[Banning Release of Commercially Raised Butterflies in San Francisco]

Resolution in support of efforts to create and implement a City Ordinance banning the release of commercially raised butterflies in San Francisco.

WHEREAS, The Environmental Protection Element and the Open Space Element of the General Plan have established that the City and County of San Francisco has a duty to protect the natural environment; and,

WHEREAS, The City's Precautionary Principle reinforces the City's duty to enhance, protect and preserve San Francisco's environment; and,

WHEREAS, The Commission on the Environment has adopted a resolution in support of biological diversity; and

WHEREAS, Releasing commercially raised butterflies, as is sometimes practiced at gatherings such as weddings, celebrations, and other events, can negatively impact indigenous butterfly populations and agency and community efforts to conserve them; and,

WHEREAS, This type of commercial use has long been banned with respect to native bird species; and,

WHEREAS, The commercial transport and release of butterflies perturbs our ability to understand the biogeography (natural distribution, breeding locations, migratory patterns, etc.) of butterfly species, and therefore our ability to determine their habitat and conservation needs; and,

WHEREAS, Experts on butterfly conservation have also declared that releases may present problems through the transfer of disease from wild habitats, laboratories, or industrial breeding facilities to other colonies, where die-off may result or diseases may weaken wild populations and make them more susceptible to other stressors; and,

WHEREAS, Although USDA permits are required to ship butterflies between states and permits are not issued for shipment across the Continental Divide, the USDA does not require that the butterflies be free of diseases; and,
WHEREAS, Experts state that release of non-native and/or commercially raised butterflies can cause the introduction of deleterious genes into local populations, which could negatively influence the survivorship potential of native butterflies; and,

WHEREAS, Monarch butterflies in particular have experienced a serious decline in California, and San Francisco can help in the conservation and recovery of this and other species for the benefit of the ecosystem and to allow the people of California and Mexico to continue to experience the wonder of these creatures in their natural habitats, following their natural migrations and lifecycles; and,

WHEREAS, Many San Franciscans believe that butterflies are animals to be respected and valued as part of the City’s natural heritage and should not be used as decorations or for entertainment; therefore, be it,

RESOLVED, That the Commission on the Environment supports and endorses efforts to ban the release of commercially raised Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) within the City and County of San Francisco; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Department of the Environment engage the relevant agencies and other stakeholders including the scientific community, event planners, and members of the public to support these efforts.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted at the Commission on the Environment’s Meeting on December 3, 2013.

Monica Fish, Commission Secretary

VOTE: 5-0 Approved; 2 Absent
AYES: Commissioners Arce, King, Gravanis, Stephenson, and Wan
NOES: None
ABSENT: Commissioners Josefowitz and Wald