

**PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS (PROHIBITION ON SUPPLY BY RETAILERS) BILL 2017 (NO 2)***First Reading*

**Bill introduced on motion by Mr Luke Foley, read a first time and printed.**

*Second Reading*

**Mr LUKE FOLEY ( Auburn ) ( 10:44 ):** I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Single-use plastic shopping bags are banned in South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory. Wealthy nations such as China, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and South Africa have either banned bags or imposed a levy on their use, as have 20 American States. The High Court of Kenya paved the way for the world's strongest ban on plastic bags. That law, representing Kenya's third attempt in the past decade to impose a ban, comes with harsh penalties of up to four years in prison and up to \$50,000 in fines. Poorer nations like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Somalia have also banned plastic bag use. However, to date, New South Wales has failed to act, and the object of this bill is to address that inaction.

Consumers understand the reasons for the introduction of this legislation—plastic bags do not degrade for decades and they travel deep into natural ecosystems because of their light weight. A ban will do more than simply reduce litter; it will reduce something that harms wildlife. More than 60 million bags are littered in this State every year. The bill before the House is based on a successful Australian Capital Territory ban which states that retailers cannot provide single-use, lightweight polyurethane bags of 35 microns or less and which allows retailers to charge for alternative reusable bags. The bill does not prevent the supply of a plastic bag that is an integral part of packaging before sale, barrier bags dispensed from a roll to hold items such as loose fruit and vegetables, bin liners, the heavy retail bags typically used by clothing and department stores, or biodegradable bags. All of those types of bags will still be legal.

The New South Wales Government has researched biodegradable bags under the auspices of the Meeting of Environment Ministers through the Council of Australian Governments process, but nothing else has been done. There has been only more talk about continuing to work with the Federal Government and other States. We have had endless talk while the problem steadily worsens. The Labor Party supported the Government when it moved to implement a container deposit scheme. That display of bipartisan support should now be reciprocated on this issue. This Parliament has passed legislation on plastic containers with the support of both sides of the House, and now is the time to legislate on plastic bags. As the Opposition's shadow Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Hon. Penny Sharpe, pointed out in the other place, no amount of awareness will get this done; action is required.

To their credit, the supermarkets are moving. Coles and Woolworths said in July that they will voluntarily stop supplying single-use plastic bags to customers. The Premier then said that she did not see the need to put a ban in place because plastic bags would not be provided by the two big supermarket chains. That ignores the evidence that the supermarkets' voluntary and unenforceable action will still leave at least 10 million bags to litter and to pollute the State every year. The Premier's determination to ignore clear scientific evidence is regrettable. A policy that leads to less landfill and a serious reduction in environmental damage deserves the support of all sensible people.

When the Australian Capital Territory reviewed its first two years of the plastic shopping bag ban, it found there had been a 36 per cent decrease in the number of plastic bags sent to landfill, 71 per cent of people said that they did not want the ban overturned, and 68 per cent said it should be implemented nationally. In South Australia, the move led to 400 million fewer plastic bags being

used in that State each year. While businesses are prepared to take the step voluntarily, we need clear legislation.

An industry scheme to reduce plastic bag use was in place from 2002 to 2005. It worked but the year after it ended use increased by 17 per cent. Businesses such as Target attempted to go plastic bag free but had to backflip in the face of consumer pressure. Industry initiatives alone will not solve the problem; we need to act in this Parliament.

New South Wales, on the best estimates available, uses 34 per cent of Australia's 8.5 billion plastic bags—light and heavy weight—every year. That means New South Wales uses almost three billion plastic bags. We can live without plastic shopping bags. Our wildlife can live—literally—without them. In December 2014 a rare Risso's dolphin died at Manly after eating a plastic shopping bag. Some of the most common problems at Taronga Zoo's wildlife hospital are related to plastic bags. Sea turtles see them and think they are jellyfish. Of all the turtles at Taronga Zoo's hospital, 70 per cent have ingested plastic. One in five ends up dying as a result.

The CSIRO survey of marine debris found that three-quarters of all rubbish along our coasts is plastic. It is highly concentrated around major cities. The figures produced by the survey are astonishing. It is estimated that there are at least 124 million individual pieces of visible plastic littering our coastline. Even if it is not directly ingested the plastic begins to break down into smaller pieces and enters the food chain. Clean Up Australia reports that plastic kills up to one million seabirds, 100,000 sea mammals and countless fish each year. Once they die from choking or starvation, the plastic is released from the decaying wildlife and spreads back into the environment again. It is a deadly cycle. The plastic is free to cause harm all over again.

There are minimal financial costs involved in this legislation. It is a matter of will, not money. All retailers will have to comply with the ban. It would be an offence to supply a banned plastic bag to a customer. Fines would apply. The phase-out can be completed over six months through consultation with business, unions and residents. There is every expectation that the idea will continue to enjoy widespread community support. The adjustment should be relatively easy. It is a sensible policy that has been implemented elsewhere to community benefit—a simple, practical response to solve the major problem of plastic waste and significantly reduce the impact on the marine environment, particularly on marine ecosystems. Future generations will benefit and thank us. Our current generation will benefit and thank us. Plastic pollution is a global crisis. Consider that in the short time I have been speaking, around 10 million plastic bags have been used worldwide. That is in the past few minutes alone. New South Wales should be at the forefront of the solution. If Eritrea and Rwanda can act, surely prosperous, first-world States such as New South Wales can act too. The community wants action; the Government should join Labor in delivering it. I commend the bill to the House.

**Debate adjourned.**