

## Taking action to reduce waste and plastics

- **Prevent unnecessary waste by phasing out single use and hard to recycle plastics; and creating a \$50m Plastics Innovation Fund to develop alternatives**
- **Reduce waste by investing in waste infrastructure and projects, and by establishing mandatory product stewardship schemes**
- **Improve domestic recycling through making it harder to export plastic waste and standardising kerbside collection of recycling and food waste**

Our natural environment is critical to our wellbeing, tourism, and national identity. New Zealand's environmental reputation is a core part of our export brand. As we respond to the impacts of COVID-19, we need to be preparing for the future. Eliminating waste is an important part of that.

We need to take action on waste to safeguard New Zealand's reputation and protect our environment from increasing volumes of plastic waste that ruins our landscape and can be fatal to our marine life.

We've banned single-use plastic bags and we're committed to phasing out more single-use plastics. We're reducing food waste by redirecting food to those in need. We're creating jobs by investing in waste infrastructure, including high-tech recycling plant.

We also initiated a project with the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor to look at how we could better deal with plastic waste. The report – *Rethinking Plastics* – sets out a series of recommendations to tackle this problem. Labour is committed to implementing these recommendations, and will roll out a waste action plan focused on lessening the environmental impact of waste, by preventing, reducing, and recycling it.

### The problem

In 2018, New Zealand sent 781 kilograms of total waste per person to council landfills – one of the highest rates in the OECD and nearly 50 percent higher than the OECD average of 525 kilograms per person. We are the twentieth highest producer of electronic waste per person in the world.

Plastic waste is a particular concern. Since the 1950s, 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been produced globally and 80 percent of that has gone to the dump or been discarded in the environment. 36 percent of plastic produced today is single-use packaging. Each year New Zealand sends around 35,000 tonnes of plastic waste offshore instead of processing it domestically.

Plastic makes up 61 percent of the waste items found on our beaches each year. Plastic has been found in our fish, shellfish, and seabirds. And plastic debris breaks down into microplastics, which are becoming widespread in the environment, with their long-term effects poorly understood, including on human health.

Tackling waste is also a critical part of our action on climate change. In 2018, waste produced 4.1 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions – mostly methane from landfills, comprising 11 percent of New Zealand's methane emissions, and 5 percent of our total emissions. Under the Zero Carbon Act, we are aiming to reduce methane emissions 10 percent by 2030 and 24-47 percent by 2050 in order to help limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees. Reducing waste emissions is an important way we can do that.

There is a lack of accurate data in New Zealand on the amount of waste that ends up in the environment and the impacts of that. Seeking to improve data quality in order to better manage our waste was a key component of the *Rethinking Plastics* report.

To tackle these problems, we need to rethink our approach to waste. We need to focus on outcomes at the top of the waste hierarchy – that is, preventing and reducing waste and reusing resources, before recycling and safe disposal. So we need to do more to prevent waste in the first place; when it does occur, take more opportunities to reduce it; and boost recycling initiatives. In the short term there are significant gains we can make in reducing the use of plastic. There are also opportunities to better invest in infrastructure to process and recycle other waste.

### **Future proofing our economy by preventing, reducing, and recycling waste**

Labour's waste action plan will future proof our economy through preventing, reducing and recycling waste consistent with a zero waste circulate approach where waste and pollution are designed out. We need to take responsibility for our waste, stop exporting it overseas, reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, and avoid waste ending up in the environment, and harming marine life. This will create jobs, grow the economy and protect our environment.

Investing in reducing waste is not just good for our environment; it is good for creating jobs. Research by the Ministry for the Environment has shown that for every five jobs created in landfilling, 15 to 20 jobs could be created in resource recovery or recycling.

Labour's measures over the next term in government will result in less waste going to landfill or into our marine environment. We will be using products that generate less waste and are easier to recycle, we will be recycling more waste ourselves instead of sending it offshore, and there will be more jobs created to support our initiatives to reduce waste.

## **Prevent waste**

### **Phasing out hard to recycle single-use plastic items**

Single-use plastic items, particularly those made from materials other than plastics 1 and 2, are hard to recycle and often end up in our marine environment where they can stay indefinitely, particularly after breaking down into microplastics. In many cases these items are provided 'free' with other products, so there is little ability for customers to avoid them.

This term we have implemented the phase out of microbeads and banned single-use plastic bags, and we have committed to phase out hard to recycle plastics – starting with PVC and polystyrene packaging. We have also begun work to phase out more single-use plastic products.

If re-elected, Labour will phase out PVC and polystyrene packaging and single-use plastic drink stirrers, tableware and cutlery, cotton buds, some cups and lids, produce bags, straws (with an exemption for those with disabilities), and produce stickers by 2025.

These products cause considerable harm to New Zealand's environment and contribute to the waste ending up in our landfills or in the environment. Each year, Sustainable Coastlines picks up 23,200 plastic straws from Auckland beaches alone.

We will also continue the work to identify additional single-use plastic items for phasing out, based on their impact on the environment and availability of alternative products, to support our goal of preventing waste from the outset.

### **Developing alternatives to single-use plastic items**

Some single-use plastic items do not currently have sufficient affordable alternatives, such as plastic-lined single-use coffee cups and baby wipes.

One of the recommendations in the *Rethinking Plastics* report was to attract research and innovation to New Zealand by offering a specific innovation fund to reimagine plastics. This would provide a way to develop alternatives so that less waste is created in the first place.

Labour will create a \$50 million Plastics Innovation Fund to develop alternatives for plastics, particularly for single use and hard to recycle plastic products.

This fund would be available from June 2021 and be run on an application based model like the Waste Minimisation Fund. It will be able to provide grants and loans to researchers or companies who can rethink the plastic products we use in our daily lives and provide more sustainable affordable options to them.

The money for this fund will be ring-fenced from the revenue raised by the waste levy.

## **Reduce waste**

### **Investing in waste infrastructure and projects to reduce and recycle waste**

Tackling waste provides a significant opportunity for New Zealand to invest in projects that will create jobs while preparing our economy for the future.

As part of the COVID-19 response, we allocated \$124 million towards waste infrastructure. The first projects to receive funding have already been announced – \$36.7 million for high-tech recycling plants nationwide. This investment will provide optical and mechanical sorters for six recycling facilities throughout the country, and plastic waste balers and processing equipment at three further facilities. This investment will continue to roll out over the coming months.

Funding for waste infrastructure and projects is also generated from the waste levy. The funding is ring-fenced – half for councils to support them with the costs of managing waste, and half allocated to initiatives that promote or achieve waste minimisation. The waste levy is expected to be generating \$276 million per year by 2024.

Labour will invest this funding through the Waste Minimisation Fund into infrastructure and projects that will help up deliver significant reductions in waste.

Priorities will include:

- Additional optical and mechanical sorters to improve the efficiency of our recycling collection
- Processing facilities for products we don't currently recycle onshore, including plastics and construction and demolition waste
- Gas capture technology to reduce the emissions from our waste;
- Diverting food waste from landfill
- Improving onshore fibre recycling capacity
- Establishing the Plastics Innovation Fund to develop alternatives for plastics, particularly for single-use and hard to recycle plastic products
- Supporting more product stewardship schemes
- Standardising kerbside collection of recyclable materials

## **Establishing product stewardship schemes**

Product stewardship schemes mean that the producer or seller of a product takes responsibility for reducing the environmental impact of their products including how they will be recycled. This term the Government has declared six priority products for regulated product stewardship schemes – plastic packaging, tyres, eWaste, agrichemicals and their containers, refrigerants, and farm plastics. Work on co-design of product stewardship schemes for these products is now underway.

Labour will implement these regulated product stewardship schemes for plastic packaging, tyres, eWaste, agrichemicals and their containers, refrigerants, and farm plastics. Alongside this we will continue work on a deposit return scheme for drinks containers.

Following the implementation of these schemes, Labour will explore regulated product stewardship schemes for further products, including looking at fishing equipment, cigarette butts, plastics used in road construction and maintenance, and synthetic foam.

## **Recycle Waste**

### **Making it harder to export plastic waste**

In government, we have joined countries around the world by signing up to a set of consistent rules under the Basel Convention for countries to follow for when they will accept plastics for recycling.

In recent years there have been significant issues with developed countries shipping plastic waste for recycling to developing countries with few controls over what was sent, meaning it often ended up in landfill or in the environment. In response to this, a number of countries have now severely limited what plastics can be imported into the country for recycling. This will ensure plastic being transported internationally will actually be for the purposes of recycling, rather than to dispose of waste more cheaply.

Labour will implement the regulations of the Convention, which will mean that, from 2021, those wanting to export hard to recycle plastic waste will need a permission from the country they are sending it to and a permit from the Environmental Protection Authority. Alongside this, we will seek to process more of New Zealand's waste onshore. If we see other countries granting permission for low grade plastic waste that ends up going to landfill, we will be prepared to impose minimum standards for the export of waste, to ensure plastic waste is only exported for genuine recycling reasons.

### **Standardising kerbside collection and food waste**

There is currently no consistent or coordinated system around the country to guide how kerbside recycling operates in New Zealand. This makes it hard for New Zealanders to have confidence about how to recycle. Often items that could be recycled aren't, and instead get sent straight to landfill. There is also a problem with non-recyclable items being put into household recycling, which leads to contamination.

Labour will work closing alongside local councils to implement standardised kerbside recycling in New Zealand. Having a consistent system across New Zealand will remove confusion for householders about what can and can't be recycled, and greatly improve the quantity of recyclable materials collected and processed - reducing the amount ending up in landfill.

We will be guided by the recommendations in a 2020 report from the Ministry for the Environment and WasteMINZ, which sets out how to standardise kerbside collections by:

- Collecting plastics 1, 2, and 5, metal, glass, cardboard and paper throughout the country;
- Incentivising the collection of food waste;
- Collecting glass separately to other recycling; and
- Providing best practice guidance to Councils.