

(Music)

*Liz Fox:* Hi, this is Positively Ocean where we celebrate the ocean and look at what's working well. I'm Liz Fox. If you're not on the beach right now, you're probably dreaming about being on one. Imagine the waves lapping, salty air, maybe a lighthouse horn in the distance, you sit and stretch out in the warm sand, dig your feet in, and feel the unmistakable rigidity of a plastic straw. Chances are, if you've been to a beach, you've seen a straw or two. That's because our oceans are teeming with discarded single use plastics that make our on-the-go lifestyle seem convenient and flexible. But along the California coast, communities are working to make meaningful change, and their efforts are spreading.

Jackie Nunez is the founder of the Last Plastic Straw and program director of the Plastic Pollution Coalition. She had her last plastic straw in 2009. Since then, she's told her story around the world to show the impact of passive choices.

*Jackie Nunez:* When I was served my little last straw at a beachside bar in Santa Cruz looking over at Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary, you'd get water and then it comes with a straw in it. I'm like "what the heck" and that was it.

*Liz Fox:* Reducing plastic straws seems like a simple change with a big environmental impact, she said. First, straws are usually unnecessary, and straws made of paper, metal, glass, or compostable material can replace plastic for people who need help swallowing or lifting a drink, Nunez said.

*Jackie Nunez:* That's really the gist of it, right? Wants and needs. Do we really need this?

*Liz Fox:* Leaders from Santa Monica to Davis and from San Luis Obispo to Berkeley are even changing the laws. Some cities choose straws upon request policy. In fact, the state assembly will vote on similar legislation later this year.

Berkeley has the most comprehensive proposal, requiring alternatives to plastics for straws in local restaurants. The bill that councilwoman Sophie Hahn introduced goes even further. It would add a 25 cent fee for single use cups and to-go containers. It would require that all single use items are recyclable or compostable within the city's refuse system, and it requires eating establishments to serve food with reusable dishes and cutlery. The

legislation passed its first hurdle in April and will be returned to City Council for a final vote in the fall.

Hahn said she hopes the new rules will reduce the \$11 million annually that the city spends to clean streets, sidewalks, and waterways and to empty public trash cans.

*Sophie Hahn:* We have been cleaning up the garbage generated by this proliferation of the fast food idea. They are profiting, and the cost of cleaning up after it has fallen to cities and other public agencies. And it's falling into our environment.

Commented [1]: Around 00:02:58

*Liz Fox:* John, a UC Berkeley student, recently ordered lunch at the downtown Subway sandwich shop. A clerk handed him a single-use cup with a plastic straw and a plastic lid so he could fill up at the soda fountain.

(Soda fountain noise)

He said he hadn't heard of the new legislation. He said he thought it was a good idea, but:

*John:* A lot of things we use are plastic, so straws aren't really in the forefront.

*Liz Fox:* And that's a point Nunez has been drilling for years.

*Jackie Nunez:* You know, nobody said this to stop the pollution of the planet, we're just not aware. We've been sold this convenience, and all this plastic is in our lives, when we ask for it or not. And it's the kind of a wake up moment when people are like, "You know, we don't really need this stuff."

Commented [2]: Around 00:03:15

*Liz Fox:* She knows awareness brings change. Since 2009, she's been the unofficial aggregator for global ditch the straw efforts. Usually, a group starts with a beach cleanup, and after finding plastic straws, they ask local restaurant owners to rethink putting one in every drink every time.

Then in 2015, came the video. Christine Figgenger, a marine biologist, netted a female Kemp's ridley turtle with something protruding from its nose. She filmed for eight excruciating minutes as her colleague tugged and pulled at it with pliers. The turtle bled throughout the grueling extraction. Halfway through, the team identified the object. Here's Figgenger at the time:

*Christine Figgener:* Plastic? What? Don't tell me it's a freaking straw? It's a straw, a plastic straw. That is just stupid. So, this is the reason why we do not need plastic straws.

*Liz Fox:* The video went viral, and a sea change ensued. And it's not just local governments that are eliminating plastic. In mid April, Theresa May announced the United Kingdom will ban the sale of all single use plastic including straws, stirrers, and cotton swabs in 2019.

And that's an example of folks doing right by the ocean. Until next time, I'll be searching for all things Positively Ocean. For Ocean Currents and KWMR radio, this is Liz Fox reporting in Berkeley, California.

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