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CRUISE SHIP SEWAGE BAN PASSES ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY, BUT FACES HURDLE FROM COASTAL SENATORS

Sacramento, CA – A ban on cruise ship sewage dumping in state waters sponsored by Bluewater Network was passed by the Senate Environmental Committee early this week, but may face opposition from port and coastal senators who could put cruise industry interests over environmental protection. The legislation, authored by Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) (**AB2672**), will prevent cruise ships from dumping sewage along the California coast. The bill requires reporting of discharges and penalties up to \$25,000 per day for violations of the no-discharge policies or failure to report. Senate Appropriations will hear the bill sometime in August.

Environmental groups, the Attorney General's office and the Coastal Commission support the bill because of the threats to coastal waters from cruise ship dumping. Cruise ship traffic has escalated by 50 percent in the state during the last two years. In 2004, 44 cruise ships will make nearly 800 calls at Californian ports. Last year, a sewage dumping ban was stripped from a similar bill (AB121) due to cruise industry lobbying and opposition from senators who represent port areas. The cruise lines want waivers for ships with certain treatment systems in order to set a national precedent allowing them to dump in ports, harbors and coastal waters around the U. S.

"More cruise ships may be welcome in California's ports, but discharges of sewage and dirty water are not," said Teri Shore of Bluewater Network. "The good news is that cruise ships don't need to use our coastline as a dumping ground. This bill will make sure they won't."

Cruise ships are equipped with holding tanks that can hold all wastewater long enough to dump outside state waters. Cruise lines want exemptions from the sewage ban for ships equipped with newer wastewater treatment systems. However, these systems are unproven over time and the effluent produced contains harmful metals and nutrients such as ammonia that can cause algal blooms and threaten marine ecosystems. Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines declared in April 2004 that two of three of these systems installed on its vessels were not working properly. Lastly, the state is not able to institute a regulatory program at this time due to staffing constraints, according to the state water board.

Cruise ships are like floating cities that carry as many as 5,000 passengers and crew. On a typical one-week voyage, each ship generates 50 tons of garbage, more than 200,000 gallons of sewage and 1 million gallons of graywater from sinks, showers and kitchens. All of it ends up in the ocean, some treated, some not.

AB2672 (Simitian) would prohibit cruise ships from dumping sewage (treated or untreated) into state waters. Currently, cruise ships can dump treated sewage anywhere, including into ports and harbors. Untreated sewage is dumped just outside state waters. Treated wastewater is not monitored or tested to determine if it meets water quality standards. If necessary, the state water board will apply to the US EPA to secure the no-discharge policy.

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