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**TO:** Solid Waste Management Select **MEETING:** June 18, 2019  
Committee

**FROM:** Sonam Bajwa **FILE:** 5365-02  
Special Projects Coordinator

**Subject:** Beverage Containers in British Columbia

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the Board send a letter to the Minister of Environment supporting the BC Product Stewardship Council's recommendations to increase the beverage container recovery rate.
2. That staff provide an update to the Board on the details, as they become available, on the new federal government initiative to reduce plastic pollution.

## **SUMMARY**

The Board passed the following motion on May 28, 2019:

*It was moved and seconded that staff be directed to review the report prepared by the Ocean Legacy Foundation regarding British Columbia's Beverage Container Legacy: The Missing Millions and report back to the Board.*

The Ocean Legacy report claims that over a 5-year period (2013-2017), more than 1.6 billion beverage containers were not returned within BC's deposit refund system and "could be coating BC's shorelines or floating in ocean currents".

On June 10, 2019, the federal government announced an initiative to reduce plastic pollution by ensuring that companies that manufacture plastic products or sell items with plastic packaging are responsible for managing the collection and recycling of their plastic waste. Other components of the initiative include banning harmful single-use plastics, prevent and retrieve discarded fishing gear and investing in new Canadian technologies.

British Columbia has the most advanced existing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs in North America, placing the responsibility of end-of-life products on the generator and retailer. For beverage containers, the two industry stewards are Return-It BC (previously Encorp) and BC Brewers' Recycled Container Collection Council (BRCCC), that have recovery rates of 75.8% and 91% respectively. New activities are proposed by the stewards to further increase their recovery rates. The RDN, through participation on the BC Product Stewardship Council (BCPSC), assists with advancing these, and other, EPR programs, and is an effective

and appropriate mechanism for the RDN to advocate for improving stewardship of beverage containers.

## BACKGROUND

The Ocean Legacy Foundation recently released the report *British Columbia's Beverage Container Legacy: The Missing Millions* (Appendix 1). Ocean Legacy Foundation is a British Columbia based non-profit organization with a focus on plastic waste in the ocean. Their report claims that beverage containers are not returned for deposits and calls on the government to:

1. Increase the regulated deposit rate;
2. Add all beverage containers to the deposit refund system;
3. Require producers to collect and report on the recycling of bottle caps;
4. Raise regulated targets to at least that achieved by Alberta and Saskatchewan, with long-term targets matching the EU;
5. Enforce the regulated targets in a meaningful way, such as requiring producers to pay for the cleanup of ocean plastics equal to the amount by weight that they fail to collect and recycle.

The BC Product Stewardship Council, recently provided similar recommendations to the Ministry of Environment (Appendix 2).

The British Columbia Product Stewardship Council, established under the auspices of the Union of BC Municipalities, is a coalition of BC regional districts (including the RDN) established to advise the province and advocate to improve the effectiveness of extended producer responsibility programs in BC.

### ***Management of beverage containers in BC - Extended Producer Responsibility***

In British Columbia, beverage containers are collected through two different EPR programs, Return-It BC and BRCCC.

Return-It BC has seen a drop in recovery rate from 78% in 2016 to 75.8% in 2017<sup>1</sup> but will likely be ~77%<sup>2</sup> in 2018. Return-It BC relates part of the low recovery rate in 2017 to early in the year when collection was impaired by snowy and icy conditions in the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island. Currently, any caps that are left on bottle are recycled because they are high quality plastics and they have plans to formally include bottle caps in their program.

Return-It BC conducts benchmark studies annually and in 2017, they included an analysis to better understand the scale and behavior of those who throw refundable beverage containers

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<sup>1</sup> Return-It BC 2018 recovery rate is not available until July 2, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Stat provided to RDN staff by CEO of Encorp Pacific, Allen Langdon

away in the garbage (discarder). With a sample of over 5,500 participants taking the online survey, 56% of the survey participants were discarders, which totalled a projected 295,238,726 containers thrown away. The study showed that a large number of beverage containers were discarded outside the home due to lack of convenience (i.e. people do not want to carry beverage containers until they come across a recycling bin). To address this, Return-It BC has emphasized collection in public spaces, streetscapes, large venues, and events to avoid containers ending up in the landfill.

BRCCC has a 91% recovery rate for beer bottles and cans, which is one of the highest return rates for beer in North America. Bottle caps are currently excluded from their program.

### ***Plastics in our Ocean***

British Columbia has a total coastline length of 27,200 kilometres<sup>3</sup>. Although a large coastline increases the opportunity for waste to end up in the ocean, British Columbians are fortunate to have access to a very robust recycling and waste collection system with limited leakages.

The University of Oxford, in collaboration with the non-profit organization Global Change Data Lab, researches trends and topics across the world to monitor the progress towards the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals and publishes *Our World in Data*<sup>4</sup>.

According to *Our World in Data*, high-income countries tend to generate more plastic waste per person, however how plastic waste is managed determines its risk of entering the ocean. Mismanaged plastic is defined as

"plastic that is either littered or inadequately disposed. Inadequately disposed waste is not formally managed and includes disposal in dumps or open, uncontrolled landfills, where it is not fully contained. Mismanaged waste could eventually enter the ocean via inland waterways, wastewater outflows, and transport by wind or tides."

Countries like Canada, with very effective waste management systems have very low amounts mismanaged waste, therefore the opportunity for ocean discharge is also low. Poor waste management across many middle- and low-income countries means they dominate the sources of global ocean plastic pollution.

As shown in the map below, Canada accounts for 0 – 0.1% of the mismanaged waste in the world. It is important to note that mismanaged waste does not imply that it ends up in the oceans.

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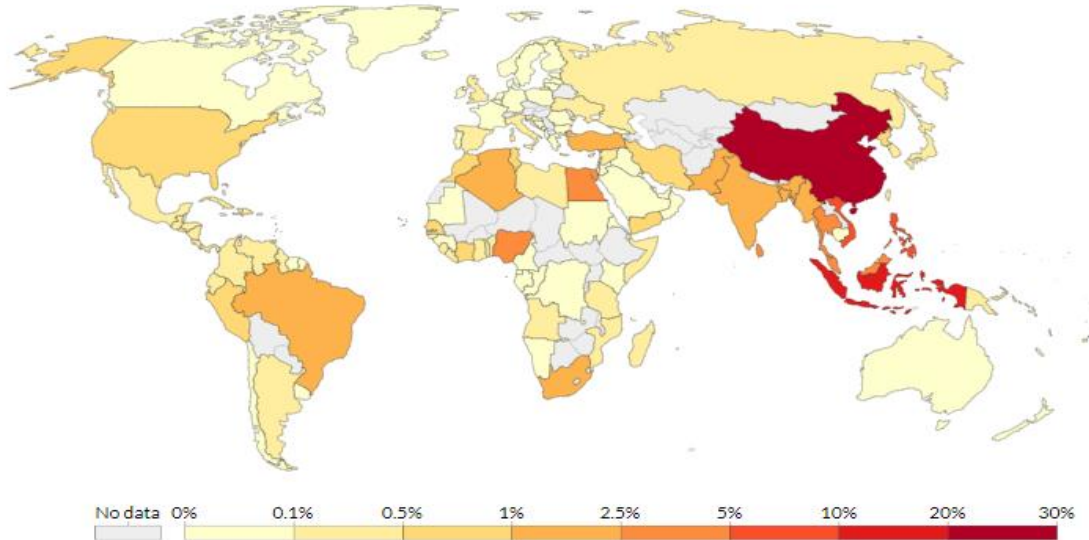
<sup>3</sup> <http://knowbc.com/BC-Facts>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/>

### Mismanaged waste (% global total), 2010

Global share of mismanaged plastic waste derived from a given country. Mismanaged waste is material that is either littered or inadequately disposed. Inadequately disposed waste is not formally managed and includes disposal in dumps or open, uncontrolled landfills, where it is not fully contained. Mismanaged waste could eventually enter the ocean via inland waterways, wastewater outflows, and transport by wind or tides.

Our World  
in Data



Source: Jambeck et al. (2015)

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In 2018 through the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup program, volunteers coordinated 876 cleanups and collected 411 tonnes of litter on 1,875km of Canadian shoreline. The Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup is in partnership with OceanWise and World Wildlife Foundation and has been organizing clean up events and reporting data since 1994.

At every cleanup, volunteers collect citizen science data about the litter they are picking up. The 12 most commonly found litter items in Canada in 2018 were:

1. Cigarette Butts	560,432
2. Tiny Plastic or Foam	353,773
3. Food Wrappers	56,116
4. Bottle Caps	49,633
5. Paper Material	44,130
6. Plastic Bags	26,512
7. Beverage Cans	23,462
8. Plastic Bottles	21,327
9. Straws	21,111
10. Other Packaging	18,771
11. Foam	18,699
12. Coffee Cups	14,320

Although there are beverage containers that are not returned for recycling in BC, it is very unlikely that they are ending up in the ocean. Due to tides and currents, the beverage cans and plastic bottles that are found on Canadian shores often did not originate from Canada.

Nevertheless, the report from The Ocean Legacy Foundation and the Annual report from Return-It does highlight gaps in current collection of bottles in British Columbia where improvements can be made.

### ***Role of the RDN***

*Advocacy:* Historically, the RDN has actively worked with other local governments, product stewardship agencies and the Province to improve EPR programs through activities such as:

- Direct communication with stewardship agencies;
- Participation on the BC Product Stewardship Council such as through the recommendations to the Ministry of Environment and Return-it BC as presented above;
- Advocacy through organizations such as the Association of Vancouver Island Communities, Union of BC Municipalities, and Federation of Canadian Municipalities; and,
- Board resolutions supporting improvements sent directly to the Ministry of Environment.

*Education and Awareness:* Effective education and awareness programs are key to the success of any program. The RDN does supplement the existing education and awareness campaigns by Return-It BC and other stewards through our newsletters and What Goes Where app.

### ***Role of the Government of Canada – June 2019 Announcement regarding initiative to reduce plastics pollution.***

On June 10, 2019, the federal government announced they will be focusing on reducing plastic pollution; a copy of the news release is attached in Appendix 3. The announcement highlighted the following initiatives:

1. Ensuring that companies that manufacture plastic products or sell items with plastic packaging are responsible for managing the collection and recycling of their plastic waste;
2. Banning harmful single-use plastics as early as 2021 under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and taking other steps to reduce plastic waste, where supported by scientific evidence and when warranted – and taking other steps to reduce plastic waste;
3. Working with industry to prevent and retrieve abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear, known as ghost fishing gear – a major contributor to marine plastic debris;
4. Investing in new Canadian technologies;
5. Mobilizing international support to address plastic pollution;
6. Reducing plastic waste from federal operations;
7. Reducing plastic microbeads in freshwater marine ecosystem;
8. Supporting community-led action and citizen-science activities; and
9. Launching Canada's Plastics Science Agenda.

Details of the program implementation were not provided in the announcement. The federal government did state its plan to work with provinces and territories, through the Canadian

Council of Ministers of the Environment, to support the development of consistent Extended Producer Responsibility programs across the country. The Government of Canada will also work in collaboration with provinces, territories and industry to set targets for plastics collection, recycling, and recycled content requirements. Updates on the program will be provided as they come available.

## ALTERNATIVES

1. That the Board send a letter to the Minister of Environment supporting the BC Product Stewardship Council's recommendations to increase the beverage container recovery rate; and,
2. That staff provide an update to the Board on the details, as they become available, on the new federal government initiative to reduce plastic pollution.
3. The Board provide staff with alternate direction.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Advocacy and education that promotes waste diversion are key elements of the RDN Solid Waste Management Plan and budgets have been established for carrying out these activities.

## STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Environmental Stewardship – Protect and enhance the natural environment, including land, water and air, for future generations. Achieve 90% waste diversion targets set out in the Solid Waste Management Plan.



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May 31, 2019

### Reviewed by:

- L. Gardner, Manager, Solid Waste Services
- R. Alexander, General Manager, RCU
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer

### Attachments

1. British Columbia's Beverage Container Legacy: The Missing Millions.
2. Consultation Recommendation to Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and Return-It BC in regards to the Encorp Pacific program plan.
3. Government of Canada taking action to reduce plastic pollution news release.