



MEDIA RELEASE

COUNCIL ADOPTS A PLASTIC BAG POLICY FOR NORFOLK ISLAND

At their meeting this week the Council adopted a Plastic Bags Norfolk Island Policy. The purpose of the policy is to encourage the phasing out of single use plastic shopping bags used by retailers on Norfolk Island.

The impacts of single-use plastic shopping bags on the environment is widely known, as they enter the waste stream as litter and due to their persistence in the environment, in particular in our oceans and waterways. In addition, due to the difficulties of waste management on Norfolk Island, it is important to look at ways to reduce the island's waste load and plastic bags is a simple waste stream that can be avoided.

The original intent of the policy was to have no plastic shopping bags by September 2017, as Council's Operational Plan 2017/18, however following community consultation of various retail outlets it was identified that this is not feasible due to:

- All retailers hold large amounts of stock that they need to use, so it was unreasonable to expect them to use it all by September 2017;
- There is still a limited supply of alternatives such as Boomerang Bags and due to shipping constraints, it can take an extended period of time to order in alternative bags such as paper bags, compostable bags or reusable calico-style bags.

Without legislative powers in place, Council is unable to legislate a ban of plastic bags however through this policy Council encourages retailers to phase out the use of plastic bags and seek alternative solutions. It was identified during community consultation that the majority of retailers were generally supportive of this type of policy.

Council thanks the retailers who have already made changes in this area and encourages others. Council also offers thanks to initiatives such as Boomerang Bags for the excellent work that they do to move Norfolk Island towards its vision – *The Best Small Island in the World*.

The policy can be viewed at www.norfolkisland.gov.nf and a factsheet with further information is attached to this media release.

Remember to: *Avoid, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover* – and only *Dispose* as a last resort. We have already seen a huge take-up by the community in using Boomerang Bags and cardboard boxes when shopping which is great to see. Thank you!

Lotta Jackson
GENERAL MANAGER

20 October 2017



ABOUT PLASTIC BAGS

Plastic bags are used every day for shopping, transporting of goods and carrying, storing and disposing of waste. For many people the supply of plastic bags when shopping is expected, due to the common practice of retailers supplying plastic bags at the checkout for free. Many towns, states and countries are looking at ways to reduce the reliance of plastic bags due to their environmental impact. This impact is not only through production but also through litter and their persistence in the environment, in particular in our oceans and waterways. Single-use plastic bags – the type you are often supplied at a supermarket – are made from high density polyethylene (HDPE) which is made from petroleum. The heavier plastic bags, found in specialty stores and department stores are made from low density polyethylene (LDPE).

WHY BAN PLASTIC BAGS?

Production- Impacts to environment

HDPE and LDPE plastic bags are made from a non-renewable resource – petroleum which has a huge cost to the environment, however their use is often short lived and majority are thrown away without any ability to recover the resource.

Litter – Impacts to environment

HDPE plastic bags are incredibly persistent in the environment as they can take up to 1,000 years to fully decompose. Due to their light weight they can be transported easily by the wind and end up in our oceans. A plastic bag floating in the water can simply be mistaken for food by vulnerable animals including turtles, whales, birds and fish. Once a plastic bag has been ingested it can prevent the animal from digesting food or can prevent them submerging. Plastic bags can also be a suffocation risk to small children.

Norfolk Island Waste Management

Plastic bags are being banned across the world due to the environmental impacts detailed above. The need for Norfolk Island to ban plastic bags goes even beyond the issues detailed above. Due to the isolated nature of Norfolk Island there is no sustainable way

to manage plastic waste (along with many of our other waste streams) on the island. We, as a community, need to be making a conscious effort to avoid and reduce the amount of plastic waste we generate on the island to reduce our environmental footprint.

HOW WILL PLASTIC BAGS BE BANNED?

The Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC) has developed a policy to encourage the ban of certain types of plastic bags and limit the supply of other types of plastic bags. The policy will include the following provisions:

- Retailers are encouraged to use existing HDPE plastic bag stock and phase out the use of HDPE plastic bags
- Retailers are encouraged not to order HDPE bags and provide alternatives for their customers
- It will be encouraged for retailers who supply LDPE plastic bags (thicker bags) to impose a charge on the use of these bags to manage the amount of bags being supplied.

WHAT ABOUT BIODEGRADABLE AND DEGRADABLE BAGS?

Biodegradable bags are made from plant-based materials such as corn and wheat starch and can break down in the presence of oxygen. However, there is no regulation on how much time these bags take to fully biodegrade. These bags cannot be composted. These bags can still pose the same risks to wildlife as HDPE bags, therefore biodegradable bags are not considered a suitable alternative to HDPE plastic bags.

Degradable bags are made from petroleum products however they are made to weaken and break down into smaller fragments. These bags cannot be composted. These bags can still pose the same risks to wildlife as HDPE bags and the fragments may persist in the environment for a long period of time. Therefore, degradable bags are not considered a suitable alternative to HDPE plastic bags.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

- **Compostable bags:** For retailers who believe that the supply of plastic bags is integral to their business, a compostable bag which meets Australian Standard 4736 can be used as an alternative. Compostable bags that meet AS4736 have a shelf life of up to 12 months and can be composted in a home composting unit.
- **LDPE plastic bags:** LDPE plastic bags may be used as an alternative however retailers are encouraged to place a charge on the use of those bags to deter consumers from using the bags.
- **Boomerang bags:** Norfolk Island currently has reusable cloth bags in circulation that are provided as an alternative to plastic bags. Boomerang bags are made using recycled fabrics. Norfolk Island does not have a facility to reuse or recycle fabric wastes therefore Boomerang bags are a very sustainable alternative for Norfolk Island and make good use of a potential waste stream.
- **Recycled cardboard boxes:** Given most materials imported to Norfolk Island are packaged in cardboard boxes, the island has a healthy supply of boxes. These are a fantastic alternative to plastic bags and once an appropriate composting facility has been implemented on the island the discarded cardboard boxes can be composted on the island.
- **Paper bags:** may be used as an alternative, and going forward, once an appropriate composting facility has been implemented on the island the discarded paper bags can be composted on island.
- **Canvas / green bags:** these bags may be supplied by the retailer at a cost to the customer with the idea that the bag is reused. These bags may include the retailer's marketing logo.

WHY FOCUS ON PLASTIC BAGS?

There are many waste streams on Norfolk Island that as a community we should be thinking about when consuming these products, for example, plastic bottles. There is a need for a shift in behaviours on the way we consume products, how we generate waste and how we sort our waste streams and dispose of wastes. Norfolk Island is in a unique situation where we are very high consumers however we have no current sustainable way to manage our waste streams. This is something that requires not only NIRC's direction, but also changes in behaviours within the community. Encouraging the banning of plastic bags is just the first step. Banning plastic bags is an achievable goal and a great step in the right direction for Norfolk Island.

I USE SINGLE USE PLASTIC BAGS AS A BIN LINER – WHAT SHOULD I USE NOW?

A large number of single use plastic bags are used as bin liners within the household. By banning HDPE plastic bags it may result in the community purchasing rolls of bin liners which essentially have the same impact to the environment. This is where we as a community need to shift our behaviour and recalibrate our mindset. Why do you need a bin liner in the first place? What about the use of a cardboard box to contain your waste streams and to transport wastes to the Waste Management Centre? Or perhaps, deliver your waste in your rubbish bin, unlined and rinse it out at the Waste Management Centre. NIRC is currently progressing to a more sustainable waste management system on Norfolk Island. More wastes will be recycled, a composting facility will be implemented which will manage organic wastes, food scraps, cardboard and paper wastes and green wastes. Plastics, aluminium and steel cans will all be recycled off island. Without these waste streams in your general (residual) waste – is there a need for a plastic bag at all?



MORE INFORMATION

For more information
please contact
Claire Quintal
Team Leader – Waste &
Environment on
22609 or
Claire.quintal@nirc.gov.nf