Executive Summary of
‘Response to the Government of Bermuda on Regulating Single Use Plastics, January 2022’

Time for change

An initiative to rid Bermuda of the plastic pestilence

Executive Summary by Beyond Plastic Bermuda

The paper – “Response to the Government of Bermuda on Regulating Single Use Plastics, January 2022” – is a compilation of research and interviews carried out by a committed group of volunteers working together as Beyond Plastic Bermuda (BPB). This document is a summary of that document. BPB is motivated by their concern for Bermuda’s environment, particularly at a time when climate change looms large and the serious issues of environmental and health impacts of plastics can no longer be ignored.

BPB is supportive of the Bermuda Government’s stance on the issue, which states: “Because of these three threats: climate change, ocean pollution and human health, the Government has committed to eliminating single-use plastics by 2022. We have also committed to educating the public about recycling and reusable items and encouraging greater sensitivity to the ocean and its importance to our lives.”

With the public, private and third (nonprofit) sectors working together in the community, BPB is optimistic that the scourge of excessive plastic and waste generally can be successfully addressed.

1. **The beginning**

BPB was formed in early 2021 following efforts to encourage greater collaboration between environmental NGOs to tackle key issues affecting Bermuda’s environment. The group had identified the issue of single use plastics (SUPs) as critically important to the island.

Reducing the use of plastics will require a significant change in mindset across the community; we have developed a dependency on plastic in our everyday lives and rethinking our approach to waste management overall will be essential to making a difference. Many products, such as plastic food wrappers and bags, are used for just minutes, and yet they will remain in our environment for hundreds of years.

BPB comprises approximately 12 volunteer members who have met weekly for the past 18 months. They have carried out wide-ranging research on the nature of the problem;

“best practices” to make a change; success stories in other countries; the potential unintended consequences of change; and how to engage our community.

In summary, BPB’s goals are to:

- Educate the public about the impact of SUPs
- Offer guidance on safe alternatives to SUP products
- Support Government policies on plastic reduction
- Encourage the community to reduce or eliminate consumption of SUPs.

The next step for this initiative will be to prepare a timeline and budget, prioritizing and assigning action points. BPB is hopeful that collaboration between sectors of the community will enable creation of a phased plan with identified resources to deliver change. This plan would need to have the buy-in and engagement of the community in order to be effective.

2. The challenge

Bermuda has a waste crisis – but we are not alone. What makes Bermuda’s situation particularly pressing is the lack of space to make our waste “go away”. It is particularly evident in this small island that there is no “away” for such everlasting items of waste as plastic.

The plastic bag was created in 1959 specifically to be reused many times, to save forests that were being ravaged to make paper bags. It didn’t work out that way. Plastic waste litters the land and seas, damaging the environment and potentially causing health issues. Widespread use of plastics has created a situation in Bermuda that is unpleasant and unhealthy for residents – and a disaster for an upmarket tourism destination. Today, thousands of hours annually are spent by corporate and private volunteers clearing up other people’s plastic trash.

To address the problem, the entire community will need to work together, and it will require considerable resources.

An innovative approach is needed to if we are to achieve a zero-waste and re-use economy. Recycling is not the answer, given that just 9% of the world’s plastic has ever been recycled and Bermuda only recycles tin cans, aluminium and glass – known as TAG – at a very low rate.

We also need to guard against “greenwashing” PR efforts in which a company ambiguously self-identifies as environmentally friendly. For example, product information on the packaging will be unclear, suggesting it is earth-friendly and environmentally conscious when it is not. Misleading information on labels may include terms such as ‘biobased’, ‘biodegradable’ and ‘compostable’. But they may only be compostable in an industrial facility in temperatures of 165 degrees Fahrenheit. In other words, they are not compostable at home.

We need to work towards a “circular economy” based on eliminating plastic at source where possible; only using plastics that are genuinely recyclable, marine and terrestrially compostable or reusable; and circulating plastic items so they stay in the economy and out of the environment.

3. The task

Removing plastic from the waste stream is no small task. BPB continues its work

- researching sustainable alternatives to plastic;
- meeting regularly with stakeholders to assist them in making the change to alternatives;
- meeting with Government;
- spreading the word through webinars, radio interviews, strong social media presence and news coverage.

The team has also been involved in the BUEI Youth Climate Summit that chose SUPs as a focus, and BPB put the spotlight on young people as the main focus of its Earth Day campaign.

BPB understands there may be resistance to change and that community education and engagement will be key to successful implementation of SUP restrictions. It is unlikely – and, in fact, would be impractical – to ban all SUPs in the first instance. This will make it necessary to continue to encourage people to avoid those SUPs which have not been restricted.

In addition, BPB promotes general waste reduction in order to move Bermuda to a zero-waste model. BPB encourages the adoption of reusable models that have been proven to be successful in other jurisdictions – notably, a number of islands in the Caribbean – to reduce all waste.

4. Recommendations for a Better Bermuda for All and Forever

a) **We need Government’s help:** Public education and voluntary measures alone will not stem the tide of single-use plastic in a timely manner. Experience with other public health and environmental crises have demonstrated voluntary means will take many years and large amount of money. If we take that approach alone, people’s health and the environment will continue to degrade. And plastic use and production is forecast to double in less than thirty years, which will make the problem worse. We would like to see Government place import and or use restrictions as soon as possible on plastic straws, utensils, defined plastic bags, plastic or plastic lined cold food containers, fruit and vegetable trays, polystyrene/Styrofoam trays, food sachets, cotton buds and oxy-degradable plastic. Other single use items such as plastic drink bottles, plastic cups, plastic food containers for hot foods and single-use beverage pods should be scheduled for elimination in the near future.

b) **Know it all**: Gathering data will be essential to making informed decisions. At present, we have no idea how many imported drinks arrive in cans, glass bottles,

plastic bottles or paper-based cartons. We also do not know the importation levels of different types of food containers. Making changes to Bermuda's customs codes will enable us to quantify the problem and regulate beverages according to container type.

c) **Duty calls:** Increasing duty rates on beverages imported in plastic containers and reducing duty on beverages imported in glass, cans or cartons will steer demand away from plastic bottles towards alternatives. Using metrics to gauge success, will mean duty rates can be adjusted accordingly.

d) **Revenue**: Funds generated by the increased tariffs should be directed towards creating a robust public education programme and an Environmental Trust to continue this work longer-term. Consumer education will be key to success of any effort to decrease plastics on the island.

e) **Jobs:** Quantify the number of employees directly involved in import and sales of soft beverages. Interviews with wholesalers and retailers raised concerns that Bermudian jobs could be affected by cutting back on plastics. Bermuda faces challenging times economically, but we cannot act intelligently without data, and need to determine the facts.

f) **Reuse**: We need to introduce reusable container schemes – using sturdy washable boxes for takeout food. There are successful models for this in numerous cities – with the Tiffin Scheme in Mumbai, India being the global gold standard.

g) **Recycle**:
   - Make recycling of glass, aluminium and cans mandatory to cut waste at the Tynes Bay Facility, removing unwanted items from the waste stream and reducing hazardous materials in the ash.
   - Collect recyclables weekly to address consumer concerns about waste build-up.
   - Establish a designated recycling bin programme; blue recycling bags are part of the plastic problem.

h) **Sorting points**: Create household waste sorting points to enable householders to separate waste types without going to Tynes Bay. These should be located throughout the island.

i) **Composting**: Taking food out of the waste stream will result in more efficient incineration and a decline in rat infestation. Provide householders with food composting bins and initiate a subscription compostable waste collection service.

j) **Stakeholder engagement**: Community-wide buy-in will be essential to success. This needs to include retailers, importers, consumers and government ministries (e.g. Finance, Health, Works & Engineering). Targeted and transparent consultation with commercial stakeholders and environmental NGOs will be needed.

k) **Learning tools**: NGOs will be a practical resource for development of education programmes for schools and to host community events, but they will need government support (if not funds) in connecting with public schools. For their future, our young people need to be equipped with knowledge about zero-waste lifestyles and nature-based solutions such as tree planting, gardening and composting.

l) **Plan to succeed**: Bermuda needs an updated National Waste Management Plan for the modernization of waste management to support activities to cut back and ultimately remove SUPs from our island's waters, roadsides and open spaces. We will require changes to waste management processes, facilities and equipment and there will be a cost.

m) **Accountability and cost:** The 'polluter pays' principle in effect in US states, Europe and Asia, is known as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Importers and retailers bear some responsibility for the plastics problem – and they need to be part of the solution. Costs are already incurred for trash collection, and there will be resources needed for consumer education; they should assist. We cannot continue to be dependent on caring members of the community spending their free time collecting trash left by careless consumers. BPB recommends that importers of plastic products contribute to subsidizing proper waste management and disposal of polluting products and funding education campaigns.

To conclude, the BPB has taken a broad and deep look at the problem of single-use plastics in Bermuda. We have spoken to numerous experts in the field and studied a variety of proven solutions.

Above all, Bermuda needs to address this issue seriously, and that will require change and innovation. We cannot continue doing what we are doing and expect to make improvements to what has become a crisis for our island.