ACT Government

Phasing out single-use plastics

Discussion paper

City Services, Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

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Comments may be made:

- online at the above website
- by email to ACTwastepolicy@act.gov.au
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Comments can be made until end July.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Our society can no longer throw away responsibility for the plastics littering our environment.

Single-use plastics are ubiquitous, filling our waterways, our city parks, our bush landscapes and our landfill.

If we are to take a responsible approach to managing our environment we must reduce problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics.

I know that community concern about this waste is now at an all-time high. And many businesses in Canberra and our Australian packaging industry are already taking steps towards a more responsible approach.

Yet it is still common place to see takeaway shops continuing to use plastic-foam polystyrene takeaway containers like it is the 1980s. Supermarkets also continue to sell plastic plates, cups and cutlery - when it seems like there are clear alternatives already being sold on their own shelves.

That's why Governments also have an important role to play through education, but also through environmental regulation. The European Parliament last year voted to ban single-use plastics in the EU by 2021. Similarly, South Australia and the City of Hobart are also looking at phasing out single-use plastics.

The ACT Government believes that we should consider phasing out or banning single-use products in the ACT, going beyond our existing ban on light-weight single-use plastic bags. To do this we need to build a circular economy, working with industry through innovation to help 'design out' and minimise problematic plastics and move to more sustainable alternatives (where they exist).

We want to ensure that, as part of a responsible approach to plastics, any government intervention is practical, particularly for consumers, and addresses important social equity concerns.

This discussion paper is designed to seek ideas and feedback from ACT residents, business and the packaging industry on how best we responsibly manage environment by phasing out problematic and unnecessary single-use products.

Thank you in advance for your input on how we move towards a single-use plastic free ACT.

Chris Steel
Minister for City Services

PURPOSE

This discussion paper is intended to:

> engage with industry, business and the community about problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic waste and pollution;

> identify opportunities and ideas for phasing out specific problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics and moving to more sustainable alternatives;

> highlight important considerations that will inform government decision making, including:

- potential impacts on manufacturers, importers and businesses that supply and use single-use plastics.
- consumer impacts, including social equity concerns and practicalities.

This discussion paper focuses on single-use plastic consumer products that are designed to be used once, often away from home, and rapidly discarded. This includes plastic bags, plastic-lined disposable cups, takeaway containers, straws and cutlery.

YOUR FEEDBACK

Responses to this discussion paper will help the ACT Government to determine appropriate policy responses on this important issue. This paper has been designed to guide your feedback, which we can accept in a number of ways, including:

> Written submissions

> Survey

> Community, Industry and Government sessions

QUESTIONS WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER

Single-use plastic products

1. *Do you agree with the consumer single-use plastic items listed on page 21 being considered as part of this paper? If so, which items do you think are the most important to address (e.g. plastic bags, straws, cutlery, disposable coffee cups, takeaway containers)?*

2. *What regulatory or other approaches do you support to address consumer single-use plastic in the ACT? When do you think action is needed, and why?*

Business, retailers, manufacturers and importers

3. *If you are an ACT based manufacturer, importer or retailer of consumer single-use plastic products, what cost and other impacts do you think need to be considered as part of this discussion?*

4. *If you are a local business that sells, offers or provides consumer single-use plastic in the ACT, what do you think needs to be considered as part of this discussion?*

Community

5. *Have you taken steps to reduce your use of single-use plastic? If so, what have you done?*

6. *What alternatives to single-use plastics have you used and are they practical?*

7. *What members of our community may be impacted by phasing out single-use plastics and how? What are the solutions?*

8. *What else do you think needs to be considered as part of this discussion?*

The plastic we create today could outlive our grandchildren's grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Plastic is everywhere. It's in our homes, workplaces and environment, and is even being found in our food.[1]

Plastic plays an important role in our everyday lives. It is used in a wide range of applications as a low-cost manufacturing option. Its uses include protecting the food we eat, keeping medical equipment clean and free of germs, and making cars and planes lighter, which saves fuel and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. However, plastic doesn't come without its downsides. It presents three key problems:

1. Persistence in the environment - commonly used plastics do not readily break down and can persist in the environment in some shape or form for hundreds or even thousands of years.[2] Plastic pollution is compromising the safety of our food supplies, soils, waterways and wildlife.
2. Rising global plastic consumption - global consumption of plastic is increasing and compounding its negative effects. Since the 1950s, plastic production has grown faster than any other material. Plastic production is expected to double again in the next 20 years and almost quadruple by 2050 based on current trends. It is also estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic (by weight) in our oceans than fish.[3]
3. True cost of plastic - the downstream costs and perverse outcomes of the consumption of plastic to the economy, environment and society are not accounted for, and are borne by the environment, waste management and health sectors.

The ACT is not immune from these global challenges. Given much of the plastic we consume is designed to be thrown away after a single use, it is timely to carefully examine our consumption and disposal of these products – particularly when our use of these products could be avoided.

In the ACT, we could do more to reduce our plastic footprint. Although Canberra's population is small, the ACT has demonstrated leadership and influenced the national debate on a range of environment and waste issues. Our local businesses and community have actively supported policies that minimise our waste and move us closer to being a more sustainable society.

The ACT has already taken steps to address the impact of single-use plastic through the plastic shopping bag ban, introduced in 2011. The plastic bag ban is estimated to have reduced plastic bag use in the ACT by over 310 million bags since its introduction[4] and has significantly reduced our plastic bag consumption.[5]

As a community we have taken positive steps to reduce our waste and live more sustainably. If we are going to curb our reliance on single-use plastic and reduce our environmental impact, we can and should do more. The best way to do this is to avoid creating plastic waste in the first place. We can do this by improving the efficiency of the way we use plastic in our daily lives and changing the consumer choices we make.

As a government, it's important to target our efforts where it has the greatest benefit. We know that changes could have impacts on consumers, businesses and industry. This discussion paper therefore seeks your views on areas of reform as well as any potential unintended impacts that may arise from government intervention.

Ideas and feedback generated through this discussion paper and consultation process will help the government identify further options we could explore as a Territory to avoid and reduce single-use plastic.

We look forward to hearing the views of the ACT community, guided by the discussion questions, in the forthcoming consultation.

Fast Facts

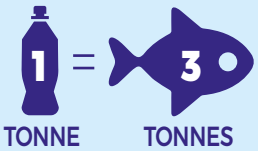
Plastics production has grown rapidly over the last 50 years from 15 million tonnes in 1964 to 311 million tonnes in 2014. As plastics serve more and more uses, this growth will continue, with a further doubling in production over the next 20 years.[6]

Half of all plastics produced are designed to be used just once - and then thrown away.[7]

It is estimated that globally 95 per cent of plastic packaging material is lost annually after a short first use - with a value of approximately $110-$165 billion.[8]

In Australia, about 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste was generated in 2016-17. This roughly equates to 103 kg of plastic waste per person annually. Of this, 12 per cent was recycled, 87 per cent was sent to landfill and one per cent was sent to an energy-from-waste facility.[9]

Plastic kills over 100 million marine animals and harms over 600 marine species every year.[10]



By 2025, on current trends, the ocean will contain 1 tonne of plastic for every 3 tonnes of fish. By 2050, there will be more plastic than fish by weight.[11]

Canberrans are among the best recyclers in the country. Each year we generate around one million tonnes of waste, and over 70 per cent of that is reused or recycled.[12]

SETTING THE SCENE

WHAT IS PLASTIC?

The United Nations defines plastic as *'a lightweight, hygienic and resistant material which can be moulded in a variety of ways and utilised in a wide range of applications'*.[13] Plastic can be flexible or rigid, and vary in chemical composition.

Plastic is usually synthetic and is most commonly made from petrochemicals (fossil-based); although some plastic can be made partially or fully from natural materials (bio-based).

Both sources of plastic when found in some products become immediate threats to wildlife in the environment due to their shape or form. For example, they can:

- be mistakenly consumed due to their resemblance to natural food sources which can result in death (e.g. plastic bags and bottle tops)
- cause physical injury or death (e.g. plastic fishing nets and bottle rings) or
- subvert natural ecosystem function (e.g. prevent light penetrating ocean waters).

By changing the way we think about and consume single-use plastic in the ACT we can all help deliver our commitment to tackling single-use plastics.

WHAT IS SINGLE-USE PLASTIC?

Single-use plastic, often also referred to as disposable plastic, is commonly used for plastic packaging and includes items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.[14]

Plastic packaging represents the largest slice of global plastic production. This single-use material makes up between 26 per cent[15] to 36 per cent[16] of the world's plastic and is designed for immediate disposal.

Common types of unnecessary, avoidable or replaceable single-use plastic items include; **plastic bags (including those that are biodegradable and compostable), bottles, straws, disposable containers, disposable coffee cups, lids, straws and cutlery.** By their nature, many of these items are designed to be disposed of, often within minutes, following just one use. Their brief use, often combined with an inability to be recycled,[17] makes these kinds of single-use plastic particularly costly and damaging to our environment.[18]

Some single-use plastic will always be necessary. For example, single-use plastic helps keep medical equipment sterile and safe to use. For this reason, this discussion paper focuses on what is commonly referred to as 'unnecessary' 'problematic' or 'avoidable' single-use plastic. It is also recognised that readily available alternatives may not exist for all consumer single-use plastic products at this point in time.

AUSTRALIANS USE

7.8 BILLION

PLASTIC BAGS EACH YEAR

5.6 BILLION

ARE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS[A]

AUSTRALIANS USE

1 BILLION

DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUPS EACH YEAR.[B]

MOST OF THESE CUPS ARE NOT RECYCLABLE AND END UP IN LANDFILL

AUSTRALIANS USE AROUND

10 MILLION STRAWS EACH DAY[C]

THIS EQUATES TO APPROXIMATELY

160,000 STRAWS

EACH DAY IN THE ACT[D]

OUR PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC: WHY WE NEED CHANGE

Since 1964, plastics production has increased twenty-fold, reaching a global annual production of 311 million tonnes in 2014.[19] Plastics production is expected to double again in 20 years and almost quadruple by 2050.[20]

Globally, the plastic produced each year is equivalent to:

OVER 5,800 SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGES

(THE SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE WEIGHS **52,800 TONNES**)

OVER HALF A MILLION TELSTRA TOWERS

(THE TELSTRA TOWER WEIGHS AROUND **537 TONNES**)

ALMOST THREE MILLION BLUE WHALES

(A BLUE WHALE WEIGHS AROUND **104.5 TONNES**)

FOSSIL-BASED AND BIO-BASED PLASTICS

Fossil-based components of plastic products cause short and long term effects in the environment. They do not degrade but breakdown under specific conditions and over time result in residual microplastic particles (less than five millimeters in length). Microplastics can be absorbed by plants and animals from the environment and be disseminated through the food chain.

Bio-based components of plastic products do degrade under specific conditions. They are being used to replace some fossil-based plastics but do not offer the same range of properties needed to replace all the plastic products we currently use.

PLASTIC IS MADE FROM NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES

More than 99 per cent of plastics are made from chemicals derived from oil, natural gas and coal. These non-renewable natural resources cannot be replaced once they are depleted. The UN estimates that by 2050 the plastic industry could account for a fifth of the world's oil consumption.[21]

Making and discarding plastic has a significant carbon impact, an impact that is only going to increase in the future if there is no change in our current practice. By changing the way we think about and consume single-use plastic in the ACT we can all help deliver our commitment to tackling climate change.[22]

RECYCLING IS ONLY PART OF THE SOLUTION

Only nine per cent of all global plastic waste ever produced has been recycled. About 12 per cent has been incinerated, while the remaining 79 per cent has accumulated in landfills, dumps or the natural environment.[23]

The rapid rise of single-use plastic production is compounded by the fact that these products are rarely made of recycled material (i.e. they are made from non-renewable 'virgin' material) and they cannot be easily recycled. For example, in Australia only three per cent of plastic bags are recycled and it currently takes 85 times more energy to recycle a bag than to make it.[24]

There is also understandable confusion about the types of plastic that can be recycled. For example, many bags labelled as compostable are only able to be composted in a commercial facility and will not decompose in a compost at home. Similarly, biodegradable and degradable bags cannot be recycled through existing initiatives such as RedCycle. Unfortunately, this means that people who think they are doing the right thing are inadvertently contributing to plastic pollution. These issues have led to some Australian states including Queensland and Western Australia banning compostable plastic bags, which may be considered more 'environmentally friendly'. Victoria has also signalled that its forthcoming plastic bag ban will include compostable plastic shopping bags.

ON AVERAGE ONLY

OF THE PLASTICS USED GLOBALLY ARE ACTUALLY RECYCLED

PLASTIC ENDS UP IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

There are unprecedented levels of plastic in our environment.

Plastic is estimated to make up about 80 per cent of marine litter.[25] The United Nations reports that at least eight million tonnes (eight times the ACT's annual waste)[26] of plastic leaks into the ocean each year.[27] This pollution adds to the plastic that has been accumulating in our environment since the 1950s.

Plastic is also appearing in our food chain. Microplastics have been found in table salt and in tap and bottled water around the world.[28] Researchers have recently found plastic in human stool and they estimate that over 50 per cent of the world's population may be ingesting microplastics.[29] The associated health implications of this finding are not yet well understood.

Plastic pollution is also an issue for the ACT's local terrestrial and riverine environments as single-use plastics have been found in Canberra's waterways. The United Nations advises that taking action now to prevent plastic pollution is more cost effective than the future clean up.[30]

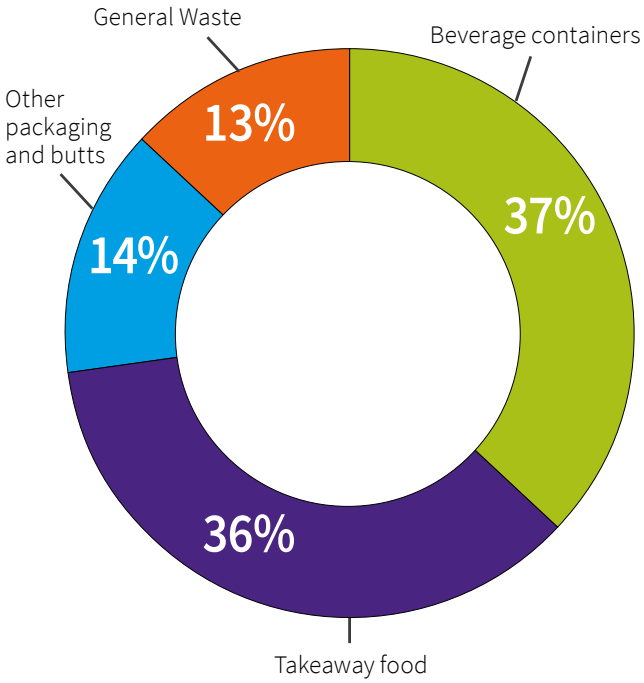
In Australia, the most littered plastic items are:[31]

1. Cigarette butts and packaging
2. Takeaway food & beverage (e.g. straws, cutlery, wrappers, takeaway cups)
3. Beverage containers
4. Other plastic
5. Plastic bags.

This list is broadly consistent with commonly littered single-use plastic items internationally and across Canberra.[32]

In the ACT, the Keep Australia Beautiful 2017-18 litter survey found that although there had been an 11.3 per cent reduction in litter levels by quantity over the preceding 12 months, there has been a 21.3 per cent increase in the level of plastic litter. This means that while there is less litter in our local environment, a greater proportion of that litter is plastic.[33]

Figure 1: ACT Litter Stream, ACT Government 2018.



Single-use plastics transform valuable non-renewable resources into landfill or environmental litter. The current life-cycle of plastic means that no matter how good we are at recycling, the only way to reduce the impact of single-use plastic is to avoid using it in the first place.

PLASTIC HAS AN ECONOMIC VALUE

Plastic has an economic value and that value is lost when it is thrown away. This value represents an opportunity for Australian industry and business to create innovative products and local jobs.

Working out how this value can be reintroduced into our economy requires a cultural shift from thinking about our used plastic as a waste product, to instead treating it as a valuable resource.

MOVING TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The ACT is committed to reducing waste and recovering resources to achieve a sustainable, carbon-neutral Canberra.[34]

As a community we know wasteful consumption of our resources is not sustainable. Worldwide, conserving our limited resources is being considered through the lens of a 'circular economy'.

A circular economy is an economic system that aims to minimise waste and keep resources in use for as long as possible. The 2018 Australian National Waste Policy explains that:

'A circular economy retains the value of materials in the economy for as long as possible, reducing the unsustainable depletion of natural resources and impacts on the environment. A circular economy has economic benefits, creating new industries, markets and products, and leading to new revenue streams and creation of jobs.'[35]

The first step to achieving a circular plastic economy is to design waste out of the system by eliminating problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic and focusing efforts on ensuring most plastic packaging is 100 per cent reusable, recyclable, or compostable.[36] Through being smart about how we capture and reuse the plastic we already have, we can do this while mitigating costs to the community, business and government.

While a move towards a circular economy won't happen overnight, the ACT Government is committed to exploring options with industry, business and the ACT community to encourage such a shift.

Research suggests that by addressing economic externalities, reducing the amount of plastic waste we send to landfill and reusing the materials we already have is good for our economy.

Figure 2: Circular Economy, © European Union, 2018 (Source: European Parliament).

The Canberra-based consultancy, the Centre for International Economics found that improving how we manage waste has broad benefits to the Australian economy. It has calculated that a hypothetical five per cent improvement in efficient use of materials across the Australian economy could benefit Australia's GDP by as much as $24 billion.[37]

Further analysis is required to determine the benefits to the ACT's economy.

EXISTING POLICY CONTEXT IN THE ACT

The ACT Government's approach to waste management is outlined in the 2011 ACT Waste Management Strategy.[38] Developed in consultation with the public, it outlines several objectives, including; working to reduce the amount of waste we produce here in the ACT, and a shift to waste being viewed as a resource, rather than rubbish for landfill.

The cornerstone to effective waste management is the waste management hierarchy, which classifies waste management strategies according to their order of importance and aims to extract the maximum practical benefits from products while generating the minimum amount of waste. It does this by:

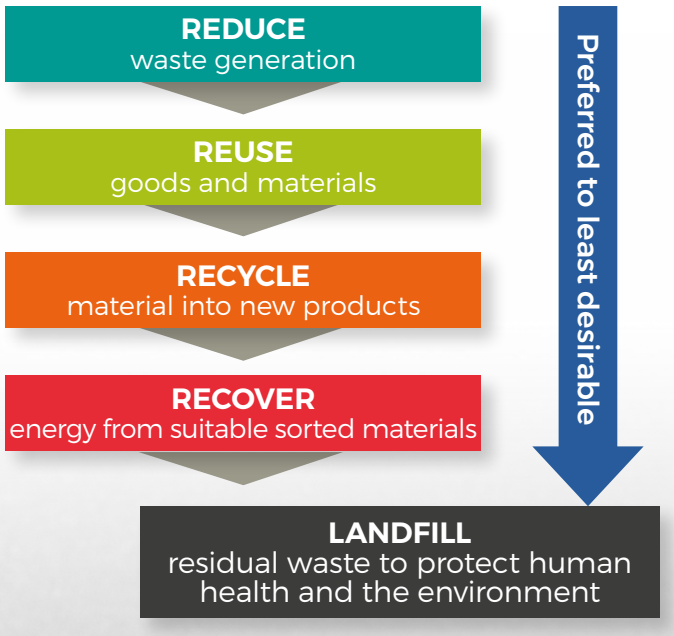
> avoiding products becoming waste (reduce and reuse)

> finding an alternative use for waste (recycle and recover) and

> ensuring safe and appropriate disposal as a last resort.

The ACT's waste management hierarchy is consistent with, and supports the principles of, a circular economy.

Figure 3: Waste Management Hierarchy, ACT Government 2011.



ACT INITIATIVES

PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG BAN

In 2011 the ACT ban on the supply of single-use plastic shopping bags with a thickness of less than 35 microns took effect. The current ban does not regulate biodegradable and compostable bags, produce bags (e.g. bags used to separate fruit, vegetables and meat products), or bags that are an integral part of a product's packaging. The plastic bag ban has been reviewed three times since its introduction. The first two reviews were conducted by ACT Government in 2012[39] and 2014.[40] The most recent review was independent and undertaken in 2018 by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.[41] More information about the 2018 independent review is provided on the following page.

All three reviews have concluded that the ban has been successful in reducing the amount of plastic bag waste in the ACT.

2018 INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE ACT PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG BAN

In 2017, the ACT Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability commissioned an independent review to investigate the efficacy of the *Plastic Shopping Bags Ban Act 2010* and make recommendations about how the ban could be improved.

The ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment conducted the review and the Commissioner's report *Unfantastic Plastic – Review of the ACT Plastic Shopping Bag Ban* was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly in September 2018.

In summary, the review found that the ban has resulted in a significant reduction in net plastic bag consumption in the ACT. However, the review also found that while the ban has reduced plastic use in the Territory, as time passes consumption is likely to result in plastic bag use surpassing pre-ban levels unless further policy measures are introduced.

To improve the operation of the plastic bag ban, the Commissioner made four recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Introduce a mandatory plastic bag disclosure scheme

The ACT Government establish a mandatory plastic bag disclosure regime, which would require those retailers who sell or distribute plastic bags in the Territory to report annually on bag sales and distribution.

Recommendation 2: Introduce minimum plastic bag pricing

The ACT Government should introduce a mandatory minimum price on plastic bags and consider applying this equally to biodegradable and compostable bags.

Recommendation 3: Improve government's governance on plastic bag regulation

The ACT Government review and confirm the optimal division of responsibilities between government agencies for the regulation of plastic bags in the ACT.

Recommendation 4: Research synergies for compostable plastic and the proposed household organic collection scheme

The ACT Government research synergies for introducing compostable plastic, primarily into packaging of organics, to supplement the proposed ACT household organic collection scheme.

The ACT Government is carefully considering the Commissioner's recommendations and is committed to ensuring any future action on plastic bags is considered holistically as part of our broader waste management practice in the Territory.

If agreed, adopting the Commissioner's recommendations will require legislative change. Before committing to legislative change, the ACT Government wants to hear from industry, business and the community to ensure any future action considers single-use plastic more broadly and is right for the Territory.

You can access the Commissioner's report at: www.envcomm.act.gov.au

PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS AND INITIATIVES

The ACT Government has run education campaigns to build awareness of waste issues in the community, including:

- **Education and outreach:** NoWaste delivers education and outreach programs and engages directly with over 4000 community members each year. Online education material includes factsheets and the 'Recyclopaedia' which explains what can be recycled.
- **'Straws Suck' campaign:** In June 2018, the ACT Government launched a public education campaign to raise awareness of the impact of, and alternatives to, single-use plastic straws. In response, a number of local businesses have pledged to reduce the number of single-use plastic straws they provide and customers have been encouraged to refuse single-use plastic straws.
- **Plastic free events:** The ACT Government is committed to reducing the amount of plastic at its events, working with suppliers and service providers to explore additional ways to further reduce single-use plastic. In 2020, the ACT Government has committed to hosting its first plastic free event.

REDUCING THE IMPACT OF PLASTIC: WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE WORLD?

Global community concern about the impact of single-use plastic has been informed by international initiatives like World Environment Day,[42] ocean clean-up campaigns, and documentaries like the BBC's Blue Planet II,[43] which showed in detail the impact of plastic on our marine environment.

In Australia, local issues have been highlighted through Keep Australia Beautiful's annual litter index and television shows like the ABC's 'War on Waste'[44] and the Four Corner's exposé 'Trashed'.[45]

This concern has resulted in community pressure for governments and companies, both internationally and in Australia, to do more.

GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 2015, members of the United Nations, including Australia, adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals to provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity.[46]

Each goal outlines specific targets to be achieved by 2030. Sustainable Development Goal 12 focuses on responsible consumption and production patterns. Relevant targets for single-use plastic include, but are not limited to: the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources; and reduced waste generation.

Other Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to improved resource recovery and waste management (e.g. Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water).

NEW PLASTICS ECONOMY GLOBAL COMMITMENT

The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment unites businesses, governments and other organisations behind a common vision to address plastic waste and pollution at its source.

Launched in October 2018, the Commitment has already united more than 350 organisations, working together to ensure that plastics never become waste – keeping them in the economy and out of the ocean, in a 'race to the top' to create a circular economy for plastic. The signatories currently represent over 20 per cent of all packaging produced globally.

The Global Commitment and its vision for a circular economy for plastic are supported by the World Wide Fund for Nature, and have been endorsed by the World Economic Forum, The Consumer Goods Forum (a CEO-led organisation representing some 400 retailers and manufacturers from 70 countries), and 40 universities, institutions and academics. More than 15 financial institutions with in excess of USD$2.5 trillion in assets under management have also endorsed the Global Commitment, and over USD$200 million has been pledged by five venture capital funds to create a circular economy for plastic.

These companies, governments and institutions have committed to work towards 100 per cent reusable, recyclable, or compostable plastic packaging by 2025.

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

Following pressure from their citizens, countries are taking action on single-use plastic pollution. While the specific approaches used vary from country to country, there are similarities in the suite of policy and legislative measures that have been demonstrated to successfully affect change.

Some recent examples illustrating the range of possible approaches are provided below.

Figure 4: Government approaches to reduce plastic waste around the world (data compiled from various sources).

1. CANADA

2018: introduced a regulatory ban on single-use bags of 50 microns or less. Some Canadian provinces incentivise recycling by collecting it for free and charging a fee for the collection of each garbage bag.

2. WASHINGTON DC, USA

2016: regulatory ban on disposable food containers made from expanded polystyrene and non-recyclable/ compostable material.

2018: introduced regulatory ban on single-use plastic straws and stirrers (takes effect mid-2019).

3. U.K.

2018: introduced regulatory ban on microbeads, cotton buds (Scotland only) and plastic straws, in addition to introducing a tax on single-use plastic bags.

4. EUROPEAN UNION

2016: France introduced a regulatory ban on single-use plastic shopping bags. In 2017 the ban was expanded to include produce barrier bags.

2018: EU adopted the first-ever European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy. The strategy aims to eliminate plastic pollution and change the way plastic is produced and consumed in the EU. Member states will have flexibility in how targets are met.

2019: EU Parliament approved a new law banning single-use plastic by 2021.

Specific items the EU intends to ban include straws, plastic plates and cutlery, plastic balloon sticks, plastic cotton bud sticks, takeaway food containers and polystyrene cups.

5. INDIA

2018: announced a commitment to eliminate the use of all single-use plastic by 2020.

6. NEW ZEALAND

2018: regulatory ban on single-use plastic bags (with handles) up to 70 microns. This includes biodegradable and compostable bags (takes effect mid-2019).

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

In Australia, the push for change on single-use plastic is gathering momentum.

For example, the South Australian Government recently undertook consultation on the impact of single-use plastics, with phase-outs of certain single-use plastic products floated as a future option.[47] Hobart City Council recently voted in favour of a by-law that would restrict the use of single-use plastic takeaway packaging including cutlery, straws, sauce sachets, plastic lined coffee cups and lids, and plastic takeaway hot food containers and lids.[48]

NATIONAL WASTE POLICY

In 2018 all Australian Governments agreed to the National Waste Policy. The policy aims to promote a circular economy, making a shift away from 'take, make, use and dispose', to a more sustainable approach where the value of resources is maintained for as long as possible.

One of the key principles in the strategy is to avoid the creation of waste by prioritising waste avoidance and encouraging efficient use, reuse and repair.[49] Strategy 10 of the National Waste Policy specifically targets plastics and packaging and aims to *'reduce the impacts of plastic and packaging on the environment and oceans, reduce plastic pollution, and maximise benefit to the economy and society.'*[50]

SENATE INQUIRY INTO WASTE AND RECYCLING

Established in mid-2017 the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Inquiry into waste and recycling considered issues relating to landfill, markets for recycled waste and the role of the Australian Government in providing a coherent approach to managing solid waste.[51]

Released in 2018, the inquiry's report *'Never waste a crisis: the waste and recycling industry in Australia'* made several recommendations aimed at reducing waste, including single-use plastics. Recommendations include that the Australian Government prioritise the establishment of a circular economy for plastic,[52] and that Australian and state and territory governments agree to a phase out of petroleum-based single-use plastics by 2023.[53]

NATIONAL PACKAGING TARGETS

In April 2018, Commonwealth, state and territory environment ministers committed to reducing the amount of waste generated and to making it easier for products to be recycled.

Through a joint statement, ministers endorsed a target of 100 per cent of Australian packaging being recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025 or earlier and committed to working with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, representing over 900 leading companies, to deliver this target.[54]

In September 2018, the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation Board announced the following National Packaging Targets to be achieved by 2025:

APCO 2025 TARGETS

- **100%** of packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable
- **70%** of plastic packaging will be recycled or composted
- **30%** average recycled content will be included across all packaging and
- Problematic and unnecessary single use plastics packaging will be phased out through redesign, innovation or alternative delivery methods.[55]

These ambitious National Packaging Targets are significant and will require the support of industry, business, government and individuals to succeed.

THE TIME IS RIGHT TO DO MORE

The world's reliance on plastic is complex and there will need to be changes to affect the kind of global change we need in the longer term.

However, the recent review of the plastic bag ban has demonstrated that change is possible and that the changes we make as a local community in the ACT can make a difference.

We know that industry and business are an important part of addressing this complex issue. We also know that a large proportion of Canberrans support existing ACT policies to reduce our plastic consumption and 64 per cent of surveyed people want us to do more.[56] As a Territory we have an opportunity to build on this momentum and continue to reduce our own waste and protect our local environment.

To start the conversation, we have made some suggestions about the type of single-use plastic that could be targeted for action and have outlined some of the approaches that could be used to make change. The approaches outlined in this paper aren't exhaustive and we expect industry, business and the community will have ideas that can contribute to solving this problem.

1 *Do you agree with the consumer single-use plastic items listed below being considered as part of this paper? If so, which items do you think are the most important to address?*

WHICH ITEMS SHOULD WE FOCUS ON?

There are numerous problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics that we could act on. Possible items to be included and excluded from consideration are:


✔ Plastic straws and stirrers


✔ Plastic cutlery


✔ Disposable plastic plates and cups


✔ Disposable plastic-lined coffee cups and lids


✔ Polystyrene (foam) plastic food containers and beverage cups


✔ Light-weight fruit and vegetable bags

? Other non-recyclable plastics


✖ Microbeads (already being phased out)


✖ Plastic beverage containers


✖ Other plastic packaging (e.g. food packaging, consumer goods)


✖ Sanitary items


✖ Nappies and incontinence products


✖ Reusable plastic bags above 35 microns in thickness, including 'green bags', 'biodegradable' and 'compostable' bags


✖ Health related sterile items (e.g. syringes)


✖ Cotton buds

A PHASE-OUT APPROACH TO FURTHER REDUCING THE IMPACT OF PLASTIC IN THE ACT

The ACT Government actively looks for opportunities to show leadership on social and environmental issues and plays an important role in creating an environment where businesses and individuals are motivated and supported to reduce plastic waste.

As a community we have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership on the important issue of single-use plastic consumption and effect real change; for ourselves and future generations. We can do this in several ways, including by influencing change on a national level and by implementing local changes here in the ACT.

The first step could be to stage our response so that the most problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics are managed first, while focusing on products where there are readily available alternatives to plastic (e.g. cutlery). Through a phased approach, we can focus on achieving the best outcome while minimising impacts to business and the community, allowing our effort and resources to be targeted where they will make the most difference.

The phase-out approach may be different depending on each type of single-use plastic and the availability of alternatives.

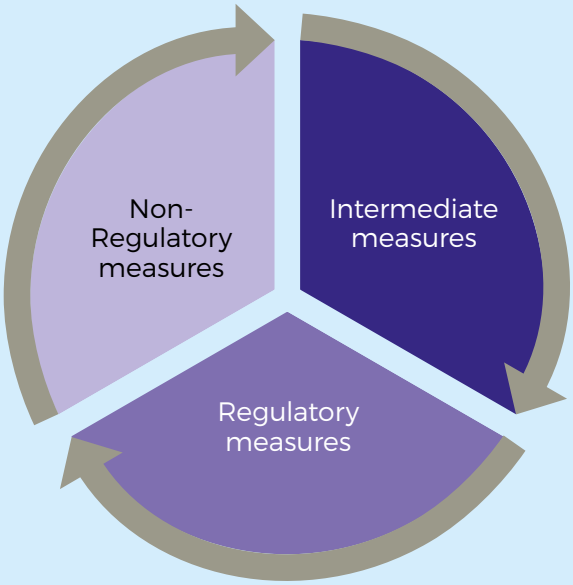
The ACT Government has a suite of approaches it can use to influence a reduction in plastic waste that include non-regulatory measures, intermediate and regulatory measures. A combination of approaches may be necessary to effect the greatest change.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of any decision to reduce plastic waste and the impacts it may have. In considering what change may be appropriate for the ACT, each approach must be carefully considered to reduce the chance of unintended consequences and to minimise impacts to industry, business and the community.

Non-regulatory approaches

The ACT Government is committed to engaging with governments, industry, business and environment groups to continue to influence national change.

Figure 5: Potential measures to address single-use plastic waste



To progress the national discussion and bring about change, the ACT Government is working with its state and national counterparts to drive an ambitious, harmonised national approach, and is engaging with other Australian environment ministers to realise the potential of the Australian Government's 2018 National Waste Policy. The ACT Government also participates in state-based initiatives and is a member of the Queensland-led inter-jurisdictional working group, which is working with retailers to introduce a voluntary phase-out of heavy weight, single-use, boutique plastic bags.

As with other jurisdictions, the ACT Government works closely with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation to explore ways to achieve National Packaging Targets. This includes working with local businesses that may have specific obligations under the Australian Packaging Covenant.

To support Canberrans, the ACT Government delivers ongoing education about reducing, reusing and recycling resources. There are several government programs aimed at raising public awareness about sustainability, waste reduction and recycling through the Actsmart sustainability programs for events, schools, businesses and households. Transport Canberra and City Services runs the Recycling Discovery Hub at the Materials Recycling Facility in Hume, where residents can visit to find out more about recycling and waste management in the ACT.

Intermediate measures

The ACT Government can support innovative approaches to reducing waste through government partnerships and procurement processes. Through leading by example, the ACT Government can demonstrate to businesses and individuals how they can reduce, reuse and recycle soft plastic and other materials.

To explore opportunities across ACT Government Directorates, the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate has formed an internal Soft Plastics Working Group. Recent initiatives include trialling the recycled asphalt in the ACT's 2018-19 road resurfacing program. This innovative product is composed of recycled glass and soft plastics; each tonne uses 300 kilograms of recycled asphalt and redirects the equivalent of 800 plastic bags, 252 glass bottles and 18 used printer toner cartridges away from landfill.[57]

Regulatory approaches

Finally, ACT Government can drive local change by introducing effective policy and legislation.

Options for regulatory change in the Territory could include introducing new legislation to phase out the use of other types of single-use plastic.

2 *What regulatory or other approaches do you support to address consumer single-use plastic in the ACT? When do you think action is needed, and why?*

WHAT CAN BUSINESS DO?

Business is a critical part of tackling the issue of single-use plastic. The ACT Government wants to hear businesses' ideas and concerns about the issues outlined in this paper. This includes retailers, food service and packaging manufacturers/suppliers.

In response to consumer concern, many of the companies responsible for the majority of plastic found in our environment have voluntarily committed to making their packaging 100 per cent recyclable by 2025.[58]

Large Australian retailers have also made voluntary commitments to take action on single-use plastic. For example, Woolworths and Coles have committed to a nationwide ban on lightweight single-use plastic bags, including in NSW where there is no regulatory requirement to do so. They have also committed to reducing unnecessary packaging throughout the supply chain, including on fruit and vegetables.[59]

There are other initiatives that business is able to support to reduce plastic waste. Over 50 Canberra cafes have registered for the Responsible Café initiative. It is estimated that through promoting the use of reusable cups, each participating cafe saves about 35 cups from landfill each day. Across Australia this equates to almost 61 million disposable cups each year.

Recent research indicates that once 25 per cent of a population commit to change, large scale social change occurs.[60] What this means is, once enough people start to bring a reusable coffee cup each time they visit a café, this behaviour becomes the new social norm. Business plays a fundamental role in influencing and facilitating their patrons to effect this change.

3 *If you are an ACT based manufacturer, importer or retailer of consumer single-use plastic products, what cost and other impacts do you think need to be considered as part of this discussion?*

4 *If you are a local business that sells, offers or provides consumer single-use plastic in the ACT, what do you think needs to be considered as part of this discussion?*

WHAT CAN WE AS A COMMUNITY DO?

All Canberrans can play a role in reducing our waste. For example, we can each choose to:

- avoid purchasing products with unnecessary packaging
- participate in community initiatives like plastic free July. www.plasticfreejuly.org
- repair and reuse items instead of throwing them away
- purchase multi-use products that will last a long time instead of single-use products that will be disposed of quickly
- improve our recycling habits by sorting our waste properly, including through the Container Deposit Scheme, and
- use products that are recyclable and include recycled content.[61]

Community campaigns that provide information about how to create change and influence others in the community to improve their habits. For example, the not-for-profit organisation 'Good for the Hood' provides resources for individuals to engage with their local communities to reduce waste and improve their local environment.[62]

5 *Have you taken steps to reduce your use of single-use plastic? If so, what have you done?*

6 *What alternatives to single-use plastics have you used and are they practical?*

7 *What members of our community may be impacted by phasing out single-use plastics and how? What are the solutions?*

8 *What else do you think needs to be considered as part of this discussion?*

CASE STUDY: PLASTIC FREE PLACES

> The Plastic Free Places program (developed by the Boomerang Alliance a national not-for-profit organisation formed in 2003 with the aim of a zero waste society) is a community-driven, systematic approach to addressing disposable plastic litter and use, with a focus on long-lasting solutions.

> The program works to reduce the amount of single-use plastic packaging within specific communities.

> This is achieved by engaging directly with businesses, especially food retailers, seeding lasting changes towards supporting a circular economy.

> At the end of 2018, Plastic Free Noosa had eliminated more than 1.5 million single-use plastic items in just 11 months, from member cafes and restaurants alone.

> The Program currently operates in several other communities including:

- Wollongong (Plastic Free Wollongong)
- Byron Bay (Plastic Free Byron/Make The Switch).

BENEFITS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In order to reduce waste and improve environmental outcomes we need to change our habits. As individuals this can be challenging, but a shift in behaviour represents an opportunity to think differently about how we can live more sustainably.

IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

Reducing our consumption of plastic will reduce our use of non-renewable resources and our greenhouse gas emissions. By eliminating plastic in the design process there will be less single-use plastic that ends up in the waste and litter streams. Both of these benefits are expected to result in better environmental outcomes and reduced cost to government, industry and the community.

POTENTIAL SAVINGS FOR EXISTING BUSINESSES

Some businesses may potentially save money as a result of not providing 'free' single-use plastic products. However, there may be an increase in costs if businesses provide more expensive non-plastic single-use products as an alternative. It is acknowledged that the likely impact to businesses will depend on individual business models and the products they provided. If the community supports a move to reducing single-use plastic, innovative businesses should be well placed to attract patronage.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW BUSINESS

Any change to our consumption of single-use plastic will have impacts for the industry that produces single-use products. However, this change provides an opportunity for existing business to change and new business to emerge to meet demand. The Australian company KeepCup[63] is an example of how innovative business can be successful while contributing to solving our issue with plastic.

ALTERNATIVES

Any decision to take action on single-use plastic items will need to be informed by robust information on the environmental and economic impacts of alternative products. A commonly used approach is to undertake a life cycle assessment (also referred to as a cradle-to-grave analysis) which considers the impacts associated with all the stages of a product's life (i.e. from raw material extraction all the way through to its use and eventual disposal). This approach aims to ensure that one type of item is not replaced by an equally problematic item which then requires corrective action in the future.

SOCIAL EQUITY ISSUES

Transitioning away from single-use plastics presents a challenge for some members of the community, and their needs must be considered carefully. While phasing out single-use plastics is likely to have a range of benefits, it may also have significant consequences – particularly for some parts of the community and business. Any decision to phase out single-use plastic products might be more challenging and expensive for smaller businesses:

- Passing on increased packaging costs may result in reduced access to a business and its services or products by vulnerable members of the community
- Some people need access to single-use plastics for a range of reasons, and may find their ability to join in community activities is constrained
- Some business models, such as mobile food vans, are entirely reliant on single use plastics.

#SUCKITABLEISM – STRAW BANS AND THEIR IMPACT ON PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

The #SuckItAbleism campaign is a response by people with a disability and their advocates to raise awareness about the impact of banning single-use plastic straws on people with a disability.

The twitter campaign has particularly highlighted the poor attributes of plastic straw alternatives available which do not meet the needs of people with a disability including sustainable paper, metal and bamboo straws.

LOOKING CLOSER AT THE ALTERNATIVES – REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

All Australian jurisdictions, with the exception of NSW, have proposed or implemented a regulatory ban on single-use plastic bags. In response to public pressure major supermarket retailers have introduced a voluntary nationwide ban on plastic bags.

Other alternative bags need to be carefully considered. For example, according to a study undertaken in 2018 by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, polypropylene bags most of the green bags found at supermarkets should be used 37 times and cotton bags should be used 7100 times before being discarded.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

To inform any future policies and to support decision making, the ACT Government wants to hear your ideas. ACT Government looks forward to receiving your feedback on how you think we can best reduce our plastic waste and improve environmental outcomes.

Comments may be made:

- online at www.yoursay.act.gov.au
- by email to ACTwastepolicy@act.gov.au
- by mail to Waste Policy, Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate,
  PO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

This consultation will include written submissions, surveys, and face-to-face sessions. Following consultation, the ACT Government will consider next steps including further, targeted consultation as appropriate.

Privacy

Before making a submission to this discussion paper, please review the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate's privacy policy and annex at www.tccs.act.gov.au/tams_files/privacy.

Any personal information received in the course of your submission will be used only for the purposes of this community engagement process. Names of organisations may be included in any subsequent consultation report, but all individuals will be de-identified unless prior approval is gained.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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