

# A Crime of Convenience

by WESLEY TOURANGEAU /// EAC Volunteer

On a bright and sunny September day in Halifax, Nova Scotia, an army of volunteers from the EAC and Greenpeace Canada descended upon Turtle Grove beach—land recently returned to Millbrook First Nation. They were there to take part in World Clean Up Day, a global civic movement centred on raising awareness and cleaning up plastic waste and other human debris.

The beach at Turtle Grove was littered with plastic pieces, large and small. Mark Butler, Policy Director at EAC, was shocked by the amount of debris. “I’ve been doing beach cleanups for 23 years and this is one of the dirtiest urban beaches I’ve encountered in the HRM,” Butler says.<sup>1</sup>

The two organizations added an investigative aspect to their cleanup, a Plastic Polluters Brand Audit. Trash was organized and cataloged by type and company responsible in order to identify the major corporate contributors to plastic waste pollution in the area. “It’s time to place more responsibility on the producers of these products,” Butler says.

Brigid Rowan from Greenpeace Canada agrees: “We need to address the plastic epidemic at its source, and the source is, for economically expedient reasons, corporations choosing to mass produce and use a lot of single use plastic packaging.”<sup>2</sup>

Many eco-conscious consumers have been avoiding single-use plastics for years. Reusable water bottles and coffee mugs are common and most grocery stores sell their own brand of reusable shopping bags. There is even a push to start refusing all single-use plastics, and carrying around reusable replacements for everything.<sup>3</sup> And while a well-informed citizenry is doing its part to consume responsibly, there are calls to reframe the responsibility discourse so that less blame is placed on individuals.

In an effort to address growing environmental and health concerns, China recently stopped accepting shipments of certain types of plastics that are said to frequently arrive contaminated and poorly sorted.<sup>4</sup> This has impacted countries like Canada who export some of their plastic waste. Halifax was shipping 80 per cent of its recyclables to China.<sup>5</sup> The municipality has now had to find new places to send it.

In other parts of the world significant legal steps have been taken in attempts to curb plastic use. In the western Indian state of Maharashtra—which includes Mumbai, India’s largest city—one of the world’s strictest plastic bans came into effect earlier this year. This ban covered the production, sale, and use of many single-use plastic items, including bags, straws, cutlery, and small bottles. Ignoring this ban led to fines and even three months in jail. Backlash from plastic manufacturers and beverage giants like Pepsi and Coca-Cola have led to a relaxing of this ban, but items like plates, bags, and take-out containers remain outlawed.<sup>6</sup>

So what approach is needed in Canada, where less than 11 per cent of plastics get recycled, and the rest are incinerated, dumped in landfills, or wind up polluting our parks, lakes, and oceans?<sup>7</sup>

Environmental Defence and 46 other signatories (including EAC) are calling on the Canadian government to strive towards a zero plastic waste Canada. Included is the requirement of “enforceable Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation that makes companies financially and operationally responsible for collecting and recycling the materials they put on the market, and reducing resource consumption.” The aim of EPR is to require companies to take care of their share of the plastic waste problem. This takes pressure off of the consumer and taxpayer, making it easier to avoid plastics such as the baskets, bags, and wrapping in which many foods are sold. Manufacturers and retailers have to think about how their products are collected at end of life, and how it would be recycled.

Among the other goals they’ve asked of the Government are to ban plastics that are either harmful or difficult to recycle, phase out poorly sorted plastic waste exports, work to harmonize waste policy across Canada, and improve the capture and recycling of single-use plastics. Canada’s environmental organizations have drawn the blueprint. It’s up to government and corporations to make it happen.



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## MILLBROOK FIRST NATION

Turtle Grove was a seasonal Mi’kmaq settlement along Kijipuktuk’s shores, on the Dartmouth side where the Nova Scotia Power generating plant now stands. Wigwams dotted the cove there all the way up to 1917, when the fire, explosion and tsunami of the Halifax Explosion devastated the community.

Mi’kmaq survivors were ignored in the disaster’s aftermath, and the community was never rebuilt. Turtle Grove’s survivors and descendants were relocated to various reserve communities, including Millbrook First Nation who recently took ownership of these land as part of an outstanding land claim. The small, tree lined cove remains unoccupied to this day, but Millbrook has plans to develop homes, businesses and a park where the community once stood.

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