

Your submission to Proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags

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Reference no: 368

Submitter Type: Individual

Clause

1. Do you agree with the proposed mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags in New Zealand, including those made of degradable (eg, oxo-degradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic? Why / why not?

Position

Yes

Notes

However, I am deeply concerned that by doing this we will encourage the use of more durable plastic bags, which will persist in the environment even longer than single-use plastic bags and cause equal (if not greater) environmental harm. I am also concerned that by encouraging the use of other materials (eg. paper) we will be contributing to environmental degradation in other ways (eg. deforestation, more coal/oil use to manufacture these other products, getting resources from countries where environmental regulation is poor etc).

Clause

2. We have proposed a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. This could include under 50 microns or under 70 microns in thickness. If you agree with a mandatory phase out, which option do you prefer, and why?

Position

less than 70 microns in thickness

Notes

I am extremely concerned about the consequences of encouraging the use of thicker plastic, as this plastic may persist in the environment after use longer than the single use plastic, therefore making the problem worse. If allowing thicker plastics, we must ensure that these are recyclable, and therefore that we have the facilities in New Zealand to do this.

Clause

3. Are you aware of types of single-use plastic shopping bags that should be exempt from a mandatory phase out?

Position

No

Notes

Clause

4. Do you currently manufacture, sell, provide or import for sale or personal use these types of single-use plastic shopping bags:

Position

No

Notes

Clause

5. Should smaller retailers be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags? Why / why not?

Position

No

Notes

There should be no exceptions to this. However, I see benefit in the Government or larger companies assisting smaller businesses with the costs/infrastructure requirements. Perhaps large companies could 'sponsor' smaller companies in their communities to help with this, and then receive environmental stewardship certifications/recognition. I also think regional and local councils have a role to play.

Clause

7. The proposed mandatory phase-out period for single-use plastic shopping bags is at least six months from when regulations are Gazetted , subject to consultation. Do you agree with this timing?

Position

Yes

Notes

Yes, however the sooner the better.

Clause

8. Do you agree that the benefits expected from implementing a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags exceed the costs expected from implementing the phase out? Why / why not? Please consider both monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits (those that can be measured by money as well as those that can't).

Position

Not sure

Notes

As mentioned, I am concerned that the products that will replace single use plastic will have a larger environmental footprint (from energy/resources used to make them, persistence in the environment). Moving to ban single-use plastic bags without having well-researched alternatives is unwise, and an example of creating a policy solution without fully understanding the problem and policy options first.

Clause

9. Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand? Why / why not?

Position

Yes

Notes

Considering community groups are giving away fabric bags for free, there are certainly cost-effective alternatives (as well as reusing cardboard boxes etc). However, such initiatives are not available around the whole country and so this needs to change/be made more accessible.

Clause

10. How can people be encouraged to reuse multiple-use shopping bags enough times to offset the environmental impacts of producing them? (select one or more)

Position

national information campaign and mobile phone app for shoppers

Notes

As mentioned, I think we need to create a life-cycle analysis of the alternatives (from their creation right until they are recycled or decomposed) that shows the inputs, cost, resources that it takes to make AND break down the bags. This needs to be in a consumer-friendly, digestible format (eg. an A3). Only then are consumers able to make fully informed decisions.

Clause

11. What would help you and your family adjust to life without single-use plastic shopping bags?

Notes

Knowing the most environmentally-responsible alternatives for things that are harder to replace (eg. rubbish bin liners, dog poo bags etc).

Clause

13. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions about the proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags.

Notes

I think that in making decisions about what is will allowed, or exempt, that we must include the costs/relative environmental footprint that goes into making the products, as well as the costs/time associated with recycling or decomposing the product (ie. an entire breakdown of the cycle of the bag). This should be presented to the public in a digestible, acceptable, and easy-to-read format (eg. an A3). Associated with this, I also think we need to do a similar thing for food packaging. Carrier bags are only a small part of the problem, and the packaging out food comes in is a significant issue. I hope these conversations happen alongside plastic bags, and that the necessary infrastructure can be developed, invested in, and encouraged.