

## **Proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags submission.**

**Harrison Long**

Submitter type: Individual

### **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?**

- Yes.

I do 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. I believe that the negative consequences associated with plastic bags interaction with the environment greatly outweighs the consequences of New Zealander's changing their use from single-use plastic shopping bags to reusable alternative shopping bags.

Being a passionate New Zealander that cares and values the outdoor environment I have major concerns after observing the negative impacts that single-use plastic shopping can do to our environment. Whether it be hunting, fishing, diving or bush walking it is not uncommon in my opinion to observe plastic bags littering and ruining the natural aspects of New Zealand's environments.

The degree to which this proposal makes to limiting the amount of single-use plastic shopping bags from entering our environments and causing negative impacts I believe should be noticeable after due time. From my perspective I understand that the benefits outweigh the costs and that creating a proposal for this issue is a great initiative from the Government. Not only will the phase out see short term benefits for New Zealand, but also long-term benefits globally as less plastic bag waste will be entering the environment.

**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?**

- Less than 50 microns in thickness.

I prefer the option of less than 50 microns in thickness as I believe it is the most practical solution as well as assuming more people will accept this category than under 70 microns therefore having a greater impact within society. Understanding that plastic bags that are less 50 microns are the most likely type of plastic bags to be found littered amongst the environment rather than between 50 microns and 70 microns, I believe this is a good starting place for the proposal. If the Government were to phase-out less than 70 microns, I believe that people will react negatively as this will phase out plastic bags that consumers reuse many times for different purposes.

Bags over 50 microns have the potential for being multi-use to which personally I take advantage of and reuse whenever possible. Although I am unaware if many people have the same characteristics as me and choose to reuse plastic bags or not.

I do have a concern about how people may use bags over 50 microns if this is the only option available in stores. I believe that for this to be of great benefit consumer consumption of the over 50 micron bags should remain the same or decrease. This is due to the bags being constructed of denser materials, hence having a greater environmental impact when littered into the environment than bags under 50 microns.

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

- Not sure.

**4. Do you currently manufacture, sell, provide or import for sale or personal use these types of single-use plastic shopping bags:**

- No.

**5. Should smaller retailers be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags? Why / why not?**

- No.

I do not believe that small retailers should be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. As stated in the consultation document it is not only large retailers that are contributing to the littering of plastic bags into the environment, but also smaller retailers (MfE, 2018). This prompts my opinion as I do not believe that smaller retailers should be exempt from the mandatory phase out. It is my belief that creating exceptions in certain areas can cause exceptions elsewhere. This may also open many loop holes for business to try and avoid the phase out if they desire to. For New Zealand and the environment to benefit to the greatest possible degree all retailers should be included regardless of size and sales.

**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?**

I personally believe that small retailers shouldn't be defined by the number of full-time equivalent employers it consists of. This is due to New Zealand's market place comprising of many what may be classed as "smaller retailers". Therefore, if small retailers were to be exempt as defined by their number of full-time employers it may potentially exclude the mandatory phase out from a large proportion of retailers and hence be an ineffective strategy at decreasing single-use plastic bags in the environment. As the consultation document states, England had implemented the mandatory phase out to 'large' retailers defined by retailers employing 250 or more full-time equivalent employers in 2015 yet has recently considered in 2018 to be extended to all retailers (MfE, 2018). I believe that from England's example if this proposal is passed it should be passed once and not reconsidered three years later that it should have included all retailers.

As seen from experience from my parent's small business, they had decided to remove all single-use plastic shopping bags from the store and replace them with paper bags and cardboard boxes. It was an easy transition phase that could be quickly implemented. It is my understanding from this experience that small retailers should generally be able to easily transition away from single-use plastic bags to more environmentally friendly alternatives.

**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?**

- Not sure.

I am unsure whether the proposed mandatory phase-out period for single-use plastic shopping bags of at least six months from when regulations are Gazetted, subject to consultation is substantial enough. As company's stock large supplies of plastic bags and buy in excess ("bulk") to last reasonable lengths of time it is necessary for these businesses to use existing stocks. Although for many businesses the time frame of six months may not be long enough.

The given examples from the consultation document of Queensland and Western Australia's nine-month phase-out periods would seem appropriate to apply to New Zealand's phase-out period (MfE, 2018). This would hopefully supply adequate time for retailers of varying sizes to use the existing stocks. I do agree with also having an extended period of time for retailers to use these stocks before fines can be imposed for non-compliance.

**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).**

- Yes.

I do agree that the benefits of the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags exceed the costs expected from the implementation. I believe that single-use plastic shopping bags significantly impact the environment as well as having negative consequences on wildlife. Phasing out plastic bags might/will not solve all plastics littering the environment, but it will have a great benefit for future generations and the environment nationally and globally.

The phase out will benefit retailers as they will profit from not having to provide free plastic bags to customers as it assumed that they will transition to multi-use bags. Although there will also be retailers that will provide alternative bags that may cost more than current single-use plastic shopping bags. Depending on how retailers approach the phase out and whether they decide to supply customers with alternative bags will determine if they are impacted on positively or negatively economically.

The consolation document states that some “paper and heavier-weight bags (plastic bags between 35 and 50 microns)” are manufactured within New Zealand (MfE, 2018). Hence if the plastic bag phase out includes bags that are “50 microns or less in thickness” then jobs may be lost. I am unsure to what negative extent this may have on plastic manufacturing businesses within New Zealand as I assume that they also produce many other plastics than just single-use plastic shopping bags.

**9. Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand? Why / why not?**

- Yes.

I believe that there are reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags that exist in New Zealand. There are many alternative options that include other materials that offer multiple use bags such as paper, cotton, recycled fabric, hemp, jute and other non-plastic materials. These materials have less of an impact on the environment and can also be compostable within suitable conditions. Other options also include cardboard boxes, lightweight folding nylon bags and backpacks.

Many companies have already shown and proved that there are practicable alternatives to plastic bags such as PAK'nSAVE which has provided cardboard boxes for many years as a means to reuse boxes and save the number of plastic bags being used. This example of one supermarket chain and many others can be observed to show how easily it can be to divert away from single-use plastic shopping bags to multiple use alternatives.

**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)**

- Voluntary incentive schemes by individual retailers.
- National information campaign and mobile phone app for shoppers.

I believe that there is not enough information readily available to the public to display facts about how many times multiple-use shopping bags should be used to offset the environment impacts of producing them. This information should be displayed at supermarket checkouts where consumers can easily see and understand how many times they should actually use multiple-use bags. Prior to reading the consolation document I was unsure of how many times multiple-use bags should be used and I believe that many other people are not aware either.

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

My family currently does not use single-use plastic shopping bags and has not done for quite some time prior to first hearing of this phase-out strategy. So personally, my family and I would not need to adjust our lives based upon the mandatory phase out. Although, for other families to be able to make an easy transition I strongly believe that alternative bags should be kept at a minimum price for low-income families to be able to afford alternative solutions. Countdown already supplies \$1 folding nylon bags as well as having incentives like the 'Bags for Good' scheme. The supermarket chain also sends out weekly emails to subscribers that occasionally reminds customers to use multiple-use bags. Furthermore, both Countdown (Dunedin Central) and New World (Centre City) have large signs displayed in the front shop windows reminding customers about using multiple-use bags to which I assume is also implemented throughout the country. If I did need to adjust my life without single-use plastic shopping bags these incentives and reminders would definitely encourage and promote personal change.

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

I am unsure of how data on single-use plastic shopping bags and other single-use plastics entering the market and the monitoring of reductions can be improved. Although I am sure that the Government will choose and implement the best appropriate strategies to achieve the results and data that they wish/need to obtain such as the Sustainable Coastline Project (MfE, 2018).

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

Overall, I believe that this proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags is important not only New Zealand's environment, that is seen to be "clean and green", but also globally. This proposal is a significant step for the country to protect New Zealand and limit the depredation caused to the environment by the littering and detrimental environmental consequences that plastic bags create. This proposal in my opinion is also a major step for helping create a 'more' sustainable world for future generations and our country.

**References:**

Ministry for the Environment. 2018. Proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags: Consultation document. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.