

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

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Reference no: 41

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

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 don't really know about this. I think there should be some plastic bags available in the interim until a viable, compostable solution is found. You need to consider what it's going to be like for a wide range of citizens, including the elderly, the disabled, the poor, public transport users and people that don't drive. I don't think it's quite enough to force people to pay extra each time if they haven't brought bags with them, until they change their behaviour and bring a bag with them every time. It will work to an extent, but I think what you may end up with is a lot of reusable bags that end up in landfills at some point in the future, and a lot of disgruntled people feeling even more taxed because they didn't have a car or the ability to easily go from home to the shop to pick up some groceries. Think more about how practical or impractical it's going to be for the less fortunate and the vulnerable in our society.

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

I think making exemptions would be a cop out and send the wrong message. This will be painful initially but otherwise it's making too many compromises for the sake of convenience. If it's completely unworkable then I'm sure the public and retailers will kick up enough of a fuss to force compromises, or some smart cookie will come up with an alternative that people are willing to use.

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

No, they can find alternatives, but there must be initiatives in place where they have enough reusable bags supplied to make it work. I think you should also look at the use of polystyrene by takeaway outlets. I know these are usually low margin businesses but they should be able to find other ways of packaging food.

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

It's hard to say whether it's sufficient, but it seems long enough. It just needs to be communicated repeatedly, but not communicated in an overbearing or punitive way, as if you're leaving people abandoned and helpless. It should be promoted as a positive step but also communicated in such a way that shows people the government understands this will be a difficult thing for people to adjust to,

and that there are alternatives available. Make those alternatives known clearly.

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

Yes

Notes

It's short term pain for long term gain. Unfortunately it's a complicated process and there need to be other things sorted out before it becomes easier for people to bear. There needs to be some kind of punitive measure for manufacturers that continue to produce wasteful packaging, some form of levy to encourage or force them to find other ways of packaging their products. It's not something this country is coping with and I think it's quite an urgent environmental issue.

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

Yes, to an extent, but I've explained above that it isn't quite where it needs to be. I think people will find solutions out of the difficulties they face though. It will be seen as a challenge to overcome by some instead of an insurmountable burden imposed by authorities. Necessity is the mother of invention.

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

This is a tough question. I don't think you should have set this up as an either/or situation with voluntary schemes or a national information campaign. It could be both.

Clause

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

Notes

Provide viable alternatives including free bags that are rotated around communities. Provide access to bags at stations in urban areas. You also need to think about how rural people will cope, especially in isolated areas with shops at least 20-30 km away. It probably isn't the end of the world if they have to purchase a reusable bag instead, if they forget to bring one, and it should teach them to remember it next time, but it would be appreciated if people were given options other than being punished by virtue of where they live.

Clause

12. How can data on single-use plastic shopping bags and other single-use plastics entering the market and monitoring of reductions be improved?

Notes

This is an extremely difficult question to answer. I don't know how this is currently monitored. Is it relying on voluntary reporting from manufacturers, distributors and/or retailers? You would probably need some kind of legislative deterrent and frequent audits, wouldn't you? How much compliance be assured? Would you have the resources to adequately monitor over large areas?

Clause

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

Notes

This is a good start and I know it's small steps for progress/mitigation, but I would like to see more emphasis on producers finding alternatives to plastic packaging. Are you going to phase out the use of ziplock bags too? Organic stores often use paper bags instead which aren't always ideal but are useable and probably better for the environment in the long term. I think we need to be aware though that there's no perfect solution, because paper bags aren't necessarily better for the environment given how much water is used to manufacture them. Everything will have some sort of compromise so it's about looking for the least damaging alternative, which wouldn't be prohibitively expensive for consumers, producers and retailers. I think there's enough awareness about reusable bags that they can be seen as a viable alternative to plastic bags, and after an initial period of anger, denial and frustration, I would imagine most consumers will accept that a convenience they had previously taken for granted is no longer there, so things will get a little harder but not too hard for most to cope with. I would suggest that provision of free alternatives would be appreciated by consumers, such as schemes where supermarkets are provided with reusable bags by community groups and schools etc. Government funding should be provided to cover costs of e.g. sewing machines and materials. You could also try other options such as teaching inmates how to sew, then donating bags they've made to supermarkets and other retailers for consumers to use. Also

encourage consumers to return bags so other consumers can use them. I think you should also be aware of as many practical difficulties of phasing out bags as possible, such as that there are currently no obvious alternatives to use when it rains. Not everyone can walk to a vehicle easily and if reusable bags get wet then they may not be easily usable again for some time, and may be very inconvenient to store away and cart around on public transport, for example. Are there any other materials readily available and able to be produced on a mass scale that, if not waterproof, are water-resistant enough to be practical and not too burdensome on consumers? Also, what will be done about bin liners? Are you expecting people to just use paper bags or large bins? This doesn't really work practically. It doesn't seem as if the government has thought this through properly, and seems a bit simplistic going by what it has proposed so far. I don't think the government is sufficiently acknowledging how people have to deal with household waste, and should lean on manufacturers and producers first before reasonably expecting consumers to deal with the waste that is currently generated from packaging. Currently I haven't seen a realistically convenient alternative to plastic bags as bin liners. I'm not saying everything needs to be convenient, but if it's too much of a pain then people will resent the government for imposing things like this on them, without other options to deal with waste that they can only do so much about with the current level of non-recyclable packaging.