

**Statement to the Vermont House Committee on
Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife
Regarding S. 113 - An act relating to the management of single-use products**

*Submitted by
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Good morning. My name is Chris Miller, I am the Global Advocacy Strategy Manager at Ben & Jerry's, and I am here today to offer testimony on behalf of our company in support of S. 113, an act relating to the management of single-use products.

I'd like to thank the Chair, Representative Sheldon and Vice Chair, Representative Lefebvre, and the rest of the committee for inviting me to offer Ben & Jerry's perspective on the issue of single use plastics. We're incredibly pleased that the Senate passed S. 113 unanimously and we are appreciative of this committee's work to move the legislation forward. We strongly encourage you to pass a bill that does three things; bans single use plastic bags, ends the use of polystyrene food service products, and single-use plastic straws. As you know, many states and municipalities have or are contemplating legislation banning single use plastic, and every New England state has pending legislation of some sort. It's important for Vermont step up and do its part on this important issue.

Now, I know I don't have to tell you that the issue of plastic waste has become a global environmental crisis. As you know, environmental groups and advocates, as well as consumers are challenging companies, including our own, to take responsibility for the plastic waste our businesses generate and the impact that that waste has on ecosystems and the environment.

In 1950, the world's population was 2.5 billion and we produced 1.5 million tons of plastic; today, with a global population of more than 7 billion people, we produce over 320 million tons of plastic a year. This is set to double by 2034. Of all the plastic produced globally to date, only 9% of it has ever been recycled. The impacts of all this plastic waste is profound, particularly on marine environments.

Just three weeks ago, you may have seen that a pregnant sperm whale washed up dead on a beach on the Italian island of Sardinia. Scientists were shocked to find almost 50 pounds of plastic in her stomach, which took up 2/3 of its stomach. Recent

Christopher Miller ~ 5.1.19

studies have revealed plastic pollution in 100% of marine turtles, 59% of whales, 36% of seals and 40% of seabird species examined. The scope and scale of the issue is immense and the only way to stop plastic pollution is to not to create it in the first place. It has become clear to us at Ben & Jerry's that we can not recycle our way out of this problem.

If I may, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about our commitment to phase out of single use plastic across our entire network of more than 600 scoop shops around the world. This work began in August of last year when we shifted to making plastic straws available only upon request. About two months ago we completed the next phase of our work which was to transition to wood spoons and paper straws upon request. And finally, we've committed by the end of next year to find alternatives to our clear plastic cups drink cups, plastic-lined ice cream cups, and plastic lids.

Now, we understand that these actions aren't going to save world, however, annually Ben & Jerry's uses more than 2.5 million straws and about 30 million spoons. To provide a bit of context, if you lined each of those 30 million spoons up, end to end, they'd stretch from Burlington, Vermont to Jacksonville, Florida. It's a lot of plastic, and so this shift to spoons that will degrade in the environment is an important part of reducing the plastic footprint of our company, it's definitely better for the environment, and it helps shift the expectations of our fans.

You may wonder what if any impact this shift to wooden spoons and paper straws has had on our business and whether there has been any reaction from our fans. First, let me talk about the impacts on the business. The transition to wooden spoons and paper straws was generally smoothly across our global network. We were able to find suitable replacements to plastic across all regions. I will tell you that because of the high demand for paper straws, lead time on orders ran several months because of production backlogs.

There was also a modest cost increase for both wooden spoons and paper straws. The increased cost of the paper straw vs. plastic added about a 1% to the total cost of goods for a small shake. However, some of that cost was mitigated by the shift to straws upon request. This has led to an overall decline in the use of straws in our shops. The shift to wooden spoons is about the same, it added about 1% to the cost of goods of a single scoop of ice cream served in a cup. We do, however, anticipate that as more businesses seek replacements for disposable plastic items, the availability of those replacements will increase, and the cost will decrease.

Let me touch briefly on the feedback we've heard from our fans. Overall, the shift has largely been received well. When we made the public announcement of our commitment on January 29th of this year, it was applauded by environmental activist as well as our fans. In full transparency, we have had some complaints in our shops about this transition. Some customers have complained about the mouthfeel of the wooden spoons and the different feel of paper straws. However, given the high volume of traffic through our shops, we would expect some feedback from a change of this nature. We have not seen unexpected levels of feedback from our fans and we fully expect them to embrace the new items as they become more accustomed to them and the reason for the shift.

We're now focusing our attention to finding alternatives for the plastic lined ice cream cups and plastic drink cups and lids. As I mentioned, we expect to roll out alternatives next year and fully complete the transition by the end of next year. Once that transition is complete, we will have reduced the overall plastic footprint of our global business by approximately 20%. This represents substantial progress in a relatively short amount of time. Much of the rest of our plastic footprint is in the plastic coating used in our pint containers as a food grade vapor barrier. Although the amount of plastic in each paper pint container is small, the volume of pints we produce is large. We are working hard on this issue as well.

In closing, let me say, we understand this is not a perfect bill, but we do believe it's an important first step in the shift towards a less disposable world. It sends a signal that we can't keep doing what we've always done, and it responds to an environmental crisis that is impacting marine environments all around the world. We strongly support passage of H. 113 and would encourage you to join the Senate in passing the bill.

I'd like to thank the committee again for this opportunity to speak in support of H. 113. If it's useful, I'd be happy to answer any questions you that you may have.