

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

Megan Blakie

**Reference no:** 5639

**Submitter Type:** Other

**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**

I am the Chief Petitioner representing 2,106 people (in-person and online signatories) who call for a ban on single-use plastic bags. The petition was started in 2016 and can be viewed here: <https://www.toko.org.nz/petitions/make-otautahi-christchurch-one-use-plastic-bag-free> (it is now closed to further sign-ups). The petition was directed to the Christchurch City Council and I made a presentation to the Full Council and, subsequently, to the Innovation and Sustainable Development Committee. Through that process my supporters and I learned that a ban could only be implemented by central government, and that more than 80% of local government bodies supported a ban. I worded the petition statement in a parochial way (focussing on Otautahi-Christchurch) as a way to engender local pride and a 'competitive spirit' (to be 'the first city to ban the bag') but extrapolate that all the signatories are supportive of a nationwide plastic bag ban. A team of volunteers ran an information stand I was invited to create for 'We Have the Means', the headline event of FESTA 2016, a central city festival. Also, I have firsthand experience of coastal and marine plastic debris; I am a coastal and off-shore sailor and lived on my boat for 2 years in the South Pacific.

**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**

Boutique-style bags (thicker plastic) are currently not recycled in Christchurch and so go directly to landfill; I assume this is the case across the country. Including them in a ban would remove them from the waste stream. Also, the demand for designer reusable bags (eg. Trelise Cooper grocery bags) indicates that high-spend consumers have already shifted their perception and no longer see boutique plastic bags as a positive marketing tool (i.e. they are no longer seen as the brand image of a quality retailer). From both an environmental and retailer marketing perspective, bags of 50 to 70 microns have negative benefit and should be included in the ban.

**Clause**

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

**Position**

Not sure

**Notes**

During my research, I became aware of a cornstarch shopping bag supplied by EDEN Eco Products Ltd in Wanganui that states it is Biodegradable and Compostable. I can't endorse the efficacy of the company's claims but if products are 'natural' and can degrade to non-toxic/harmless residues then I would support their exclusion.

**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**

Absolutely not. Every person and business needs to contribute to environmental wellbeing by playing their part. The prevalence of

small businesses in NZ (more than 95%) means a piecemeal ban with larger businesses only would be totally ineffective in producing the MFE's desired aims. Also, a ban across the board could assist in lowering the price of reusable alternative bags (higher demand by all businesses/retailers allowing volume discount wrt importing or manufacture).

**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**

No

**Notes**

**Clause**

7a. If no, what do you think would be a more appropriate phase-out period?

**Position**

two months

**Notes**

Personally, I'd like a ban YESTERDAY! If the phase out period is too long, some businesses will buy in (cheap) stock to maintain the status quo for as long a possible. The issue has been debated and procrastinated upon for years (I started my petition in 2016 and your own research shows some countries took proactive steps in 2009 or even earlier). Businesses need to be agile; the longer the lead in, the more negative is the impact on the planet, so it seems a no-brainer to give a short lead-in time of about a month or two.

**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**

The cost of pollution is environmental degradation, which affects everyone and impacts future generations. Rate-payers also have to shoulder the costs of council's domestic waste management. So if we don't take positive steps now to improve the environment, the true costs are merely deferred. Policies that advocate REDUCTION (avoid creating a waste/pollution problem) are preferable. I also support MFE and others in their call for a circular/closed loop system. Globally and nationally, with our current system of manufacture, the true cost is 'externalised' and is borne by communities and environments where the extraction of resources and/or low wage/high health-risk manufacturing takes place.

**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**

Most people I talk to say they have bags in the back of the car, or wherever, but they forget to take them with them when they go shopping. The problem is behaviour change and habit formation, not a dearth of alternatives to plastic bags.

**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**

Other (please specify)

**Notes**

Community groups are already leading the way, with stitching bees and the like. Many initiatives are happening at local, grassroots level, so tap into those groups who are already leading behavioural change. A while back a friend and I talked to a prominent social service agency about offering free bags at op shops and food banks. There is scope for grassroot initiatives to join with local and central government to ensure all Kiwis have access to free/cheap alternatives to plastic bags.

**Clause**

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

**Notes**

We already ban the bag in our household.

**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**

Citizen power could help monitoring (with Facebook/Instagram or email) could help. In addition, Keep NZ Beautiful, Sustainable

Coastlines, Greenpeace and a myriad of other NGOs can help with data and monitoring.

**Clause**

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

**Notes**

Plastic bags are a publicly recognised 'icon' of environmental pollution. A ban spearheads (and reflects) a societal change of attitude; it is an effective solution to a problem that is relatively easy to tackle. If we water down the ban and add in all sorts of exclusions for such an 'easy' and iconic problem, this signals an unwillingness to tackle problems that require us to implement more difficult solutions. During a radio interview by Alison Mau, I likened plastic pollution to the Romans using lead piping: we think these things are a great invention at the time but then realise we are poisoning our world and ourselves. We already know that microplastics are in the food chain and in remote places such as Antarctica. A ban of one type of plastic item (the one-use bag) could be the start of New Zealand's systemic rethink of the "linear" production process mentioned on page 13 of your report and of manufacturing's planned obsolescence and the 'throw-away' mentality.

Supporting documents from your Submission

After\_CCC\_presentation.jpg

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