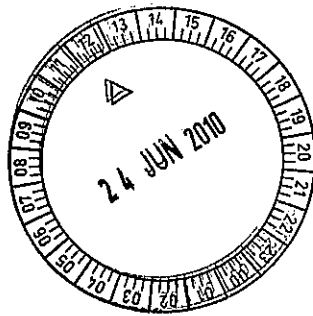


PUBLIC



Hon Dr Sally Talbot MLC

Parliament of Western Australia
Member for South West Region
Shadow Minister for Environment;
Planning; Climate Change; Lands; Youth

Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Policy
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis

Petition No 72 – Plastic Shopping Bags Ban – Submission to Committee

Thank you for inviting me to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in relation to this petition.

The petitioners are indicating their support for a Private Members Bill in my name which was introduced into the Legislative Council earlier this year.

The data which prompted me to introduce the Bill is quite chilling. Australians use nearly four billion plastic bags each year. About 3 per cent are recycled. The rest end up either in our environment or in landfill.

The link between the use of plastic bags and environmental damage is internationally recognised. Ireland, Malta, Taiwan and South Africa have introduced plastic bag taxes or prohibited the supply of free bags. Bangladesh and China have banned or are about to ban lightweight bags completely and several other countries including Scotland, England and Spain have bans and restrictions under active consideration.

South Australia and Victoria are the only two Australian states so far to have banned plastic bags. Several WA councils and communities including Albany and Fremantle have moved to eliminate plastic bag use. The Bag Smart website (<http://www.bagsmart.com.au>) lists the following areas as having activists working on ridding the environment of plastic bags: Boddington, Bremer Bay, Bridgetown, Coolgardie, Denmark, Dunsborough, Esperance, Exmouth, Goomalling, Hopetoun, Jerramungup, Jurien Bay, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Kambalda, Kojonup, Manjimup, Margaret River, Moora, Nannup, Port Hedland, Quairading, Rottnest Island, Town of Cambridge, Three Springs and York.

Community concern centres not only on the number of plastic bags going to landfill and the fact that they take approximately 1000 years to break down, but also on the

impact of plastic bags in public places, parks, on beaches and in rural and remote areas. The effect on wildlife caught up in plastic bag debris is not easily estimated but anecdotally is significant and suggests that the use of the precautionary principle is readily justifiable. The effect on recreational equipment is well documented and substantial.

While manufacturers and retailers tend to blame the plastic bag-using public for the damage caused by bag litter, an increasing number of them are recognising that public opinion is leading the way on this issue and acting to reduce plastic bag availability. The Wesfarmers group has already withdrawn plastic bags from Bunnings and Officeworks and has announced a phase out from its Target stores.

Other arguments put forward for not imposing a ban involve convenience, practicality and the health benefits of wrapping food hygienically. In the Bill, I have addressed these concerns are by adopting the following definitions:

A plastic bag is a carry bag, the body of which comprises polymers in whole or part, provided by the retailer for the carrying or transporting of goods, but does not include a carry bag which complies with prescribed design criteria.

A bag is not a plastic bag if it:

- is thicker than 35 microns,*
- has no handles,*
- is the product's integral packaging,*
- is designed for multiple use as a carry bag (i.e. greater than 10 re-uses).*

These definitions are consistent with the Commonwealth Government's Regulatory Impact Statement on the investigation of options to reduce the impacts of plastic bags, April 2008.

Thank you for your consideration of this serious issue. I would be pleased to provide further information to the Committee if required.

Yours sincerely



SALLY TALBOT
23 June 2010