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**SENATE INQUIRY SOUNDS LONG AND LOUD ALARM
ON MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION**

The Senate Inquiry report into marine plastic pollution, released today, has confirmed the worst fears about the extent and risks of multiple sources of plastic pollution, supporting calls for urgent and effective action by environment groups and scientists.

“The Boomerang Alliance presented evidence which for the first time calculated the plastic pollution load on Australia’s environment. We found previous government estimates were wildly understating the problem. The bipartisan Senate Inquiry has confirmed it is a very serious situation including a ‘looming health crisis’ from contamination of seafood. We welcome their calls for all states to have container deposit schemes by 2020; banning plastic bags and an immediate ban on microbeads,” said Jeff Angel, Director of the Alliance of 35 groups.

“At least 50% of the pollution can be stopped with container deposit schemes, bans on plastic bags and microbeads and strict controls on factories. The Senate report will help accelerate our campaigns,” he said.

“For too long government agencies have been slow to act and their inadequate information base has simply served to bias cost benefit studies towards ineffective programs that have done little to stop the ever accumulating plastic load in the marine environment. Plastic doesn’t disappear, it just breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces of microplastic, entering the food chain,” said Dave West, National Policy Director of Boomerang.

“The plastic litter and factory pollution is growing along with consumption and while not everyone dumps it into the environment, we all pay for the clean-up costs and ongoing degradation of our environment,” said Mr Angel.

Key extracts below.

**EXTRACTS FROM SENATE REPORT INTO MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION
20/4/16**

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Marine_plastics/Report

Recommendation 15

8.78 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, actively encourage the states and territories, which have not already done so, to consider the most effective methods to address marine plastic pollution in their jurisdictions. These should include implementation of container deposit schemes and other anti-littering mitigation strategies.

Recommendation 16

8.79 The committee recommends that, if all states and territories have not introduced container deposit scheme legislation by 2020, the Australian Government revisit the issue with the view to developing legislation for those jurisdictions which are yet to implement container deposit schemes.

Recommendation 20

8.88 The committee recommends that the review of the Australian Packaging Covenant include support for the development innovative packing solutions that offer alternatives to plastics.

Recommendation 21

8.91 The committee recommends that the Australian Government support states and territories in banning the use of single-use lightweight plastic bags. In doing so, the Australia Government should ensure that alternatives do not result in other pollutants entering the environment.

Recommendation 22

8.95 The committee recommends that the Australian Government move to immediately ban the importation and production of personal care products containing microbeads.

Recommendation 23

8.97 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, identify measures, including regulatory measures, already available to prevent plastics entering the marine environment and ensure that they are being implemented effectively in all jurisdictions. In particular, the committee recommends that more effective enforcement of environmental laws in relation to preventing nurdles entering the waste management system be pursued.

Other extracts:

(p117) 6.103 However, the committee accepts the evidence that CDSs provide a cost effective and efficient mechanism to successfully reduce the volume of beverage containers found in the marine environment. The committee is of the view that the Australian Government should actively encourage the implementation of container deposit schemes by states and territories which have not already done so.

(p138) 7.84 The committee is of the view that voluntary product stewardship and producer responsibility should also be supported with regulatory and legislative reform. In particular, the banning of the use of single-use lightweight plastic bags was considered, and the evidence indicates that this is an appropriate measure considering the volume of these items found in the marine environment. The committee believes that states and territories which have not already implemented a ban should be encouraged to do so. The committee also believes that alternatives, such as biodegradable plastic bags, should not be encouraged under such a ban until there is conclusive evidence that such alternatives do not pose a risk to the environment.

7.85 A ban on the importation and production of personal care products which contain microbeads also received widespread support during the inquiry. The committee notes the Australian Government's commitment to introducing a legislative ban if a voluntary, industry initiated phase-out does not result in the removal of all such items by 2017. However, the committee believes that the evidence of significant microplastic pollution resulting from the use of such products requires an immediate ban.

7.86 The committee notes that a range of alternative regulatory and legislative mechanisms are also available, including the use of state and territory environmental protection legislation. The committee supports initiatives that increase the use of such legislation, particularly in relation to preventing the movement of nurdles into the marine environment through the stormwater system.

(p139-40) 8.5 As a consequence, plastics are entering the world's oceans at an alarming rate. The committee notes that, while there are some concerns about the lack of rigor of some of the estimates of the amount of plastic in the marine environment, they are still sobering: five trillion plastic pieces on the surface of the oceans; eight million tonnes of plastics leaking into the ocean every day—that is the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic every minute of every day of the year.

(p142) 8.19 Emerging research points to the significant threat of microplastic to the marine environment. The committee was considerably alarmed to hear that the potential effect on human health from the ingestion of microplastics in the food chain is only now emerging as an area of research interest. The committee is concerned that there may be a looming health crisis associated with seafood consumption, and urges the prioritisation of research on this issue, and appropriate investment from both government and industry. The committee also considers that microplastics warrant specific focus in strategies aimed at mitigating the effects of marine plastic pollution.

(p151-2):

8.73 The committee supports the introduction of container deposit schemes in all Australian jurisdictions. The committee believes that there are proven benefits of such schemes, for example, the ability to remove an additional 35,000 tonnes from the waste stream. The committee considers that the responsibility for implementation rests with each state and territory. However, if container deposit schemes have not been introduced by 2020, the committee believes that this matter should be revisited.

8.74 The committee recognises that the implementation of container deposit schemes is a polarising issue with beverage industry representatives being concerned about possible associated costs to consumers, industry and government. While acknowledging these concerns, the committee is somewhat sceptical of many of the arguments put forward by industry. In relation to concerns about the costs that will be borne by the community, the committee notes

that there will be benefits to both the community and government in reduced costs of litter collection and disposal, less landfill and the reduction of environmental impacts.

8.75 The industry also pointed to concerns that container deposit schemes will reduce demand for beverages and thereby affect investment and employment in the sector. The committee notes that there are currently other matters affecting the beverage sector including concerns with the amount of sugar in beverages which is leading to consumers reassessing their consumption habits.

8.76 Another concern put forward by the industry is the impact on kerbside recycling. The committee notes that in jurisdictions in which kerbside recycling exists without container deposit schemes, recycling rates remain alarmingly low. In addition, research from PricewaterhouseCoopers presented to the committee does not support the contention that kerbside recycling and container deposit schemes cannot co-exist.