

Consultation on Plastic Bags

The amount of plastic packaging must be drastically reduced. However, I do not believe that a total ban on single-use plastic bags is wise, nor easily enforceable.

In the first place, the term 'single use' is misleading. Very often, these bags may be reused, typically for rubbish bin liners, but also for other purposes.

Further, there are a number of items for which a plastic bag is the most suitable solution. Examples include wet fish, and products containing semi-liquid or gelatinous constituents such as takeaway foods.

Also, it has been shown in many overseas areas that a meaningful charge for plastic bags reduces consumption by 80% or more. Typically this is accompanied by promotion of alternative bag materials.

Education may also help to reduce plastic bag usage in favour of less environmentally damaging packaging.

Finally, the amount of plastic packaging of individual items taken out from a typical shopping trip is often far greater than the amount of plastic in the carrier bag. That should be the focus of efforts to reduce plastic usage. For example, most grocery outlets provide separate plastic bags for fruit, vegetables, and bulk food dispensed from self-service containers. Most of these products could easily be wrapped in paper. In addition, the majority of manufactured food is packaged in non-degradable plastic.

Thus I propose that an excise tax of perhaps 20 cents be introduced on each plastic bag manufactured or imported. This may be passed on to the customer via the retailer. The revenue must be directed to environmental protection.

Robert W. BEVAN SMITH