

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC, Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office

Via Email: lcco@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC,

RE: PETITION NO.046 BANNING PLASTIC BAGS

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the issues raised in the petition on banning plastic bags. I acknowledge that the government has imposed a ban on plastic bags of 35 microns or less from July 1, 2018 and undertook a study on household views of plastic waste.

The signatures on the petition were collected over a short period of time—the summer months of 2017 and into early 2018—and only during the *Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Beach Clean-Ups*. During these clean-ups there was overwhelming support for a ban on all single-use plastics once people saw the impact on marine life and the amount of plastic floating in the ocean. The *Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Campaign* collated extensive data on the amount and type of plastic collected. After one month of cleaning up WA beaches, the *Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Campaign* collected 15,000 plastic items over an area of 4.5 square kilometres. During 2017, 2000 volunteers gathered 196,000 plastic items covering 37 square kilometres. Far more plastic remains uncollected. Attached is the spreadsheet of the data.

By collecting single-use plastic and collating the data, the *Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Campaign* provided evidence that single-use plastic has become an environmental problem in WA. They have also raised community awareness unlike any other campaign for littering.

No data is readily available from the government that shows how much single-use plastic goes into landfill or waterways, or is recycled or incinerated in WA. Without solid data collection, how do we know what the recycling rates are or where to invest into education to raise community awareness? This should be the core work for any policy formulation on waste.

The survey report commissioned by the government, *Western Australian Households' Views on Plastic Waste 2017* by Colin Ashton-Graham (Consulting Behavioural Economist) for the Boomerang Alliance was a good start for testing community behaviour. The survey demonstrated that the public are already rejecting single-use plastic in favour of reusable options, especially in cases where easy alternatives already exist. However, there are some pertinent gaps in the survey.

Emerging evidence suggests that biodegradable and compostable bags fail to break down quickly enough to protect the marine environment or to compost in landfill conditions. In the survey's testing for community response to this knowledge, supplementary information was not provided to the respondents about the FOGO system. The FOGO system allows for bags that must be both biodegradable and compostable to be placed in the green waste bin, which is then composted at Neerabup, the industrial composting site. This is useful in combating one of the behaviours of purchasing or using biodegradable or compostable bags for bin liners, such as those provided at the supermarket. We already know that only 3% of plastic bags are recycled, and that when South Australia implemented the ban the sale of bin liners increased.

The government's ban on plastic bags of 35 microns or less has already seen the manufacture and supply of more heavy-weight plastic bags for purchase in major supermarkets in WA. These bags are not biodegradable and compostable, and once they can no longer be used they cannot be placed in

the FOGO system and will still end up in waterways and landfill, taking even longer to break down. This is a contradictory policy by the government in its ban of lighter-weight plastic but not thicker plastic bags, and is potentially misleading information to the community.

Another barrier to the use of plastic bags that was not addressed by the survey report is getting shopping delivered to the door—a much needed service for parts of the community. The shopping still gets delivered in plastic bags as the companies have yet to find an alternative.

All of the environmental problems associated with the use of single-use plastics and the regulatory problems associated with banning single-use plastics can be resolved with the passing of the *Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2017*.

The bill places the onus on the manufacturers to provide alternatives to single-use plastic that are already available. By implementing a ban, consumers are effectively given more choice as retailers are forced to provide more options.

The bill will ensure consistency among all local councils, a problem Parliament already encountered when a few local councils tried to implement a ban on plastic bags within their areas, prior to the announcement by the government.

The bill makes it easier for the consumer to purchase goods that do not contain single-use plastic. This will lessen the impact on: landfill; our waterways and marine and wildlife; and the need for recycling and incinerating.

The bill will be a first for Australia. Western Australia will be leading the way nationally in the waste hierarchy, combating waste as an environmental problem, as well as monitoring achievements and adjusting to setbacks.

There is more than enough plastic in the world today to be recycled indefinitely and sustain current and projected demand, but plastic cannot be recycled infinitely, nor can it be incinerated safely, due to the toxins it produces.

I note that during the Review of the Waste Strategy, in which I participated in, it was highlighted that a large proportion of Western Australia's plastic is exported for recycling. Banning single-use plastics in Western Australia will help lessen the impact of China's import ban.

As a concerned community member who actively seeks to limit single-use plastics in my everyday life, I respectfully urge you to look favourably on the petition and the issues raised, and see it as a positive step in helping the government, community and environment to tackle this problem.

Yours sincerely

Josephine Jurak