

Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into the Environment Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags, Packaging and Microbeads) Bill 2016

Government response

The Andrews Labor Government thanks committee members for their report into the Environment Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags, Packaging and Microbeads) Bill 2016. The government also acknowledges the important contributions made by the stakeholders who participated in the Inquiry.

Recommendation 3

The government undertake a formal assessment of the impact of the Bill on communities, families, individuals, businesses and the environment.

Government response: Not support

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to protecting our environment, including improving how we manage plastic waste. The government has considered the Bill in question, and as indicated when the Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council on 18 October 2017, does not support it.

Reasons for this include that it is broader in scope than bag bans in other jurisdictions, and businesses have emphasised to us the importance of national consistency. It has unreasonably short implementation timelines and would unnecessarily increase the reporting burden for government and industry.

Rather than assess the specific impacts of the Bill as proposed in Recommendation 3, we are taking action that will reduce plastic pollution in the environment.

In October 2017, the Premier announced our commitment to banning single-use, lightweight plastic shopping bags in Victoria. The announcement was followed by a three-month consultation on a discussion paper, seeking the views of the Victorian community on how we can design a ban that is effective and lasting.

During the consultation we also gathered views and evidence on the most effective and appropriate approaches to reduce the environmental impacts of other types of plastic pollution. This includes food and beverage packaging, cigarette butts and microplastics.

We received over 8,000 submissions during the consultation, with more than 96 per cent of submissions supporting a ban. Through this process, we gained a better understanding of how the design of our ban could impact Victorian communities, families, individuals, businesses and the environment.

Importantly, retailers told us that there needs to be a transition period to help consumers adapt to the changes and for retailers to deplete current stocks of single-use plastic bags. They also highlighted the need for consistency across Australia to successfully introduce a ban. We also heard that an extensive education campaign is required for retailers and the community to support the transition away from plastic shopping bags and to make the ban as effective as possible.

We have listened to the feedback and have designed a ban that will be effective and lasting. The ban will be consistent with other states and territories where possible to help individuals and organisations in adapting to the changes. Where there are differences, we will ensure we achieve the best outcomes for the Victorian community and our environment. As we work to legislate our plastic bag ban, we will undertake a Legislative Impact Assessment to ensure that the economic and social impacts of the ban are understood and minimised.

Our ban will be in place from late 2019 to ensure retailers and consumers have enough time to adapt to the changes. We will also take early action to support retailers and their customers to move away from single-use plastic bags to reusable bags so that it's common practice before the formal ban starts.

The Andrews Labor Government is working with other states, the Commonwealth, and retail associations on a national voluntary phase-out of thick plastic bags. This will complement Victoria's single-use lightweight plastic bag ban. We will monitor the use of thick plastic bags to ensure plastic pollution continues to decrease. We will also consider designing the ban so that thicker plastic bags can be included in the future if voluntary action isn't effective.

We are working with other jurisdictions to phase out microbeads in Australia. The phase-out is progressing well, and we will keep working to ensure a full national phase-out of microbeads is achieved. Further, we will seek strong national action on other types of microplastics, such as microfibres.

Over the next 12 months, we will develop a Victorian plastic pollution action plan to prioritise the most effective actions to reduce other types of plastic pollution. We will also establish a reference group made up of government, industry, community and environmental representatives to help inform this plan, while continuing to draw on the feedback received during the consultation.

By genuinely engaging with the Victorian community and working cooperatively with other Australian jurisdictions, we are developing a sustainable approach to managing plastic pollution and ensuring the protection of Victoria's natural environment.