



14th September 2018

Ministry for the Environment

PO Box 10362

Wellington

6143

Tēnā koutou,

**Submission on the
'Proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic
shopping bags'**

Masterton District Council (MDC) welcomes the **proposed mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags.**

The Council recognises that plastic bag waste is a significant issue, and that steps to reduce plastic waste are needed urgently.

New Zealanders use around 1.6 billion single-use plastic bags every year. For local councils, single-use plastic bags entering the waste stream have both financial (waste management service) and environmental (littering our natural environment and waterways) implications.

MDC believes our community would embrace the change. We recently ran an extremely successful project (in cooperation with a local trust and local supermarkets) which saw reusable bags being given to people in Masterton free of charge in exchange for used plastic bags that are now being re-purposed by a community group. The initiative aimed to raise awareness of the issue of single-use plastic bags that litter our environment, and provide members of our community with a practical re-usable solution.

Members of our community are already involved in nationwide initiatives to reduce plastic waste e.g. the community led 'Boomerang Bag' project to make and provide recycled fabric shopping bags for use in place of plastic bags. And some local supermarkets and retailers have already, or are in the process of voluntarily phasing out single use bags.

In February 2018, MDC also adopted our first wellbeing strategy **He Hiringa Tangata, He Hiringa Whenua**. The **Environmental Development**



Chapter of this strategy **supports a shift from a linear to circular economy encouraging zero waste.** Our aspiration is to be a leader in environmental development, with Council, Iwi, stakeholders and our community working together as kaitiaki/stewards to preserve and enhance our natural environment and to create a better future for our people.

We believe a mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags aligns with these objectives and Council's vision for our environment.

Masterton District Council makes the following additional comments:

- **Definitions**

Masterton District Council agrees with the proposed definition of 'single-use plastic shopping bags' as cited in the consultation document:

'A new plastic bag (including one made of degradable plastic) which has handles and is below a particular level of thickness. The term 'plastic' and 'degradable' (including biodegradable, compostable or oxo-degradable) would be defined in regulations with reference to international standards. The proposed phase out would apply to these bags when they are sold or distributed for the purpose of carrying sold goods.'

We support the proposal to include compostable and degradable bags in the proposed definition, noting that there is currently no system in place to collect compostable bags and not enough facilities to process them effectively (source: WasteMinz survey).

- **Particular level of thickness - 50 microns or under 70 microns**

The thinner the plastic bag, the less resilient to wear it is and the more likely it is to be designed and used for single use only. The standard supermarket single-use plastic shopping bag is generally below 50 microns in thickness.

Heavier weight plastic bags (thickness between 50 and 70 microns) can be reused and therefore could be seen as 'multi-use' bags rather than 'single-use' bags.

However, MDC is cautious about applying a weighting baseline as this may limit the change in consumer behaviour and increase the number of thicker bags going to landfill.



Therefore we advocate that the implications of introducing a 'weighting baseline' would need to be carefully considered by the central government and market tested.

- **Timeframe**

Masterton District Council agrees with the proposal for a six-month phase-out timeframe as the minimum timeframe for New Zealand to prepare and adapt.

At the same time we would like to note that the success will depend on the intensive public education campaign that the central government should lead.

- **Smaller retailers being exempted from or included in the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags**

MDC support the retail industry moving together in an effective way and therefore we believe that the single-use plastic bags ban should apply to all retailers, as opposed to 'the larger retailers only'. Smaller retailers also contribute plastic bags to the waste stream. We believe any exceptions could weaken the effectiveness of the desired consumer behaviour change.

- **Education**

MDC suggests developing and implementing a national educational campaign to raise awareness, promote reusable alternatives and to create a sustainable behaviour change. We would also like to propose ensuring that affordable re-usable alternatives are easily accessible.

- **Financial aspects**

MDC acknowledges the potential costs of the single-use plastic bags phase out, as cited in the discussion document.

We note in the discussion paper that the majority of single-use bags affected by this ban are manufactured overseas and imported, so phasing out is unlikely to have a local business or employment impact related to production.



In contrast, this move towards reusable bags, under a circular economy model, has the potential to increase job creation through, for example, manufacturing of reusable bags and remanufacturing of bags from recycled fabrics. For example the European companies turned the plastic bags ban to their advantage by localising production of reusable alternatives and creating 3,000 direct and indirect jobs (source: Euractive).

There are also major non-financial benefits of a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic including: minimisation of plastic waste going to landfill and the reduction of harmful effects of the plastic waste on our natural environment.

In summary, Masterton District Council would like to thank again the Government for the opportunity to make this submission.

Nāku noa, nā

MAYOR

ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY LEAD