

MY SAY

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PRESERVING PARADISE,
VANUATU STYLE

Port Vila's town council in Vanuatu has struck an important blow for its capital and all of the Pacific Islands. It has banned the sale and use of plastic bags in the town. It was, of course, subsequently cruelly assailed by the local plastic bag manufacturer, by shops that find plastic bags such a convenient form of packaging, and by shoppers moaning about the unreliability of paper and cardboard bags and boxes in wet weather.

But the council is sticking to its guns and deserves a medal for doing so.

Plastic bags are beyond question one of the great curses of modern civilisation.

All the Pacific Islands that want visitors to descend upon them in great numbers for the sake of stripping them of their foreign currency and travellers' cheques promote themselves, sales-wise, to their prospective customers as being perfectly pristine places with an environment close to being that of Paradise, or even exceeding it.

All are liars. Are the fences, hedges, shrubs and electricity and telephone lines of **Paradise free of the drapery of blue, green, red and white used plastic bags?**

Are the roads, gutters and ditches of Paradise free of plastic litter that, as likely as not, lies squelched and half full of noisome things?

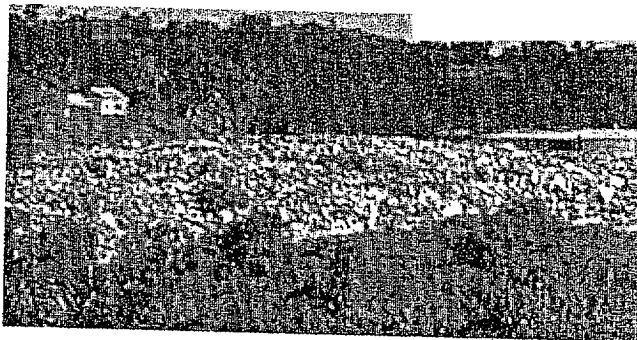
Are the beaches, bays and lagoons free of plastic bags that choke turtles, fish and seabirds, clog engine, water takes and foul propellers?

Being the place it is, Paradise presumably is free of all these horrors. None of the Pacific Islands are, that is

certain.

Sell or use a plastic bag in Port Vila and you can cop up to 12 months in jail, or a fine of up to 20,000 Vatu (US\$135). The only criticism of Port Vila's anti-plastic bag policy is that these penalties are manifestly inadequate.

Surely, the only adequate penalty is to seize a plastic bag carrier, tie the criminal's head tightly into the plastic bag and allow the fellow to suffocate. Alternatively, a plastic bag should be stuffed down the criminal's throat, so



Mountain of rubbish greets you as you enter Suva.

that he chokes. We do favour choice.

Port Vila is not a big place, nor is it so small. It is a pretty town, a 'great spot for a pleasant holiday. It has one of the prettiest harbours in the Pacific.

Now that it has taken the heroic step ridding itself of plastic bags, it is by many magnitudes become more pretty and pleasant.

According to figures worked out by a local newspaper, Vanuatu has been using more than 1.5 million plastic bags a month, which is about eight bags per person. That's 18 million obscenities a year, or about 650 tons of chemical clog a year dumped on the landscape.

Port Vila's environmental office

painted a nightmare in the way of a Mount Everest of plastic bags full of disgusting matter piling up at the town's rubbish dump in 10 or 15 years.

One of the great nauseating sights of the Pacific Islands is the massive edifice that is the rubbish dump that greets and farewell visitors as they enter and leave Suva. How much of it is just plastic bags full of horrid substances and inflated by the evil gases of decay? It's an explosive situation and one that the Suva rubbish dump

manager doesn't like to be questioned about. They have been trying to move the dump elsewhere for years, but naturally no other locality wants it.

There are biodegradable plastic bags, but for some reason, perhaps extra cost, they haven't caught on in the Pacific Islands.

For centuries islanders wove themselves very fine biodegradable bags from vegetative fronds of this

and that and can still do so when the mood takes them. But they can be a moody lot and definitely, overall, are slacker than they were. Hence, plastic bags as the easy way out. So much for Paradise in the Pacific, except of course, for Port Vila.

Tourists should demonstrate support for Port Vila's noble stand by visiting only Port Vila and boycotting other places in the region until they follow suit.

When in Port Vila to shop, it is only sensible to take the precaution of shopping only on fine sunny days. That way your paper bag or box won't fall apart in the rain. Luckily, it doesn't rain in Port Vila too often. Usually only during shopping hours.

