

Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment

# Reduction in Plastic Retail Bag Use

## Discussion Guide

# Introduction

There is increased pressure and efforts globally to reduce the amount of plastics entering the environment. Members of the public have engaged the provincial government in this conversation because they believe government plays an integral role, and that a starting point for action is reducing the use of plastic retail bags. In response, the province is considering a distribution ban on plastic retail bags, meaning they will no longer be available at a checkout.

To make an informed decision, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment is seeking your opinion on whether a ban is the best approach to reduce plastic retail bags; and the factors to consider if a ban is implemented. Along with stakeholder consultations, this questionnaire is an essential element in ensuring any change meets the needs of businesses and residents in the province.

This questionnaire provides a brief overview of the issue and each section includes specific questions and spaces for a response. There is also an opportunity to indicate any additional feedback at the end. For purposes of this questionnaire, plastic retail bags refer to checkout bags provided to transport items purchased or received at a business and excludes bags used for dry cleaning; pharmaceutical purchases; in-store bulk items such as fruit, candy and nuts; loose hardware items such as nails; and meat.

It should take around 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

**Written submissions will be accepted until March 27, 2019.**

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The collection of information is under the authority of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015, for the purpose of collecting public feedback on how to reduce plastic retail bags. All feedback will be considered as officials prepare recommendations. Any personal information that may be received will be governed in accordance with the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015 and will only be used for the purpose of informing this project.

If you have questions about how this information will be collected, used, or disclosed, please email [plasticbagconsultations@gov.nl.ca](mailto:plasticbagconsultations@gov.nl.ca) or call (709) 729-4147.

## Background

Plastics are low cost, durable materials used daily by most residents, providing significant benefits to the economy and quality of life. They can reduce the energy and emissions needed to transport goods, prolong the life of perishable items, and provide durable materials for use in construction, textile, and other sectors. However, some of the characteristics that make plastics so valuable also create major challenges for their end-of-life management. The variability, durability, and low cost of plastics, combined with inadequate incentives and infrastructure to recover and recycle them has contributed to an increasing global environmental problem<sup>1</sup>. Over half the amount of plastic products and packaging entering the consumer market are designed to be used once and thrown away.

The durability of plastic means that plastic waste is long lasting in the environment as litter in communities and can degrade into damaging microplastics. When mistaken for food by animals, birds, and marine life it can transfer contaminants throughout the food chain. Addressing global plastic waste is vital for protecting our oceans, lakes, waterways, and wildlife.

The broad category of plastics includes durable goods like fishing nets, automotive and construction plastics, electronics, and textiles, as well as non-durable goods like packaging and disposables. Plastic products, such as shopping bags, straws, utensils, and take-out containers, are items that are intended to be used briefly before they are thrown away (or in some cases, recycled). Because these items are difficult to collect, they are a source of pollution and make up an estimated 43% of marine litter worldwide. In Canada, they make up more than a third of all plastic waste and are among the top twelve most collected items during Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup<sup>1</sup>. In Newfoundland and Labrador, plastic retail bags account for less than 1% of the weight of waste generated annually and 6% of large litter found along roadways<sup>2</sup>.

Recent initiatives aim to shift from the single use plastics economy to a circular one where plastics are reduced, reused, repaired, and recycled to maximize their value. At the 2018 G7 meetings, Canada committed to move toward a sustainable approach to the management of plastics and signed the Ocean Plastics Charter. Building on the Charter, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment released the Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste. As well, the Canadian Plastics Industry Association and the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada have announced that they aim to make 100% of plastic packaging recyclable or divertible by 2030.

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<sup>1</sup> CCME. Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste (November, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Plastic Shopping Bag Management in NL. Status and Options. (February, 2018).

## Profile Questions

I am answering these questions as a:

- Member of the public
- Representative of a business
- Member of an environmental organization
- Member of a community organization
- Member of an industry association or business interest group
- Municipal government official
- Provincial government official
- Regional Service Board
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

I reside in the following region of Newfoundland and Labrador or outside the province:

- Avalon
- Burin Peninsula
- Clarenville – Bonavista
- Gander – New-Wes-Valley
- Grand Falls-Windsor – Baie Verte
- Coast of Bays
- Stephenville – Channel - Port-aux-Basques
- Corner Brook – Rocky Harbour
- St. Anthony – Channel Port-aux-Choix
- Labrador
- Outside the province

Into which of the following age categories do you belong?

- 0-18
- 19-35
- 36-50
- 51-65
- 66+

Is reducing waste important to you?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

When I shop, I most often take items from the retailer using a (select one answer):

- Plastic retail bag
- Reusable bag
- Paper bag
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Do you reuse the plastic retail bags that you receive from retailers?

- Yes, all of the time
- Yes, most of the time
- Yes, sometimes
- No, I throw them out
- No, but I recycle them

If yes, what are the ways you reuse plastic retail bags (check all the apply):

- As garbage bucket liners
- To clean up pet waste
- To transport other goods
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you use reusable bags?

- Always
- Regularly
- Seldom
- Never

## Provincial Distribution Ban

Distribution bans aim to eliminate the consumption of plastic retail bags by removing the ability to acquire them. Some municipalities across the country and one province (Prince Edward Island) have implemented a ban. The Province has received requests to implement a distribution ban to reduce the amount of plastic litter in and around communities, and the harm plastic bags can cause to wildlife and marine environments.

A provincial distribution ban on plastic retail bags will result in an increase in the use of alternatives such as reusable and paper bags. Each of these items has their own environmental footprint and specific advantages and disadvantages. For example, in the absence of plastic retail bags, consumers may purchase thicker kitchen catchers for garbage bin liners, which could translate into an increase in overall plastic consumption. Several comparative lifecycle analyses of paper and plastic retail bags have shown that the production of paper bags can consume more energy, the transportation of paper bags can create more emissions, and the disposal of paper bags can take up a larger volume of material in landfills (i.e. paper is bulkier than plastic). However, paper bags are recyclable in existing curbside programs and are not as problematic when littered or mismanaged at end-of-life.

It is important to consider that bans can include fees for alternatives. Some jurisdictions have adopted distribution bans on plastic retail bags with mandated fees on the alternatives to limit their overconsumption (i.e. to avoid a one for one switch from plastic to paper). The point of a fee is to encourage people to maximize their use of paper and reusable bags, and not frequently replace them. The Prince Edward Island plastic retail bag ban coming into effect on July 1, 2019 will have mandated fees of \$0.15 for a paper bag and \$1.00 for a reusable bag, which will increase to \$0.25 for a paper bag and \$2.00 for a reusable bag on January 1, 2020. The province hopes that mandated fees will reduce consumption, and thus the environmental footprint, of the alternatives. Other jurisdictions have opted to ban plastic retail bags allowing retailers to determine what alternatives to offer the consumer and whether to charge fees on the alternatives.

## Questions

Do you agree with a provincial ban on the distribution of plastic retail bags?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If a provincial ban was implemented on plastic retail bags, which alternative would you prefer to use:

- Reusable bag
- Paper bag
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Alternatives, such as paper and reusable bags cost more to supply and have their own environmental impact. If a provincial ban was implemented on plastic retail bags, do you agree that there should be mandated fees to purchase the alternatives and limit their overconsumption (e.g. maximize use of each paper and reusable bag)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What is an effective fee to pay for a paper bag to reduce their overconsumption? Please fill in an amount.

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

What is an effective fee to pay for a reusable bag to reduce their overconsumption? Please fill in an amount.

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If a provincial plastic retail distribution ban was implemented with fees included for alternatives (e.g. paper and reusable bags), who should keep the revenue?

- Retailers
- Provincial Government
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

If you **disagree** with a provincial ban on the distribution of plastic retail bags, why do you disagree (select all that apply)?

- The financial cost of alternatives to plastic retail bags are prohibitive.
- I believe the alternatives to plastic retail bags are more problematic for the environment.
- I reuse plastic retail bags and wish to continue to do so.
- I think consumers and retailers should be able to make a choice for themselves.
- I don't believe the environmental impact of plastic retail bags is significant.
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Options

There are other approaches retailers, municipalities, and special interest groups could adopt to reduce plastic retail bags, such as:

- Retailer implemented fees or incentives to reduce use of plastic retail bags;
- Municipal bylaws to ban plastic retail bags within municipal boundaries;
- Government mandated fees on plastic retail bags; and
- Initiatives to educate the public on waste reduction.

Each of these approaches has specific operational challenges and opportunities for success.

Reduction initiatives could be led by retailers through voluntary initiatives or fees on plastic retail bags. For example, select retailers provide customer incentives for each reusable bag they bring while others charge a fee on plastic retail bags to deter their use.

Some believe that voluntary activities will not have an impact on reducing plastic retail bags and cause customer confusion, while others believe that voluntary initiatives are appropriate. The success of voluntary approaches are linked to the deterrent used (e.g.: fee, ban, or incentive) and how many retailers chose to participate. Similarly, bans of plastic retail bags at a municipal level may create an uneven effort across the province and present challenges for retailers who have operations in multiple communities.

Some jurisdictions have opted to place a mandatory fee on plastic retail bags. Fees charged on the provision of plastic retail bags at the checkout are designed to provide an economic deterrent to their consumption. A fee can be effective in reducing the number of plastic retail bags consumed; however, how the fee is applied and the amount charged can affect success. For example, in 2010, the Northwest Territories adopted legislation to require distributors to collect \$0.25 on plastic retail bags and remit the fees to an Environment Fund to cover the program's administrative costs and support waste reduction programs/initiatives. The fund generates \$400,000-\$600,000 per year and since 2010, has resulted in a 70% reduction in the number of plastic retail bags distributed.

## Questions

If a retailer or the government charged a fee to take a plastic retail bag would you stop using plastic retail bags?

- No
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, all the time

What is an effective fee to pay for a plastic retail bag to reduce use? Please fill in an amount.

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If a retailer or the government charged a fee to take a plastic retail bag, who should keep the revenues?

- Retailers
- Provincial Government
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

In summary, which option would you support and encourage the most to reduce plastic retail bag use (select only one)?

- Increased education on waste reduction.
- Retailers adopting their own fee or providing incentives to reduce the use of plastic retail bags.
- Communities continuing to implement municipal bans or voluntary bans.
- Provincial mandated fee on plastic retail bags.
- Provincial distribution ban on plastic retail bags.
- Unsure
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## Summary

Is there any additional information or comments Government should consider?

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**Please email or mail this document with your responses to:**

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