

Implementing a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban in Queensland

Results of consultation

Consultation on the Implementing a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban in Queensland discussion paper ran for three months from 25 November 2016 to 27 February 2017.

Released following the government's decision to introduce a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban, the discussion paper sought feedback on various aspects of the ban, including the commencement date and the inclusion of biodegradable shopping bags. The paper also sought feedback on working with other jurisdictions to develop options for voluntary action to reduce the use of heavier-weight department store-style plastic bags.

The discussion paper asked four questions:

1. Do you think that 1 July 2018 allows enough time for consumers and retailers to transition to plastic bag alternatives? Why/why not?
2. Do you agree that biodegradable bags should be included in a ban? Why/why not?
3. Do you support the Queensland Government working with other states and territories to encourage industry to reduce the number of heavier-weight plastic department store bags? Why/why not?
4. What else can be done by the Queensland Government to address plastic pollution?

Number of submissions

Just over 26,000 submissions were received. Thirty submissions were received from local governments, companies and organisations, with the remainder from individuals (Table 1).

20,930 submissions were received through the Queensland Government Get Involved website, with the remainder received by email or letter.

Source	Number
Individuals	26,124
Organisations	30
Total	26,154

Table 1: Summary of submissions received

Submissions from individuals

The responses from individuals to questions 1, 2 and 3 are summarised in Table 2 (note that not all submissions addressed all questions in the discussion paper).

Question	Yes	No	Unsure
Question 1—Do you think that 1 July 2018 allows enough time for consumers and retailers to transition to plastic bag alternatives?	25,106 (96.3%)	682 (2.6%)	272 (1%)
Question 2—Do you agree that biodegradable bags should be included in a ban?	16,390 (63.1%)	5008 (19.3%)	4575 (17.6%)

Question 3—Do you support the Queensland Government working with other states and territories to encourage industry to reduce the number of heavier-weight plastic department store bags?	24,936 (96.1%)	631 (2.4%)	377 (1.5%)
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Table 2: Summary of responses from individuals

In response to Question 1, 96.3% of individuals agreed that 1 July 2018 allows enough time for consumers and retailers to transition to plastic bag alternatives. A large percentage of respondents also used this question to express support for the introduction of a ban not just to support the commencement date.

Common comments provided include:

- A ban is necessary to reduce plastic litter and protect the environment and wildlife
- There is plenty of time to transition
- Bans are successful in other states and nations
- Many consumers are already using reusable bags and refusing to use plastic bags
- Frustration that a ban has not been introduced sooner
- Many other measures should also be taken to reduce plastic litter.

3.6% of individuals did not agree or were unsure. Common comments provided include:

- Plastic shopping bags are not ‘single use’ as they are often re-used as rubbish bags or bin liners
- There will be extra expense to purchase reusable shopping bags or bin liners
- Reusable bags are considered to be unhygienic
- Banning plastic bags is too drastic and a small fee should be charged instead
- Bans have not worked effectively in other states
- People should not be littering
- The government should not interfere.

In response to Question 2, 63.1% of individuals agreed that biodegradable bags should be included in a ban, while 37% disagreed or were unsure.

Common comments provided for supporting the inclusion of biodegradable bags in the ban include:

- As it takes extensive time for the bags to break down in nature they can still be consumed by wildlife
- Due to the consumer’s belief that the biodegradable bags decompose harmlessly in nature, large amounts of these types of bags may still be littered
- People cannot tell the difference between biodegradable bags and traditional bags
- Eventually the bags will end up in waterways
- All disposable plastic items are bad.

Common comments provided for not supporting, or being unsure about, the inclusion of biodegradable bags in the ban include:

- Biodegradable bags are better for the environment so are a smarter alternative
- There is no need to ban them as they will easily breakdown when in contact with nature
- There will be a public backlash if all plastic bags are banned
- There still needs to be an alternative if you accidentally leave your reusable bag at home
- The biodegradable bags would be reused, for example as bin liners or for cat/dog waste

In response to Question 3, 96.1% of individuals support the government working with other states and territories to encourage industry to reduce the number of heavier-weight plastic department store bags, while 3.9% disagreed or were unsure. The reasons given were similar to those for question 1.

In response to Question 4, over 11,000 individuals also provided ideas for other actions that could be undertaken to reduce plastic pollution generally.

Submissions from organisations

A total of 30 submissions were received from organisations (Table 3). A list of organisations is provided at Appendix 1.

Sector	Number
Retail sector	5
Local government	7
Environment	13
Waste industry	1
Other	4
Total	30

Table 3: Submissions received from organisations

Retail sector

Five submissions were provided by the retail sector.

Four of the submissions were in the main supportive of the ban, with one submission expressing reservations over the timing and other implementation issues.

The main positive aspects identified were:

- Increase in bin liner sales
- Increase in reusable bag sales
- Savings in not supplying plastic bag to consumer
- Better environmental outcome

The comments provided were:

- Government needs to work with retailers to implement the ban, to minimise impacts to staff and customers
- Ban must not inconvenience customers
- Potential decreased customer satisfaction due to longer checkout wait times
- Cost to consumer if reusable bags are expensive (if consumers keep forgetting to bring them in)
- Cost to productivity at checkout – for example claims that a ban adds 1.5hrs work for every 1000 customers
- Checkout refurbishments costs
- Health and safety (reusable bags have bigger volume and are therefore heavier)
- Needs to be nationally consistent to reduce complexity
- Need reasonable transition period (18 months) due to contracts retailers have with bag suppliers and stockpiles which need to be depleted; also, reusable bags need to be sourced and more produced
- Government should be responsible for community awareness, and highlight that the ban is a government decision not the choice of retailers.

One of the retail sector submissions said that 1 July 2018 is not sufficient time for the transition, especially with the upcoming Commonwealth Games in April.

One of the retail sector submissions believed banning biodegradable bags is unnecessary as they can be beneficial.

Local government

Six individual councils and one representative organisation provided submissions.

All the local government submissions were supportive of the ban. The main reasons given were that the ban would help to:

- reduce windblown litter at landfill
- reduce plastic bag contamination in recycling
- reduce cost of litter control
- reduce stormwater network blockages.

Local governments believed that a start date of 1 July 2018 for the ban does allow sufficient time, but stressed that education and communication campaigns are critical for implementation of the transition.

All except one council agreed that biodegradable bags should be included in the ban. This is because biodegradable bags:

- Still cause litter
- Contaminate plastic intended for recycling
- Contribute to severity of flooding (by blocking the stormwater network)
- Encourage disposable or 'convenience' thinking and behaviour.

One council recommended that the quality of biodegradable bags should be standardised, instead of banning them.

Local governments all agreed that voluntary measures should be taken to reduce the number of heavier-weight department store bags should be included in voluntary meas. The need for a coordinated approach with other states was noted.

Environment organisations

Thirteen submissions were received from environment organisations.

All of these submissions strongly supported the ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags and believed there was enough time for the transition. At the same time, education program for retailers and consumers would be required.

Submissions from this sector agreed that biodegradable bags should be included in the ban, due to their impact on wildlife and the environment if littered.

These submissions also supported measures to restrict heavier-weight department store bags, with some preferring a ban over voluntary measures.

The environment sector also called for strong government action on other prominent sources of plastic litter such as balloons and fishing litter.

Waste industry

The waste industry submission was supportive of the plastic shopping bag ban and believed the program for implementation was sufficient.

Appendix 1 - Organisations that made submissions

Local government

Local Government Association of Queensland
Mareeba Shire Council
Logan City Council
Moreton Bay Regional Council
Southern Downs Regional Council
Noosa Council
Douglas Shire Council

Retail sector

National Retail Association
Retail Council
Woolworths
Master Grocers Australia
Tanby Garden Centre

Industry – other

Australasian Bioplastics Association
Stanthorpe-Wallangarra Branch of Qld ALP
Australian Association for Environmental Education Queensland Branch Inc.
Consider This Pty Ltd

Waste Industry

Waste Management Association of Australia (Queensland)

Environment

Southern Moreton Bay Islands Coastcare
Birds Queensland
Plastic Bag Free Livingstone
Sunshine Coast Environment Council
Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland
Australian Marine Conservation Society
Bribie Island Environmental Protection Association Inc
Boomerang Alliance
Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
Tangaroa Blue Foundation
Environmental Defenders Office
Capricorn Coast Landcare Group Inc
Healthy Waterways and Catchments