

Comments on the DWER Discussion Paper 'Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia'

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This submission provides comments in support of Option 2: A state-wide ban on the sale or supply of lightweight single use shopping bags. As a marine scientist, I see the impacts plastics have on our precious marine environments, particularly single-use plastic bags. I support a state-wide ban on the sale or supply of lightweight single use shopping bags. The proposed new regulations are a positive **first** step towards addressing plastic pollution, and I commend the government for taking this action.

I think the ban could go a few steps further and regulations be widened to include biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags, other types of plastic bags and other types of plastic waste.

Biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags

The new regulations should include biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags. These types of bags do not break down rapidly into organic matter and remain a significant source of terrestrial and marine pollution. Inclusion of biodegradable and degradable bags would be consistent with the recent Queensland Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017. With appropriate consumer education, inclusion of these types of bags would likely be acceptable to WA consumers. 85% of respondents to the recent consumer survey (n=400) supported the inclusion of degradable and degradable and compostable bags after the provision of information¹.

Other types of plastic bags

The new regulations are limited to "lightweight single-use plastic bags with handles provided by retailers that have a thickness of 35 microns or less". While this is consistent with regulations in other states and territories and targets the most commonly distributed plastic bags², the scope should be widened. The regulations would be more effective at addressing plastic pollution if they extended beyond 'bags with handles' and 'thickness of 35 microns or less'. Other types of bags should be included such as produce bags and thicker department store bags. If all WA consumers are to use re-usable alternatives, we can also use alternatives to other types of plastic bags.

Other types of plastic waste

The government, businesses and communities must work together to address other significant sources of plastic pollution. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has identified several types of plastic objects that have a significant impact on marine life including buoys/traps/pots, monofilament fishing line, fishing nets, plastic utensils, balloons, caps, food packaging, takeaway containers, beverage bottles, straws, cups and plates³. Alternatives for many of these objects are readily available. It would be prudent to consider how these plastic objects could be incorporated into the new regulations and accompanying community education campaigns. In addition, micro-plastics (< 5mm) pose a significant threat to marine life⁴ and should be considered for regulatory attention in WA as they are in other jurisdictions⁵.

1. Ashton-Graham, C. Survey Report: Western Australian Households Views on Plastic Waste. (Boomerang Alliance, 2017).

2. Clean Up Australia. Report on actions to reduce circulation of single-use plastic bags around the world. (2010).

3. UNEP. Marine Plastic Debris & Microplastics - Global Lessons and Research to Inspire Action and Guide Policy Change. (2016).

4. Germanov, E. S., Marshall, A. D., Bejder, L., Fossi, M. C. & Loneragan, N. R. Microplastics: No Small Problem for Filter-Feeding Megafauna. *Trends Ecol. Evol.* (2018). doi:10.1016/j.tree.2018.01.005

5. DEFRA UK. World-leading microbeads ban takes effect. (2018). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-leading-microbeads-ban-takes-effect>. (Accessed: 18th February 2018)