

Ideas, thoughts and beliefs upon single-use plastic bags

All kinds of plastics play a huge part in society nowadays, but plastic does have large negatives, affecting the environment. The human race is quickly clicking onto the idea that to improve our environment we need to start minimizing the use of plastics. An excellent place to start is to minimize the smaller plastic items being used in everyday situations. This has been prevalent through many restaurants, bars, and large-scale organizations by halting the use of plastic straws. Various countries around the world introduced a mandatory ban on plastic bags years ago and have reported countless positive impacts on coastal regions and inland areas. The New Zealand government has introduced the idea of phasing-out single-use plastic bags with various proposals, which follow:

- Non-regulatory approaches (a formal agreement with industry or the status quo).
- Those requiring new legislation or regulation (mandatory phase-out, levy, charge, tax, or deposit-refund)
- Intermediate models (product stewardship).

With the huge amount of single-use plastic bags being dumped in the waterways around New Zealand. Once the bags are in the ocean, many of the bags start to break up into 5mm pieces. The bags that break up into these 5mm pieces confuse the young fish, and are consumed by them, this has a chain reaction, by causing the young fish to starve, and this is having a large effect of the growth of the population of fish, causing the fish to die before being able to reproduce. The single-use plastic-bags that do not break up into small pieces confuse the larger marine-species. There are countless examples of larger marine-species confusing plastic bags for food, and swallowing whole. When this happens the exact same situation happens to the larger marine-species, as it would to the smaller. A recent example is a turtle that washed up the shore of New Zealand, with over 225 pieces of plastic, many plastic bags, in its stomach. This turtle was accompanied by many other turtles, Sperm Whales, and countless marine-birds (Harrison. S (N.D)

Knowing that the plastic bags slowly breakdown within our waterways, it is important to understand, plastic-bags decompose even slower on land, and with the amount ending up at landfills, more than 40,000 bags end up at landfills every hour (Barclay. S, 4th March 2013), the amount is rapidly increasing. A single-use plastic-bag takes approximately 1000 years in landfills, with this being known it extremely alarming to know all plastic-bags that end up at landfills will stay there for hundreds of years.

When a plastic-bag degrades it releases toxins. The toxins released include, "They are styrene monomer (SM), styrene dimer (SD) and styrene trimer (ST)..." (Bernstein, M, August 16, 2009). It is important to understand these three toxins are not found in nature at all, and Styrene is believed to be extremely cancerous. Knowing it is potentially cancerous, brings up

the question of why have plastic-bags been allowed to be supplied for so many years, with no taxes or precautions.

The argument of “there are no practicable alternatives”, has been posed, this is an extremely weak argument as there are cost-less alternatives. For example, a cotton bag may be used for the exact same use but is reusable, and Eco-friendly.

It is important to understand this situation from both sides, the other side of the argument may consist of from a small to medium-sized business, with a noticeable sized increase in costs. This increase would be due to having to buy higher quality bags, e.g. 70 micron, rather than 50 micron, or even having to buy cotton/paper bags. While everyone cares for the environment they live in, several people are more concerned with the monetary level they sit at, which in return causes them to put themselves before the environment.

In summary, I believe a full phase-out of plastic bags would be the best option for the great portion of New Zealand. If we want to help marine-animals, our current population, the landscapes/coastal regions, and our future generations, then it believes making the transition should be done for the greater good.

<p>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 (e.g., oxo-degradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic? Why / why not?</p>	<p>Yes, I agree due to the rapid development of plastic bags making its way to coastal regions. For that reason, I also support the ban due to the fact that it is predicted that by 2050 the plastic mass will exceed the fish mass of the ocean.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>I would prefer 70 microns thick, this would minimize the numbers of plastic bags used. 70-micron bags can be classed as multi-use.</p>
<p>3. Are you aware of types of single-use plastic shopping bags that should be exempt from a mandatory phase out?</p>	<p>Yes, I know about the different micron thicknesses. However, I do not know in detail about the various types of plastic bags.</p>
<p>4. Do you currently manufacture, sell, provide or import for sale or personal use these types of single-use plastic shopping bags:</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p>5. Should smaller retailers be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags? Why / why not?</p>	<p>No, it was found that a fair amount of the coastal litter contribution was in fact from takeaway food and beverages, which are often from smaller businesses.</p>
<p>6. If smaller retailers are exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags and they are defined by their number of full-time equivalent employees, what should that number be?</p>	<p>It is stated within the given document that a large business is measured as >250 employees overall. However, with New Zealand being a fair bit small, I believe a small scale business would be <20 leaning towards family businesses.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Yes, I believe six months is plenty of time for retailers to phase out plastic bags and put into place another environment friendly plan.</p>

<p>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).</p>	<p>Yes, I strongly agree that the positives of phasing-out plastic bags outweigh the negatives. This is said because it once the natural land/coastal region is negatively impacted, it does not return to how it used to be. I believe that the beautiful scenery we have should be enjoyed by us, as well as future generations.</p>
<p>9. Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand? Why / why not?</p>	<p>Yes, there are many options, such as multi-use bags, or even “share bags” supplied directly from the retailer, with a bond for return. This will minimize the amount of bags used.</p>
<p>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)</p>	<p>I believe “a” and b are both good ideas, however, I think the distribution of multi-use bags prior to the start of the ban may have a larger notable impact.</p>
<p>11. What would help you and your family adjust to life without single-use plastic shopping bags?</p>	<p>Adjusting to life without single use plastic bags for my family and myself would be a smooth transition. However, I believe it would be made easier if prior to the change multi-use bags were to be distributed.</p>
<p>12. How can data on single-use plastic shopping bags and other single-use plastics entering the market and monitoring of reductions be improved?</p>	<p>By being able to maintain a good baseline by 2021 is a good aim, but this will miss the monitoring of prior the transition, to post-transition. Potentially by increasing the funding, and increasing the desired monitoring routine may provide for faster results. Saying that the funding may already be at maximum limits.</p>
<p>13. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions about the proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags.</p>	

References:

Harrison. S (N.D) *"Ban all Disposable Plastics in New Zealand"*

Sourced from:

<https://www.toko.org.nz/petitions/ban-all-disposable-plastics-in-new-zealand>

Barclay. S, 4th March, 2013, *"Our plastic rubbish killing sea life"*, NZ Herald

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<https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/pressroom/newsreleases/2009/august/plastics-in-oceans-decompose-release-hazardous-chemicals-surprising-new-study-says.html>