

ENDING PLASTIC POLLUTION

THE GREENS' PLAN TO REDUCE PLASTIC CONSUMPTION, INCREASE RECYCLING AND CUT PLASTIC POLLUTION



Plastic pollution is choking our parks, waterways and oceans. To cut plastic pollution at source, the Greens will invest in local recycling infrastructure and jobs, force corporates to take responsibility for the packaging they produce, and provide incentives for all of us to recycle more.

Over the past three decades our use of disposable plastics has skyrocketed. Global consumption of plastic drinking bottles in 2016 was estimated at 480 billion, up from around 300 billion ten years ago.ⁱ Australians use and throw away an estimated 4 billion lightweight plastic bags per year – that's 10 million per day.ⁱⁱ Across Australia, around one billion disposable coffee cups are landfilled every year.ⁱⁱⁱ

Victorians recycle about 25% of the plastics we use.^{iv} The rest of it ends up in landfill, or worse, as litter that often enters our waterways and oceans. Commonly used plastics aren't biodegradable, so they're constantly accumulating in our environment.^v This is already having a devastating effect on marine animals and the entire marine ecosystem.^{vi} Microplastics have been found in the water we drink and the food we eat, and it's too early to say what the impact on human health will be.^{vii}

The Andrews Government has dragged the chain on this issue for too long. While the Greens have campaigned for a container deposit scheme for more than a decade, the Victorian Government has said we don't need one. When the Greens introduced legislation to ban plastic bags, microbeads and unnecessary packaging, both major parties voted it down. With China's waste import restrictions starting to bite, the Greens are the only party with a plan to fix it.

The Greens' plan to drastically cut plastic pollution at source will:

- Increase incentives for recycling;
- Legally require companies to boost recycled content in their packaging;
- Ban certain single-use plastics;
- Invest in local plastic recycling infrastructure and jobs; and
- Support community-led information campaigns to reduce plastic consumption, increase recycling and drastically cut plastic pollution in Victoria.

The Greens will also work with state, territory and federal counterparts to increase consistency and efficiency of plastic recycling and product stewardship nationally.

CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME

The Greens will introduce a container deposit scheme (CDS) to be managed by the Environment Protection Authority. The main costs will be borne by the beverage industry, which would build these into sales. The cost to government would be \$5 million in year one and \$2 million per year thereafter. The scheme would recoup set-up costs and generate an annual surplus of \$90-200,000 from year two.^{viii}

The Greens believe that the beverage industry and users of their products have a shared responsibility, along with government, to manage the waste we produce.

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A CDS, which puts a value on packaging, is the most widely used mechanism internationally for encouraging the industry and its customers to fulfil this responsibility. Schemes in other Australian states and around the world have significantly increased levels of recycling and reduced rates of litter. States and countries with a CDS achieve recycling rates between 75-85%.^{ix} These schemes provide recyclers with an uncontaminated source of plastic for sorting and reprocessing. Recycled content can be made into new plastic bottles with a much smaller carbon footprint than virgin PET bottles.^x

CDS inherently improves the quality of the material collected. By separating glass, plastic and aluminium at the point of collection, material collected through CDS is much better quality. By diverting a large amount of waste out of kerbside, CDS reduces contamination of remaining materials, which will also improve the quality of recycling. Research from around the world shows CDS save local councils money; in Victoria we estimate a CDS would result in annual savings to councils totalling \$16 million.^{xi}

MANDATE RECYCLED CONTENT

The Greens would introduce legislation requiring all single-use PET plastic bottles sold in Victoria to contain a minimum of 70% recycled content.

Decades of plastic pollution have been enabled by large corporations failing to take responsibility for the waste they produce. Too often, so-called recyclable products don't make their way into the recycling process, and end up in landfill or worse, in our environment.

Efforts to drive corporate responsibility on this issue have mostly focused on the industry regulating itself. Unfortunately, corporations operating in Australia have seriously lagged behind their counterparts overseas.

Plastic pollution levels are now reaching crisis point and we can't afford to rely on a system that has failed so dismally in the past. The Greens would introduce laws requiring all single use drink containers to contain a minimum of 70% recycled content by 2022.

It's an ambitious target but it's completely achievable. Several US states already have these laws in place for drink bottles, and Coca Cola Europe has already committed to 50% recycled content in plastic bottles by 2020.^{xii} Requiring beverage companies to use recycled PET (rPET) would stimulate local recycling, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and divert a huge amount of waste from landfill.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Greens would invest \$60 million to build a state-owned and run bottle-to-bottle recycling plant to create local jobs for Victorians and strengthen our local recycling industry.

A number of recycling companies operate successfully in Victoria and with the right policy settings, would have the capacity to recycle much more plastic than they currently do. Establishing a container deposit scheme and mandating a minimum amount of rPET in plastic bottles will increase demand for recycled rPET and the viability of local recycling.

If elected, the Greens will invest up to \$60 million to build world-class plastic cleaning, recycling and production infrastructure in Victoria that would support local, closed loop recycling of plastics. Facilities would be state-owned and run, employing up to 100 people during construction and providing ongoing employment for an estimated 130 people.

The plant would require \$60 million initial investment from the Sustainability Fund and would generate a surplus from year three.

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BAN CERTAIN SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

The Greens will introduce legislation to ban a range of single-use plastic products where alternative options are readily available and affordable.

Recycling is great, but it isn't enough to address the huge plastic pollution problem we have on our hands. Single-use plastic has pervaded every corner of our lives and it's an addiction we need to address. Governments and corporations around the world are taking steps to reduce the use of single use plastics and it's time we did the same.

A huge number of states and countries have banned plastic shopping bags, and there's good evidence to show that it works. Research in countries that have banned bags have measured significant drops in the number of bags consumed.^{xiii} More importantly, research in marine environments shows that there's less marine plastic pollution in the waters surrounding countries that have banned bags.^{xiv}

In Europe, Asia and the US cities and states have moved to ban plastic takeaway containers and cutlery. The EU is currently developing a regional ban on certain single-use plastic items.^{xv} There are simple alternatives to these – including longer-lasting plastics that we re-use for many years – and bans are supporting behaviour change to re-use more.

The Greens would:

- Ban plastic bags (with medical and security exemptions);
- Ban a range of single use plastics where there are readily available and affordable alternatives, for example drinking straws, fresh produce packaging, drink stirrers; and
- Establish a coffee cup task force with a clear timeline to develop recyclable and compostable alternatives; infrastructure for recycling and composting; and targets for reducing disposable cup use.

THE PEOPLE'S WAR ON WASTE

The Greens would establish a \$2 million grants program to develop community-led information campaigns on plastic pollution. Grants would support individuals and communities to increase awareness of the problem; encourage behaviour change to reduce the prevalence of single use plastics; and improve the way we manage plastic waste.

Victorians have shown a huge amount of interest in and passion for tackling plastic pollution. The 'war on waste' has become a household term, and families are paying an unprecedented amount of attention to their plastic consumption and recycling habits.

But it's not top of mind for everyone, and it needs to be. The Greens would harness the creativity and commitment of our communities to spread the word on how every individual and family can play a role in tackling our plastic pollution crisis.

We'd invest \$2 million in grants for communities to develop their own waste education initiatives and public information campaigns, to be rolled out in their communities and across the state.

STIMULATE INNOVATION

The Greens would invest \$5 million in innovative solutions to our plastic pollution problem. The innovation fund would be managed by a new Circular Economy Centre for Excellence.

The collapse of our recycling economy provides an opportunity to restructure a green, sustainable system for the future. This represents huge opportunities for community groups and start-ups to develop innovative solutions at the grassroots level through to the global stage.

The Greens would instigate a one-off funding round for social enterprises focused on reducing plastic pollution. The

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program would be managed by the Circular Economy Centre for Excellence, a new body that the Greens will establish to drive collaborative innovation and solutions from industry, researchers and our communities.

INVEST IN PREVENTION

The Greens will guarantee that all revenue from the landfill levy and container deposits is reinvested in waste management and climate change initiatives.

Victoria's Municipal Landfill Levy was designed to fund waste reduction and management initiatives in Victoria. But successive governments have underspent the levy. Victoria could have been building its local plastic recycling infrastructure for years, but it hasn't. In the meantime, our plastic pollution problem is growing year on year.

The Greens will ensure that funds raised through levies and the container deposit scheme is routed back into waste avoidance and management, and that these funds are effectively spent. The waste hierarchy – which is already enshrined in Victorian law – establishes reducing waste as our top priority. After reduction, we should be reusing, recycling, recovering energy then disposing. The Greens will invest heavily in reduce, reuse and recycle, bucking the trend of successive Victorian governments and making a genuine contribution to reducing plastic pollution.

ⁱ Sandra LaVill and Matthew Taylor, 'A million bottles a minute: world's plastic binge 'as dangerous as climate change'', *The Guardian*, 28 June 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jun/28/a-million-a-minute-worlds-plastic-bottle-binge-as-dangerous-as-climate-change>

ⁱⁱ 'Plastic bags', *Sustainability Victoria*, accessed 20 June 2018: <http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/You-and-Your-Home/Live-sustainably/Single-use-items/Plastic-bags>

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Coffee cups', *Sustainability Victoria*, accessed 20 June 2018: <http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/You-and-Your-Home/Live-sustainably/Single-use-items/Coffee-cups>

^{iv} Blue Environment, 'Australian National Waste Report 2016', prepared for the *Australian Department of Environment and Energy*,

June 2017: <http://www.environment.gov.au/protection/national-waste-policy/national-waste-reports/national-waste-report-2016>

^v Roland Geyer, Jenna R. Jambeck and Kara Lavender, 'Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made', 20 July 2017: https://plasticoceans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Production_use_and_fate_of_all_plastics_ever_made.pdf

^{vi} UNEP (2016). Marine plastic debris and microplastics – Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi.

^{vii} Mary Kosuth, Elizabeth V. Wattenberg, Sherri A. Mason et al, 'Synthetic polymer contamination in global drinking water', *Orb Media*, 16 May 2017:

https://orbmedia.org/stories/Invisibles_final_report/multimedia and Ali Karami, Tamara S. Galloway, Abolfazl Golieskardi et al, 'The presence of microplastics in commercial salts from different countries', *Scientific Reports*, volume 7, 6 April 2017: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep46173>

^{viii} Dave West, 'Submission to the Inquiry into the Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011', October 2012:

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/documents/council/SCEP/CDL/Submissions/No_45_BoomerangAlliance.pdf

^{ix} 'Container deposit schemes work: so why is industry still so opposed?', Peter Bragge, Breanna Wright and Liam Smith, *The Conversation*, 6 June 2016: <https://theconversation.com/container-deposit-schemes-work-so-why-is-industry-still-opposed-59599>

^x Turning Rubbish into Community Money: The benefits of a 10¢ deposit on drink containers in Victoria', Office of Colleen Hartland MLC, 2011.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Coca-Cola Sustainability FAQs: <https://www.coca-cola.co.uk/faq/how-much-recycled-material-does-coca-cola-great-britain-use-in-its-packaging>

^{xiii} See, for example, evaluations from San Jose (http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf) and the UK (<https://escr.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/nine-in-10-shoppers-in-england-now-using-their-own-carrier-bags-research-reveals/>)

^{xiv} T. Maes, J. Barry et al, 'Below the surface: Twenty-five years of seafloor litter monitoring in coastal seas of North West Europe (1992–2017)', *Science of The Total Environment* Volume 630, 15 July 2018, Pages 790-798:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969718306442?via%3Dihub>

^{xv} Proposal for a single use plastics directive, European Union, May 2018: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/plastic_waste.htm