

Proposed Mandatory Phase out of Single-use Plastic Shopping Bags Submission

Question 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?

I agree with the phase out of single-use plastic bags because they are not necessary for us to use, as there are effective alternatives. It is not essential for us to carry our goods in a single-use plastic bag, when there are reusable bags available. The single use bags are light and are easily transported by wind and water, where they end up in the environment (MFE, 2018) and never break down. The bags that are degradable are misleading, as they only break down under certain conditions, that are usually not normal environmental conditions (MFE, 2018). So, people do not feel guilty using these ones because when they throw them out they think they are going to break down, but in reality, they do not. If they are phased out then there will be no problem with any of these bags entering the environment and causing harm.

Question 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?

I believe that bags less than 70 microns in thickness should be phased out because even though the thicker bags are designed to be used more than one time, this rarely happens. These bags need to be used 4 to 12 times for them to have less impact on the environment (MFE, 2018), and since customers do not know how thick their bags are, they would typically use it as a single use bag. The phase out needs to be clear to everyone to be effective. If people do not understand which types of plastic bags are banned and which are not, then the phase out will not be as effective. So, I think that all single-use plastic bags under 70 microns should be phased out so that there is not any confusion about what bags need to be used more than once. It will be clear that no single use plastic bags can be used.

Question 3:

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

No

Question 4:

Do you currently manufacture, sell, provide or import for sale or personal use these types of single use plastic shopping bags?

No

Question 5:

Should smaller retailers be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single use plastic shopping bags?

I do not think that small retailers should be exempted from the phase out of single use plastic bags because this would cause more confusion with the public. If the phase out is only going to be for a part of the population of shops, then it could cause conflict over why some retailers were still allowed them and others were not. If everyone knows that plastic bags are being phased out, then they will come prepared when they shop. But if they expect 'small shops' to still have plastic bags and they do not, then they will not have anything to carry their goods with. Retailers are likely to pass the price of transitioning to reusable bags onto their customers, so it is not the business that is having to pay the price for the change (MFE, 2018). So, this means that the cost is not a problem for the businesses initially. I believe that the phase out needs to be fair and consistent to everyone.

Question 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 do not think that they should be exempt but if I had to pick a number it would be 2 full time employees.

Question 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?

I think that 6 months is plenty of time for people to change and adapt to life without single-use plastic bags. 6 months is a lot of time to save up a couple of dollars to purchase one of these reusable shopping bags, so the price is not a factor in my eyes. 6 months is also plenty of time to adapt to bringing your reusable bags shopping with you because there are signs at the supermarket which remind you to bring your bags. It also gives business time to stop handing out single-use plastic bags and replacing them with other alternatives.

Question 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?

Yes, I believe that the benefits will exceed the costs expected from the phase out of single-use plastic bags. The initial cost for the public is not big in the grand scheme of things. A few dollars can buy a bag that can be used anywhere. It is not like one particular bag can only be used in certain shops. These bags last a long time and can be used anywhere. Businesses will not be losing money for providing reusable bags because their product prices include the price of the 'free' single-use plastic bags (MFE, 2018) and the price of their products are not expected to change. So, they will be able to use the same money that they budgeted for the plastic bags to provide reusable bags. Even if the cost for providing reusable bags was a large amount, New Zealand's landscape cannot have a price put on it. It is one of a kind and if it became affected by climate change, we cannot simply just buy it back. Once it is lost, it will be lost forever and it is our responsibility to preserve it for future generations to enjoy.

Question 9:

Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand?

Yes, I think that there are because there are reusable bags for sale for a couple of dollars, in a supermarket as you walk in. We all need to eat so every time we go and get food, the bags are right there as we walk in so it is not difficult to purchase one on your way in.

Question 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)

I believe that both voluntary incentive schemes and national information campaigns/ mobile phone apps, should be used alongside each other to encourage people to re-use their multiple use bags. People need to be informed about how the bags need to be used multiple times to offset the environmental impacts of producing them. Most people will not understand that producing these bags harm the environment in some way, so if they can be informed about this, then they will understand that they need to use them multiple times to make them beneficial.

Question 11:

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

Advertising schemes would be enough help for my family to adjust to life without single-use because we know that the impacts that plastic has on the environment are catastrophic. We have been using reusable bags for a while, but we do sometimes forget our reusable bags. It is usually when I get to the supermarket, that I remember but by then it is too late. There is no point for me to buy more reusable bags since I have enough at home. So, a better advertising scheme would be good so that we did not forget or a scheme where you could borrow a bag and pay a bond but get your money back if you return them.

Question 12:

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

We can simply look at the number of plastic bags being purchased by companies before and after the phase out, and compare what the reduction is. There should be a big drop in the number of plastic bags that are entering the market. Once, the reduction of plastic bags is calculated and how many bags we have not used, we could look at other options for where the plastic is coming from. Data could be collected for what is the next highest wasted plastic and information could be gathered on this.

Question 13:

Additional comments

I believe that the phase of single use plastic bags is a huge step in the right direction. Plastic makes up 80-85% of waste in the ocean (MFE, 2018) but there is no way that we can ban all plastic in one go, so the phase out of plastic bags is an effective way of lowering our plastic

waste. The phase out has been well researched and it is not something that has happened suddenly. The public has had plenty of notice that this is coming and has time to prepare. Convenient alternatives have been put on the market at a reasonable price, which makes it easy for us to adapt. I believe the phase out of single use plastic bags will be effective because there will be no misinterpretation for what is good for the environment and what is not, in terms of degradable alternatives. Since most degradable alternatives do not break down under normal environmental conditions (MFE, 2018), these are just as bad as normal single use plastic bags because they are not breaking down after they have been thrown out. So, phasing all of them out will eliminate this confusing and it will be clear with what bags we should be using. But for this phase out to be effective, it needs to continue to be clear and consistent. The public needs to be well informed about what the final decision is so there is no confusion.

Regards

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Bibliography

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