

Bag ban won't address ocean pollution

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Mount Desert Islander letter to the editor

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To the Editor:

The *Islander* has been reporting on Southwest Harbor's move to ban single-use plastic bags and polystyrene food containers. While this may be a 'feel good' move to reduce plastic waste in Acadia National Park, and along roadsides, I just read an article providing "Five Reasons Banning Plastics May Harm the Environment and Consumers" by the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI). The article was published on the group's website, cei.org, on July 13.

The reference in that work was the attempts to solve ocean pollution by such bans. But these moves actually divert attention away from real solutions to the ocean plastics problem.

Referring to ocean waste, CEI claims that about 52 percent of trash in the ocean is made up of fish nets, ropes and lines, something the area can identify with as it relates to killing whales, right? The rest of the trash ranges from large plastic crates and bottle caps to small fragments called microplastics.

So most of this waste does not come from consumers, but from poor disposal practices outside the US. A report in *Science Magazine* in 2015 says that China and 11 other Asian nations are responsible for up to 83 percent.

Further, a 2017 *Environmental Sciences and Technology* study shows up to 95 percent of plastic waste enters oceans from one of 10 rivers, eight in Asia and two in Africa.

Plastic is more sanitary and safer to use than other options such as reusable bags which harbor bacteria and cause a health risk. Plastic packaging reduces food waste and disease transmission.

Finally, the article points out that plastics have definite environmental benefits because they are more efficient and use less energy in production and transport, and are less energy intensive than paper or aluminum, which require 100 to 1,000 reuses in order to justify the energy to produce them. Bans on these economical plastic/polystyrene items will simply increase cost for businesses and ultimately consumers.

Banning plastic bags, straws, etc., may have some feel-good effects, but they only divert attention from the real solution, improving waste management practices around the globe, especially Asia and Africa. That may be a bit much for Southwest Harbor to take on.

For reference see articles from CEI Senior Fellow Angela Logomasini at cei.org.

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