



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Plastiki Arrival

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the Arrival of the Plastiki
Maritime Museum, Sydney**

(As prepared for delivery – July 26, 2010)

On behalf of the President, the people of the United States and my hometown of San Francisco, it is my great pleasure, David, to welcome you and the entire crew of the Plastiki here in Sydney Harbour. Two years ago, you were just five men and woman and 12,500 discarded plastic bottles. Today you've done more than turn garbage into a historic vessel, or complete a great adventure. You've delivered a message. The Plastiki did not merely sail to us here in Sydney; it spoke to us of a threat to the ocean and converted it into an inspiration. You've helped us see how we can begin to heal this great ocean.

This trip from San Francisco to Sydney does not separate us. It binds us. Every one of us, on both sides of the Pacific depends upon this ocean for our existence. The oceans produce more of the oxygen that we need to breathe than all land plants combined. They feed over 2 billion people every day. They bring us to each other's shores and they hold within them the mysteries of our existence our past and future. This ocean is our source of life and it is our sacred trust.

President Obama has called the U.S. a Pacific nation. Americans crossed a vast continent, scaled great mountains, and even carved a passage through Panama to reach this ocean. Today America's largest state, our most populace state, our wealthiest state, our newest state, all rest on the waters of the Pacific. Australians and Americans have fought together to make this ocean free and safe. Many of the greatest generation lie at the bottom of the Pacific, they gave their lives in this ocean for this cause.

And yet today, we are killing our oceans. Plastic garbage has accumulated in a vast Pacific garbage patch. This plastic garbage is literally suffocating marine animals and choking the ocean. The problem is so vast – there is so much garbage composed of so many different types of plastic at so many depths – that many people either choose to forget, or they simply give up. But not the Plastiki.

That is why this voyage is more than just a voyage. It is a symbol. These six crew members come from nations – Britain, France, America, Italy. They are people like us. You go on their website and discover they aren't superheroes. They have normal likes



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and dislikes. One of them actually brought a can of pepper spray onboard just in case the crew went “troppo.” I won’t say which one. David de Rothschild has a fetish for brushing your teeth. Jo is always getting teased for being short. David Thompson gags on mushrooms. Matt loves tequila. I’ll see you afterward, Matt. Max, my favorite, signed up to sail the world’s largest ocean on an untested vessel, and only later told everyone he can’t swim. And Vern is waiting for me to finish this speech so he can get to see his son who was born while he was at sea. These are regular people who have done an extraordinary thing. They remind us of Margaret Mead’s great insight: “Never doubt the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

A year ago these were six people and a pile of plastic trash. Today, they are a great sailing unit delivering a message of hope. The journey of the Plastiki is a journey from trash to triumph. The journey of the Plastiki is a call to each of us in Australia, to the shores of the U.S., to do our part to save this great ocean before it is too late.