

## **Proposed Mandatory Phase Out of Single-use Plastic Shopping Bags**

Jack Guerin

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, oxodegradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic?

I 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, oxodegradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic. As an individual who cares about the environment, I would very much like to see a change in the way plastic bags are used in New Zealand. I first became aware of how unnecessary single-use plastic shopping bags were when my local supermarket started offering multiple use shopping bags for sale. The idea of these bags was to bring them with you every time you go to the supermarket, and use them instead of the single-use plastic shopping bags. The fact that you can just leave them in the back of your car and grab them out when you need them, makes it no great hassle at all.

Having a tax on the bags has potential to work, but I believe, for a serious reduction in the amount of single use plastic bags New Zealand is using. There will have to be a dramatic change. I believe that a mandatory phase out will cause single use plastic bags to be rendered unnecessary following this new legislation passing. It is change that we need in this country. To Reduce the amount of plastic waste that is produced and hence taking a step in the right direction towards keeping the clean green New Zealand image.

The “degradable” bags have always been a questionable thing to me. They have the potential to suit their purpose but the problem is New Zealand doesn’t have the facilities to process all of the degradable bags. The bags are mixed in with the rest of the plastic waste, where they are not under the right conditions to degrade.

(Environment, 2018)

The degradable bags were a potential alternative to single-use plastic shopping bags but they just end up in the same place. This information makes me believe that the degradable bags should be phased out alongside the single-use plastic shopping bags.

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 if a mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic shopping bags was to occur, it should include all single-use plastic shopping bags under 70 microns in thickness. By including these thicker plastic bags in the phase-out, a much larger number of retailers will be required to change or remove the bags they are providing to customers. This will result in a greater reduction of plastic waste in New Zealand than if only bags under 50 microns are phased out and therefore help New Zealand to progress further towards its goal of zero plastic waste. Although having a country with zero plastic waste currently seems impossible, I believe that any step that can be taken to simply reduce the amount of plastic that we use should be taken.

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

I am currently unaware of types of single-use plastic shopping bags that should be exempt from a mandatory phase out.

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?

No, I do not manufacture, sell, provide or import single-use plastic shopping bags.

Question 5. Should smaller retailers be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags?

I do not think that smaller retailers should be exempted from a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. They are still stores and if they still offer single-use plastic shopping bags for use while the larger chain stores could not this would be unfair. Having the small retailers being able to offer single-use plastic shopping bags would mean that plastic bags entering landfill and polluting the environment. I, for one, think our use of disposable plastic should be as limited as possible for the sake of our own generation and those to come.

There is the argument that small retailers have a lot less people shopping there compared to the larger chain stores such as supermarkets but they would still be adding to the overall pollution of our country. I think it would better if there was a complete mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. It would make the logistics of the process a whole lot easier and there would be no uncertainty about what determines a small or large retailer.

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?

Smaller retailers are defined by their number of full-time employees. If the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags does not include smaller retailers then there should be a limit to the number of full-time employees that the business has in order for them to hold some type of licence that allows them to use single-use plastic shopping bags to give out upon the sale of items.

A good example of having a large employee base is in England where applied a levy on single-use plastic shopping bags in 2015, they made it applicable to 'large' retailers (250 or more full-time staff). I believe this was a step in the right direction. At the start of this year the British Government considered increased the range and applying the levy to all retailers. (Environment, 2018)

I personally think that the number of full time staff that defines a “large” retailer should be fewer than 250. They should have set the parameters for a large retailer as a smaller value from the start because now they are regretting it. Looking at New Zealand’s case I propose that the limit of full time employees should be 3 as it will limit the number of retailers that have the ability to distribute single-use plastic shopping bags.

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 the proposed mandatory phase-out period of at least six months for single-use plastic shopping bags is very reasonable. It will give enough time for the retailers to phase out the single-use plastic shopping bags and for suppliers to react to the change. As a part of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) New Zealand must give enough time between the passing of legislation and the enforcement of banning single-use plastic shopping bags.

The period stated by this agreement is six months. (Environment, 2018)

I agree with the timeframe as it has been proven by the WTO and stated as a part of their agreement, as it has obviously worked in the past and will give everybody involved time to adapt to the changes.

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 agree that the benefits of a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags exceed the costs expected from implementing the phase out. If we do not phase out the bags, the pollution that the bags will cause long-term will cost the country in a number of sectors, such as tourism and seafood. The economic impacts on different sectors and the cost of a future clean-up would most likely exceed the cost of implementing the phase out. If the phase-out does not occur there will also be negative impacts on our native flora and fauna, which I believe should be protected at all costs.

Question 9. Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand?

Yes, I do think there are practical alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags in New Zealand. A classic example is the re-useable cotton or jute bags sold at supermarkets. These bags are great as you can bring them with you every time you go to the supermarket, and use them instead of the single-use plastic shopping bags. The fact that you can just leave them in your car and grab them out when you need them makes it no great hassle at all.

Paper bags are also another viable alternative. Compared to single-use plastic shopping bags, brown paper bags would be a lot better at biodegrading. The problem with paper bags is that they are not the best in terms of reusability. They could instead be offered in smaller retailers where people may visit every so often and customers use a reusable bag when at higher traffic retailers.

Question 10. How can people be encouraged to reuse multiple-use shopping bags enough times to offset the environmental impacts of producing them?

It is always difficult to make large groups of people to do things you want them to. As the saying goes “you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink.” You can only encourage them. I personally think that a series of television adverts will get people talking about the need for use of reusable shopping bags. I think also since so many people have smart phones in the current day that an application could be made that includes other functions such as shopping lists and daily deals. Within this app could be a reminder to always bring your reusable bags. If something like this could be developed for a relatively low price and has other incentives to download the app in the first place, only then do I think that it could be effective. Without these incentives, I think there is the potential that not many people would download the application.

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

Adjusting to life without single-use plastic shopping bags would be difficult as we use them almost every day. We use them for supermarket bags, rubbish bags, dog excrement bags etc. I think that some type of recommendation would be helpful for some people. Some ideas that I think may help my family adjust are receiving a flyer about a guide to living without single-use plastic shopping bags or being given complimentary reusable shopping bag at the supermarket.

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?

I have no knowledge on the topic of monitoring single-use plastic shopping bags. This means I am unable to offer my opinion on any way to improve on the current system. I believe the New Zealand Government has the capability to implement best system to track single-use plastics entering the market and monitor the reductions in usage.

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

Overall, I think that Phasing out of single-use plastic shopping bags is a great idea for New Zealand. It will promote reuse and recycling in our communities. All the while removing a great percentage of single-use plastic shopping bags rubbish from our linear economy. This change will reduce the amount of plastic waste that is produced therefore helping us a step in the right direction towards preserving our natural environment. After all, it is our environment that makes New Zealand so unique, and I believe all future generations have the right to experience it in the best condition possible.

## Works cited

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