

Papakura Local Board feedback on the government's proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags

Background

The Ministry for the Environment is consulting on the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags.

The consultation document outlines the available options, which include a mandatory phase out, a charge on bags, a formal agreement between government and industry, and mandatory product stewardship.

Council staff are preparing a draft regional submission on this proposal. The draft submission will be provided to the Auckland Council Environment and Community Committee for their approval on 11 September 2018. Local boards have an opportunity to provide feedback on the matter.

Outcome 5 in the Papakura Local Board Plan 2017 entitled "Treasured for its environment and heritage", speaks to the need to better manage and eliminate if possible, pollution and waste. The priority that "the environment in and around our harbour and streams is enjoyed by increasing numbers of people" and the key initiative to "implement initiatives to improve water quality in our streams and Manukau Harbour" are a basis for the board's submission. Single use plastic bags are a known source of pollution in water ways and receiving environments.

Papakura Local Board feedback

The Papakura Local Board provides the following feedback on the government's proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags:

- i) Option one – mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags is supported, noting that:
 - this would be the most effective and wide-reaching mechanism for addressing plastic bag issues
 - reducing plastic use, litter, and marine pollution are priorities in the Waste Management and Minimisation Plan 2018.
 - the inappropriate consumption, use and discarding of plastic bags has significant impacts on Auckland's natural environment and our waste collection systems.
- ii) The ban should apply to all retailers who distribute single-use plastic bags, rather than just the larger retailers, and include those importing single use bags. The board agrees an incomplete ban will dilute the effectiveness of the ban.
- iii) The proposed six-month phase-out timeframe is supported as this is considered sufficient time to allow retailers and consumers to prepare and adapt.
- iv) Reusable options are easily available for use by the general public.
- v) The best way to prevent harm from plastic bags is to prevent them from being issued in the first place.

- vi) A charge on plastic bags, a deposit refund system and a product stewardship scheme would all support the continued distribution of plastic bags, therefore these options are not supported.
- vii) A voluntary programme or an agreement between industry and government is not supported. This approach would create an inequitable approach to the problem as some businesses or organisations will choose not to participate in a voluntary scheme.
- viii) *Definition of plastic bags:* The current proposed definition should apply to a single use plastic bag that includes handles, and is sold or distributed to the public for the purposes of carrying sold goods. This would exclude single use rubbish bags ie. black rubbish bags and the orange plastic rubbish bags still used in some parts of Papakura.
- ix) Degradable, bio-degradable, oxo-degradable and compostable bags should not be included in the ban.
- x) By limiting the ban to particular thicknesses of plastic bags may result in bag producers designing products to be just above this threshold.
- xi) *Education and enforcement:* The description of offences, and the strength of the penalties outlined in the consultation document are supported.
- xii) The proposed approach that the Environmental Protection Authority manage enforcement of this ban is supported, however, this may have some implications for council resources. Council should be invited to participate in further discussions with the Ministry around the best approaches to education and enforcement.
- xiii) *Equity and opportunity:* Concerns have been raised regarding the need for a just transition for workers relying on plastic bag manufacture, however, it is noted that the majority of single-use bags are manufactured off-shore and so local job loss is likely to be minimal.
- xiv) There are a number of community groups across Auckland who create and distribute alternative bags to their local communities. The Ministry should take these community groups into consideration as potential providers when engaging with retailers on practical options for alternatives to plastic bags.
- xv) The ban has the potential to reduce council litter clean-up costs and volunteer hours spent on litter clean ups.
- xvi) Mātauranga and tikanga Māori should be incorporated into solutions and decision-making by working with mana whenua, enabling Māori participation in decision-making as per Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.



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