

PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS PROHIBITION BILL 2016

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Tamara Smith, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) (10:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to bring before the House this bill to ban plastic shopping bags and protect marine life. I speak as The Greens NSW spokesperson for marine environments. My office drafted this bill. This legislation delivers on The Greens commitment during the 2015 State election campaign to introduce a bill to ban single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags in New South Wales by the end of 2017. The ban would apply primarily to single-use, lightweight, grocery-style shopping bags which are designed to carry away groceries and other goods bought from retail outlets such as supermarkets, takeaway shops and newsagents.

It is estimated that more than four billion plastic bags are used in Australia each year. The lightweight plastic shopping bags provided by retail outlets are often referred to as "single-use" in that once supplied they are typically not taken back to a retail store by the consumer for refilling. They are a one-off convenience but they have many lifetimes of impact on our environment. These bags are mainly made of high-density polyethylene less than 35 microns thick and they are used for carrying items such as groceries, all manner of retail goods and loose, unpackaged items purchased at convenience stores and general stores.

These bags are normally disposed of after only one use; 5 per cent are recycled, 20 per cent are reused as bin liners and the majority—around 75 per cent—are sent directly to landfill. These lightweight bags are susceptible to being blown from bins or garbage trucks during transport to landfill and from landfill areas, and often end up in waterways and eventually the ocean. Tens of thousands of marine animals die each year from ingesting plastic bags which look like jellyfish and other food often consumed by dolphins, turtles, whales and other marine life.

The objects of this bill are to minimise the number of plastic bags entering waterways and the marine environment and reduce harm to marine animals; to reduce the consumption of plastic products; to encourage more sustainable packaging solutions using reusable and biodegradable alternatives to plastic; to support the community's aspiration to improve environmental sustainability; and to reduce the visual impact of plastic bag litter. I turn to the detail of the legislation. The Greens Plastic Shopping Bags Prohibition Bill 2016 is modelled on current legislation in South Australia and Tasmania banning polyethylene shopping bags with a thickness of less than 35 microns from being handed out or sold by retailers to carry away goods. The bill proposes a transition period of 12 months. The phase-in period would enable retailers and consumers to adjust to the new legislation and use existing plastic bag stocks. During this time retail outlets would be required to provide an alternative option for customers to encourage consumers to prepare for the changes.

Not all bags would be affected. Plastic bags of less than 35 microns would be banned. This includes lightweight, single-use plastic bags such as grocery bags with handles and other lightweight bags used to carry away products from retailers. The following bags would not be included in this legislative ban: barrier bags such as the type dispensed from a roll to hold items such as loose fruit and vegetables; heavier style retail bags such as those usually used by clothing and department stores; sturdy bags designed for multiple uses, such as green bags; biodegradable compostable bags that meet the Australian Standard; paper bags; bin liners for purchase; ziplock storage bags; plastic bags that are an integral part of the packaging of bread, frozen foods, ice or bait; and reusable plastic bags.

The Greens would like to see an expansion of the legislation in the near future that could include a phase-out plan or ban on the following plastic bag types: barrier bags other than those that meet compostable standards, bin liners other than those that meet compostable standards, heavier retail bags and plastic bags used in packaging. A penalty regime for retailers found to be providing or selling plastic bags of less than 35 microns to a customer for the purpose of carrying goods is proposed to be in line with those of other jurisdictions which have fines of between \$5,000 and \$7,000. The scheme would be administered by the Office of Environment and Heritage with enforcement being the responsibility of the Environment Protection Authority.

With this ban New South Wales has the opportunity to join many countries and other States and Territories within Australia. South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have all banned plastic bags. It is high time that New South Wales did the same. The Australian Capital Territory banned plastic bags on 1 November 2011. An interim report a year later stated there had been a 41 per cent decrease in plastic bags and a 31 per cent decrease in plastic material to landfill. The report also stated there was high retail compliance and high community acceptance. The Australian Capital Territory Government and stakeholders gave 13,700 reusable bags to the community for free.

Nearly four years of South Australian experience has resulted in a significant reduction of plastic bags in its litter stream. South Australia's ban has saved our environment from at least 400 million plastic bags, and South Australians love it. Ireland introduced a 15¢ charge on plastic bags in 2002, which led to the same results as a ban. An estimated 90 per cent of consumers switched to bringing their own bags within a year of the charge being introduced. France has just introduced a ban on plastic bags in a bid to reduce the five billion plastic bags that are handed out every year in that country.

Single-use plastic bag numbers have dropped by more than 85 per cent in England less than a year after the introduction of a 5d charge per bag. England was the last region of the United Kingdom to introduce a bag charge. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have been charging for plastic bags for years, with corresponding decreases in plastic bag consumption. Other countries that have reduced their reliance on single-use plastic bags either through bans or levies on bags at point of sale include Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium and Italy

The ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): In accordance with sessional orders debate is interrupted for consideration of General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills).

Debate adjourned.