

# Proposed Mandatory Phase out of single-use plastic 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?

Yes / No / Not sure

Why / Why not?

- I agree with the mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic bags, as there is considerable evidence that so-called oxo-degradable and compostable materials do not always degrade under natural conditions and can be as damaging to the environment as normal plastics. Often these will result in plastic microbead making their way into New Zealand's waterways and terrestrial landscapes.

## 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?

- a. less than 50 microns in thickness
- b. less than 70 microns in thickness
- c. other (please specify)

- Despite the minute differences in thickness, these plastics are all small enough that they could be considered at risk of breaking down into plastic microbeads etc. I believe if plastic must be used, a more resilient form should be explored.

## Question 3

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

Yes / No / Not sure

If yes, what are they and why should they be exempt?

- No. In my opinion, no single-use plastic shopping bags should be exempt from a mandatory phase-out. Single-use is inefficient and there are easily available alternatives to these which can be reused, hence decreasing the expenditure of plastics into our ecosystems.

#### **Question 4**

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

**a. 50 microns or less in thickness**

**b. more than 50 microns and less than 70 microns in thickness?**

**Yes / No**

**If yes, please specify which bags and explain how a phase out would be likely to impact on you.**

- No

#### **Question 5**

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

**Yes / No / Not sure**

**Why / Why not?**

- No. I believe there are many alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags which are affordable and accessible. Many major retailers who have already implemented a phase-out plan have prompted customers to take initiative and prepare for this by using reusable shopping bags.

#### **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?**

- In my opinion, the mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic bags should be a country-wide initiative shared by all retailers regardless of size. Therefore I don't support any retailers being made exempt from this phase-out.

#### **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?**

**Yes / No / Not sure**

**Why / Why not?**

**If no, what do you think would be a more appropriate phase-out period?**

**a. two months**

**b. nine months**

**c. one year**

**d. other (please specify)**

- No. I believe this timing will be mostly successful. Over time, even irregular customers should soon become aware of this change and make the necessary changes. Coupled with some form of an advertising campaign, I do not believe smaller retailers can expect any major problems during this process.

### **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 / No / Not sure**

**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).**

- I wholeheartedly believe that the benefits of phasing out single-use plastic exceed the cost of doing so. There will certainly be initial costs for customers (ie purchasing reusable bags) however, in my opinion, no price can be put on preserving New Zealand's unique and diverse ecosystems.

### **Question 9**

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

**Yes / No / Not sure**

**Why / Why not?**

**If no, what do you think is missing currently that would need to be available?**

- Yes. For many years, the larger retailers have given customers a choice by providing reusable shopping bags for sale. In more recent years New World supermarket has implemented a system of providing free reusable bags so long as they are returned. This honesty box system could assist many retailers in smoothing the transition away from single-use plastic bags.

### **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)**

**a. voluntary incentive schemes by individual retailers**

**b. national information campaign and mobile phone app for shoppers**

**c. other (please specify)**

- A/B. Customers are likely to comply with incentive schemes set by their preferred retailer, however -national information campaigns across television and radio would further assist in raising more widespread awareness.

**Question 11**

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

- In the last few years, my family has been relatively prompt in gathering reusable bags due to the hassles associated with disposing of single-use bags. Families who have not yet made this transition may be assisted by more affordable reusable bags.

**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?**

- Easy data collection points would be supermarkets and landfills. This way the numbers of bags being consumed in the transition period can be monitored in order to observe any decline. Collection numbers at landfills could provide us with a number of plastic bags being disposed of and perhaps give us a way to estimate the number of bags which are being lost into the environment before making it this far.

**Question 13**

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

- It is my view that a mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic shopping bags should be implemented in New Zealand. The world has reached such a point of plastic consumption that within 30 years, our oceans could be holding more plastics than fish. (MFE, 2018) As eluded to in the consultation document, an extremely large proportion of all marine litter worldwide is various forms of plastics. Possibly the most damaging of these are that which break down into the minute particles that have come to be known as 'microplastics'. Not only have these particles been shown to cause harm to marine life but to humans as well. In my mind, this should be a great concern to New Zealander's, as our island nation is surrounded by a coastline that is home to some of the world's most unique and diverse ecosystems. Further, the extent of our marine territory is many times greater than the area of New Zealand's land mass. Despite this, New Zealand is following the same trend as the rest of the world in terms of plastic consumption, a primary contributor to this being the single-use plastics shopping bags that we have all become so familiar with seeing at supermarkets and other retailers. Most of these bags are non-biodegradable meaning they will not break down under natural conditions in the same way other materials, such as paper would. When at almost all large retailers in New Zealand, the seemingly endless supply of

plastic bags that are offered to the public is somewhat a thing of concern. This over-abundance begs the question, is the public tempted into using more than they need? Whether it is this convenience or simply laziness, our consumption has reached the point of 154 bags being used per person, per year on average. This equates to 750 million in total per year. (MFE, 2018) New Zealand has always promoted and prided itself on its 'clean green' image, yet we have collectively fallen deep into a throwaway culture where the non-monetary cost of single-use plastics seems to be outweighed by convenience. As a New Zealander who cares about the future of our country, I would like to see the public being made more aware of the damage that is being caused. Though reflected in statistics such as those provided in the consultation document, the real-world effects are not always observable to many. Speaking as an average member of the public, it is easy to forget the consequences of such mundane everyday actions like using plastics bags when we don't see the effects first hand. Because of this, national ad campaigns could prove useful in forming the public opinions and promoting a positive outlook towards the mandatory phase-out of damaging single-use plastics. It would be a great surprise to me if conscientious New Zealander's could be shown the consequences and not put more careful thought into their own usage. In the past, I have heard the overabundant use of the earth's finite materials such as fossil fuels being described as 'subsidised by nature'. Not subsidised with a monetary cost, but rather the price that all humans will eventually pay when these finite resources have been expended. A similar sort of analogy can be made when looking at the way humans have carelessly let single-use plastics make their way into our natural environments. Bearing this in mind, perhaps it is time that a more enticing subsidy be offered to the New Zealand public, allowing reusable shopping bags to be made more financially affordable.

**Bibliography:**

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

**Regards,**

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