

Updated Position on Heavyweight Bags Used for Retail Purchases

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1. Plastic carrier bags (of any thickness) must be banned from free supply to the public.

The free supply of a single use plastic bag reinforces the throw-away mentality, leading to wastage of resources and the greater prevalence of polluting plastic in the environment lasting many decades. A 12 month transition period should be applied.

2. Government should also consider banning all other single use shopping carrier bags (with handles) including paper and cotton/calico being supplied for free by retailers (exemption below).

All single use carrier bags require material and energy use and have negative impacts that should be avoided. This includes degradable or biodegradable bags (AS 5810). Paper bags require timber pulp; high water use and generate GHG emissions in manufacture. Cotton/calico bags require high water use from cotton production, generate GHG emissions, under unknown labour conditions during manufacture. Plastic also uses virgin fossil fuels, with serious end-of-life impacts. The free supply of a single use bag reinforces the throw-away mentality, leading to wastage of resources and their greater prevalence in the environment.

A transition plan for the ban on single use bags, including escalating price per unit, by 2025, should be developed.

3. Exemptions for food takeaway services could be considered where outlets are permitted to only provide a paper bag (without handles, FSC accredited and 80% recycled content) when this is needed.

Takeaway vendors are encouraged to investigate environmentally sustainable packaging designs that eliminate the need for an additional paper bag.

4. Reusable bags, of whatever material, should attract a minimum price (eg, \$1) from retailers that strongly discourages single or only a few uses; be subject to a credible Australian standard re design, number of uses and carrying capacity; and contain 80% or more recycled content.

The claim for reuse should be backed up by independent research and application of credible standards about number of uses and carrying capacity; life cycle analysis - so consumers can be informed about the most sustainable material. The price should include scope to donate to NFPs. Supermarkets can further help by making it easy to replace damaged reusable bags and recycling old ones.

- Those relatively few customers that forget to bring their own bag can buy a genuinely reusable bag, at a price that motivates a change in behaviour (see 4 above).
- Thicker, heavyweight carrier bags (currently supplied for 15 cents by major retailers) could be provisionally supplied but only at an increased cost designed to deter habitual use (\$1). These bags should have a minimum 80% recycled content, increasing to 100% when practically possible. After deducting bag costs, this fee should be donated to NFP organisations engaged in litter and waste reduction campaigns. These bags are not considered genuinely reusable. These bags should be phased out before 2025.

According to major supermarket chains about 70-85% of their customers (2019, 2020 Coles, Woolworths Sustainability Reports) bring their own bag. This means there remains a minority still using the thicker plastic bags. Thus the target group is smaller than when lightweight bags were banned and consequently the opportunity can be taken to fully phase out single use bags.

- The provision of shopping carrier bags in Australia should be regulated and not subject to any voluntary code of practice by business or industry.

Voluntary codes have been consistently ineffective.

- Retailers should report on the number of reusable and single-use bags used each year, using standardised definitions. This data to be used in any public review on the effectiveness of any government policy.

Transparency and sampling rigour is important to accountability and avoiding manipulation of data.

- Bags used for repeated supermarket online shopping, should be replaced by crates, switched at time of delivery.



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