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Mandatory phase out of single-use plastic bags confirmed



HON EUGENIE SAGE(/MINISTER/HON-EUGENIE-SAGE)

Environment (/portfolio/labour-led-government-2017-2020/environment)

- Six month phase-out period
- Applies to all plastic shopping bags under 70 microns
- All retailers to comply

Associate Minister for the Environment, Eugenie Sage today confirmed the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags in New Zealand, to come into effect around the middle of next year.

This announcement follows a five week public consultation process, where 92 per cent of submitters supported the proposed mandatory phase out.

“The clear majority of people who responded to the consultation supported a nationwide phase out of single-use plastic bags, and many called on the Government to act quickly to make this change,” said Eugenie Sage.

“Government has carefully considered the full range of views put forward, and it’s now time to take action as a step towards addressing plastic pollution.

“Single-use plastic bags often end up polluting our precious coastal and marine environments and cause serious harm to marine mammals, sea-birds and other marine life.

“Many retailers and individuals have already stopped using single-use plastic bags and recent research shows 50 per cent of New Zealanders now say they always bring reusable bags when shopping.

“This change will be difficult for some people, and I acknowledge the impact on retailers, as well as local manufacturers and importers of plastic bags. For this reason, and to meet World Trade Organisation requirements, the phase out will have a six month implementation period, despite calls for a shorter timeframe.

“Plastic waste is polluting our land, lakes and rivers, sea coast and oceans. Single-use plastic is a big part of the problem, with plastic bags among the most common items found in beach clean-ups in New Zealand.

“We must take action, and this Government’s decision to phase out single-use plastic shopping bags is the first step. This will apply to all retailers.

“We are including bags under 70 microns, with the exception of lightweight bags made of synthetic fabric and designed for multiple use over a long life. Degradable plastic bags will also be included, which covers oxo-degradable, biodegradable and compostable plastic bags.

“New Zealand recently signed up to the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment – a global pledge to address the root causes of plastic pollution.

“I have also set out a work programme to tackle our wider waste issues, which includes expanding the waste disposal levy to all landfills, improving our national data on waste and resource recovery, investing more strategically in infrastructure and innovation to support resource recovery, and developing a national circular economy strategy to design waste out of the system,” Eugenie Sage said.

Submissions and a summary of submissions from the public consultation can be found here.
(<http://www.mfe.govt.nz/node/24592>)

The exact date for the ban to come into effect will be known once regulations are considered by Cabinet in December.



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