

Taking action to reduce waste and plastics

Why are you focusing on waste now?

A key part of Labour's economic recovery plan from COVID-19 is making investments for the future. Waste is a great example of where we can make double duty investments that create jobs and deliver wider benefits. Research by the Ministry for the Environment has shown that for every five jobs created in landfilling we could be creating 15 to 20 jobs in resource recovery or recycling, and we help clean up our environment at the same time.

Why focus on plastic waste?

There are real opportunities in the plastics space to significantly reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills each year. Plastic waste is also the most significant problem in terms of waste getting into the environment. 61 percent of the waste found on our beaches each year is plastic and it can cause serious harm to our marine life.

How will banning single-use plastic items affect households?

The single-use plastics we propose to phase out are all ones that have alternative reusable or affordable less harmful single-use options, so the only significant impact on households should be they end up throwing out less rubbish.

What alternatives exist to the single-use products that are being phased out?

- PVC and polystyrene packaging – cardboard or type 1 and 2 plastic packaging, or reusable containers
- Straws – paper straws, reusable straws, or no straw
- Drink stirrers – wooden drink stirrers or reusable spoons
- Tableware, cups and cutlery – paper or wood based products or reusable items
- Produce bags – reusable bags, no bag
- Produce stickers – compostable produce stickers, signs, stamps
- Cotton buds – paper cotton buds.

Why create a Plastics Innovation Fund?

This was something recommended by the Chief Science Advisor. There are single-use and hard to recycle plastic products in everyday use that we cannot yet phase out without negative impacts, because there are not enough affordable viable alternatives. By investing in encouraging innovation in the plastic space, we can put New Zealand in a better position to phase out such products in future.

How will the Government and Councils afford these changes?

The waste levy is expected to be generating \$276 million per year by 2024. Half of that revenue will go to Councils and the other half will be ring fenced for waste reducing initiatives by the Government.

What is a regulated product stewardship scheme and how does it reduce waste?

Under the Waste Minimisation Act 2008, the Government can declare something a priority product. That triggers a process of co-design with the industry on things like how we can improve the product so it produces less harm, how we can reduce the level of waste caused, how we can better collect it, and how we can ensure it gets reused or recycled. Once this process is complete, these changes are set out as requirements in regulations that are binding on everyone who produces, imports, or sells that product.

Why not just ban products instead of using product stewardship schemes?

Sometimes there aren't viable and affordable alternatives to products we use in everyday life, like tyres and batteries. Where that is the case, a product stewardship scheme provides a way to reduce as much as possible the environmental impact of waste from that product.

What is wrong with our kerbside recycling system?

Kerbside recycling in New Zealand is managed by local authorities and, while it works well for the most part, the rules for what is recycled and how differ with each area. This can create confusion for households about what they should and shouldn't be recycling, and means we end up with more waste going to landfill instead of being recycled.

By standardising the materials to be collected and providing best practice guidance about how to do it, we can help reduce our level of waste, improve the quality of our recycling, and send less waste to landfill.

How does addressing waste help prevent climate change?

Waste produces 11 percent of New Zealand's methane emissions. Taking action to prevent, reduce, and recycle our waste is a key way we can meet our methane reduction targets under the Zero Carbon Act and help prevent climate change.