

What We Heard – Reduction in Plastic Retail Bag Use

Introduction

From March 5-27, 2019, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment held public consultations on whether a distribution ban is the best approach to reduce plastic retail bags; and the factors to consider if a ban is implemented.

A total of 2,845 questionnaires were completed through the EngageNL forum (www.engagenl.ca/). Additionally the Department received over 120 written submissions directly through mail or email. Thank you to each person and organization who participated!

The following is a summary of the responses to the EngageNL questionnaire, unless specified as being from written submissions.

Who replied?

Of the 2,845 individuals who responded to the EngageNL questionnaire, 95% identified themselves as being a member of the public. The remaining respondents identified themselves as a representative of a business (2%) or a member of a(n): environmental organization (<1%), community organization (1%), industry association or business interest group (<1%), municipal government (<1%), provincial government (<1%), or Regional Service Board (<1%). The majority of written submissions were from individuals, but submissions also were received from Municipalities NL, the Professional Municipal Administrators, Restaurants Canada, Restaurants Association of NL, the Council of Canadians – St. John's Chapter, the NL Environmental Industry Association, the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, World Wildlife Fund, Stewardship Association of Municipalities, Clean St. John's, individual municipalities, and individual businesses.

The majority of respondents (71%) to the Engage NL questionnaire identified themselves as residing within the Avalon region of the province (Figure 1) and 63% were between the ages of 19-50 years old (Figure 2).



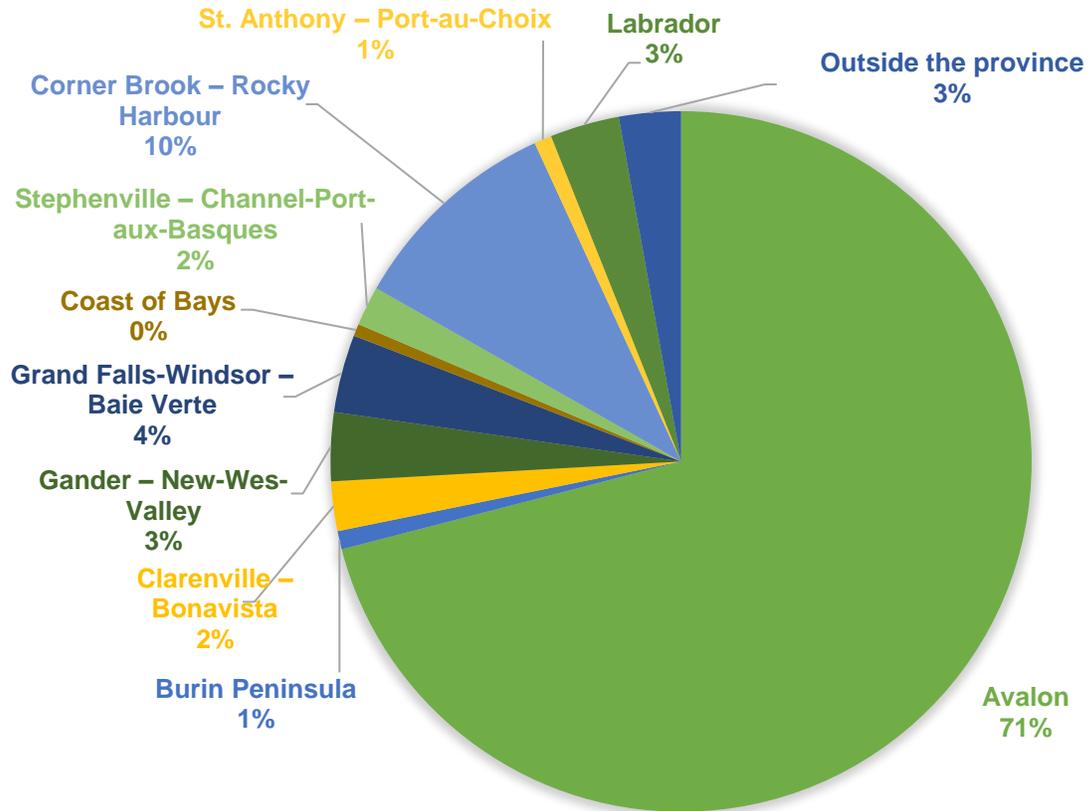


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents across the province.

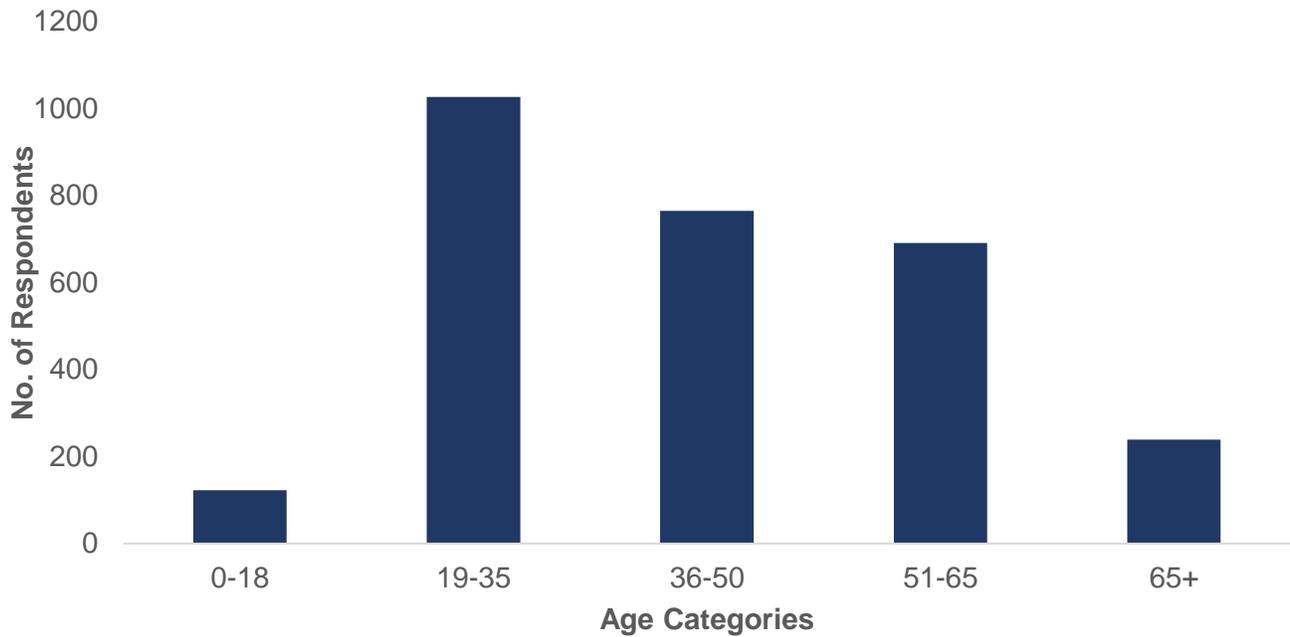


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents across age categories.



What is the current practice?

Respondents to the EngageNL questionnaire were interested in waste reduction and stated they often used products other than plastic retail bags. Of those that responded, 89% felt that reducing waste was very important, 11% felt that reducing waste was somewhat important, and less than 1% did not feel waste reduction was important.

Respondents stated that they most often take items from a retail outlet using a reusable bag (75%). Only 22% stated using a plastic retail bag most often, 0% stated using paper, and 3% stated using something other than a plastic, reusable, or paper bag. The majority (86%) of respondents stated they always or regularly use their reusable bags.

While most respondents stated they use reusable bags most often when visiting a store, those that do use plastic bags reuse them most or all of the time (72%) and very few people throw them out (Figure 3). Those that do reuse them, use them as garbage bucket liners (36%), to clean up pet waste (25%), to transport other goods (32%), and a variety of other things (7%), such as boot liners, stuffing, for arts and crafts, for dirty diapers and clothes, rain covers, household and yard cleanup, and for storage of food and products.

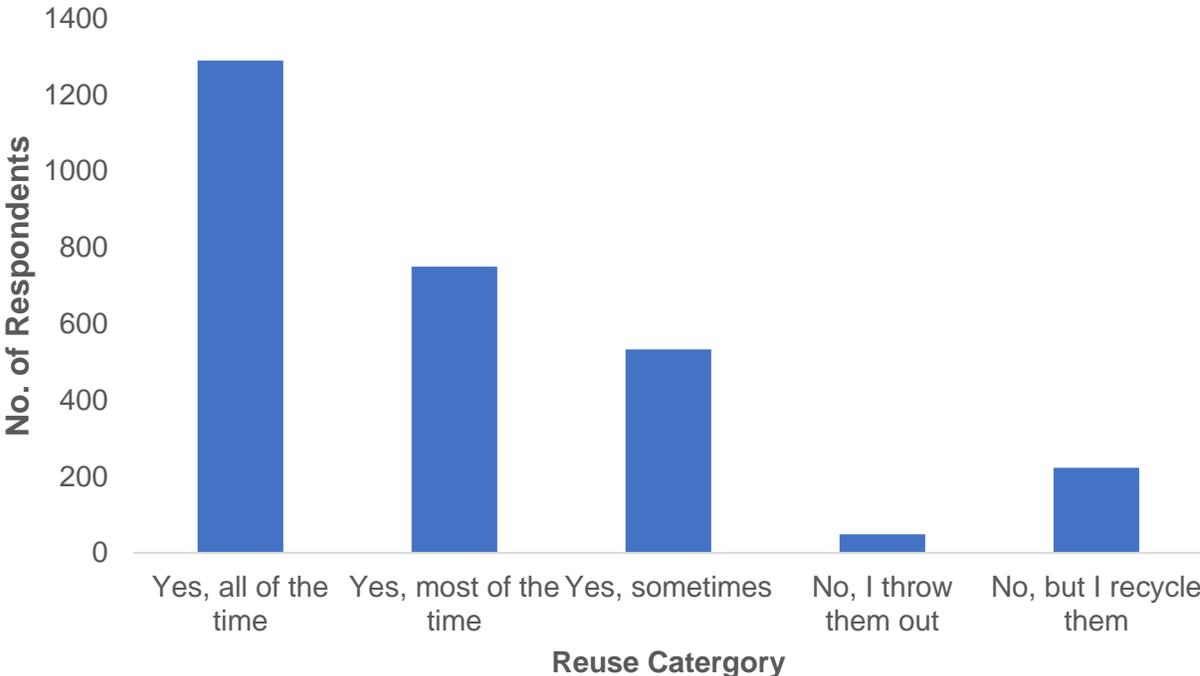


Figure 3. Reuse of plastic retail bags.



What is the preferred approach to plastic retail bag use reduction?

Of those that responded, 87% agreed with a provincial ban on the distribution of plastic retail bags. This percentage decreased to 66% when respondents were presented with options other than a ban (Figure 4). These results were consistent with written feedback submitted directly to the Department, in which 78% agreed with a provincial ban.

If respondents disagreed with a provincial ban on the distribution of plastic retail bags, it was because they want to continue to reuse the bags (32%), they think people should be able to make a choice for themselves (24%), they believe the alternatives are more problematic for the environment (12), or they think the financial cost of alternatives are prohibitive (11%).

Seven percent of respondents preferred a provincial mandated fee on plastic retail bags as a way to reduce their use (Figure 4). If this approach is considered, 86% of respondents stated they would stop using them sometimes or all of the time. If fees were implemented on plastic retail bags, the average suggested effective fee to pay to reduce their use was \$1.22. Respondents were not in agreement on who should keep this revenue. While 35% thought it should be retailers and 39% thought it should be the government, the remaining 25% of responses were varied.

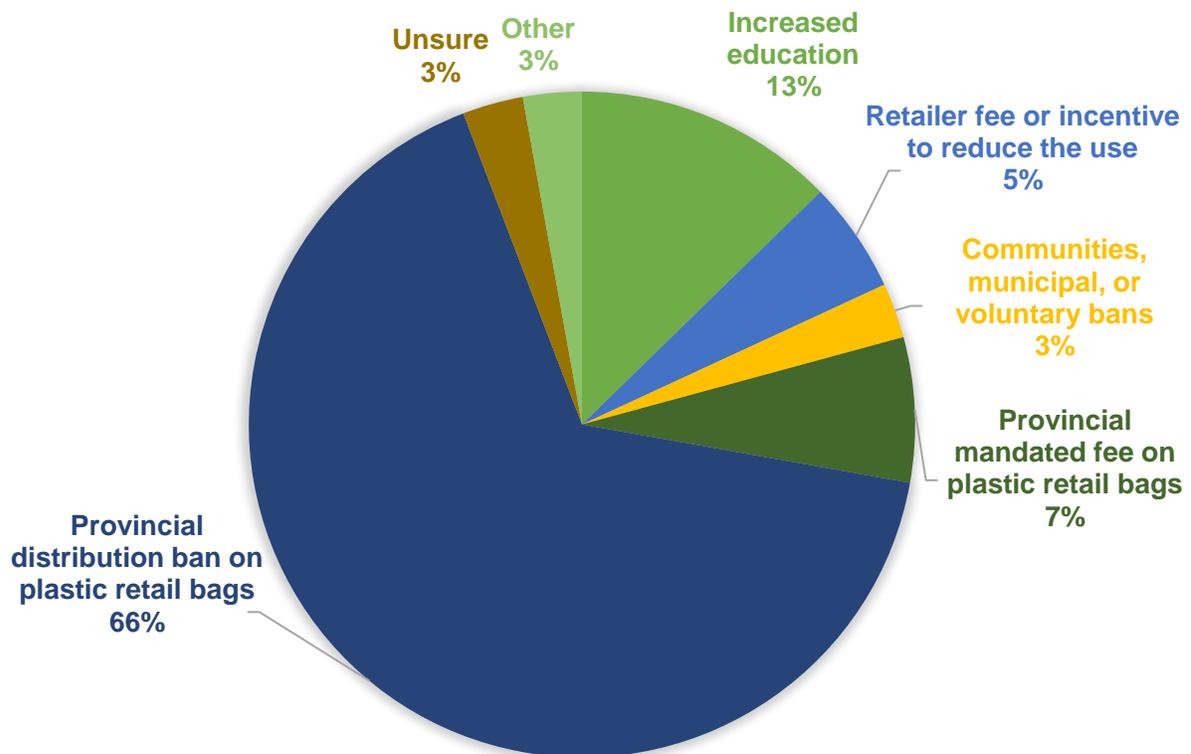


Figure 4. Support for options to reduce plastic retail bag use.



What elements would be considered in a provincial distribution ban on plastic retail bags?

Types of Alternative

Respondents stated that if a provincial ban on plastic retail bags was implemented, their preferred alternative would be reusable bags (86%). Only 10% of respondents would like to use paper bags. These results were consistent with written feedback submitted directly to the Department.

Fees on Alternatives

While respondents were highly supportive of a provincial ban on plastic retail bags, fewer (66%) agreed that there should be mandated fees to purchase the alternatives and limit their overconsumption. Of the remaining respondents, 18% did not agree with mandated fees to purchase alternatives, and 16% were unsure.

If fees were implemented on alternatives the average suggested effective fee to pay for a paper bag to reduce their overconsumption was \$0.38 (Figure 5). The average suggested effective fee to pay for a reusable bag to reduce their overconsumption was \$1.68 (Figure 5).

Respondents were not in agreement on who should keep the revenue if a provincial plastic retail distribution ban was implemented with fees included for alternatives (Figure 6). While 42% thought it should be retailers and 32% thought it should be the government, the remaining 26% of responses were varied. Ideas included using the fees for developing recycling programs, initiatives to reduce waste, initiatives to mitigate climate change and environmental damages, to give to environmental or community charities/ organizations, to give to waste management regulators or service providers, or that revenues should be split between the provincial government and the retailers.

Implementation Date

Some respondents stated that the ban should begin as soon as possible, while others stated that retailers should be given 6 to 12 months to prepare for the implementation of a ban and allow their existing stock of plastic retail bags to be used.



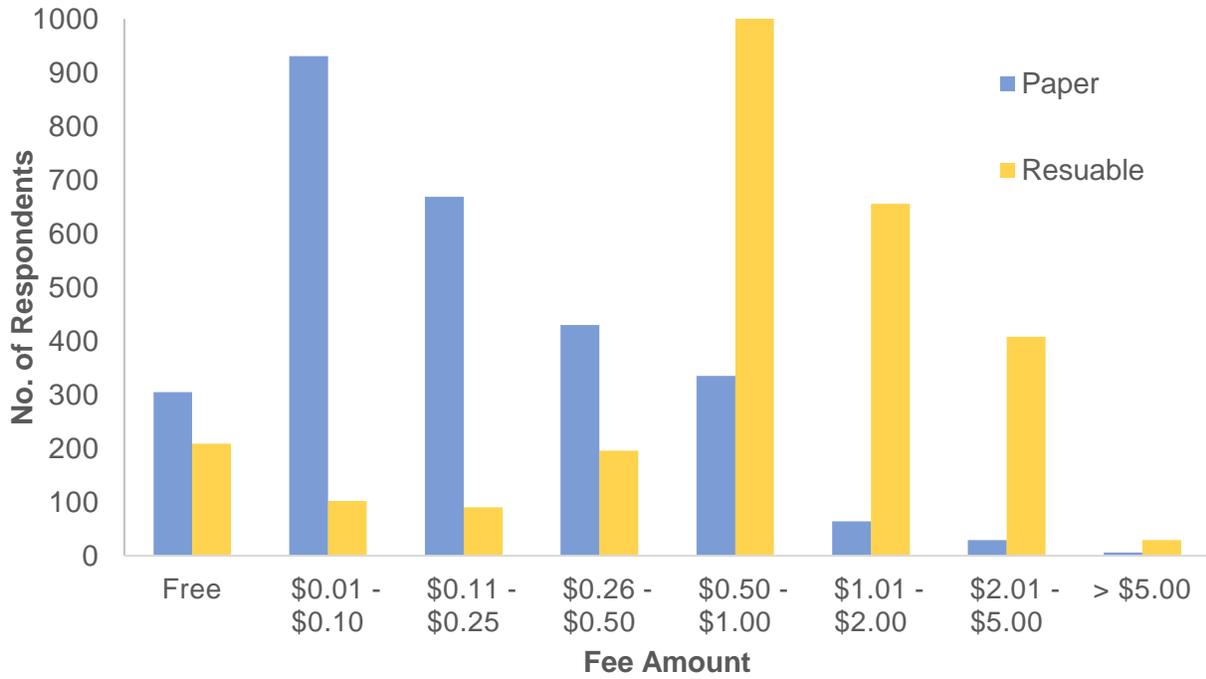


Figure 5. An effective fee to pay for alternatives to deter overconsumption.

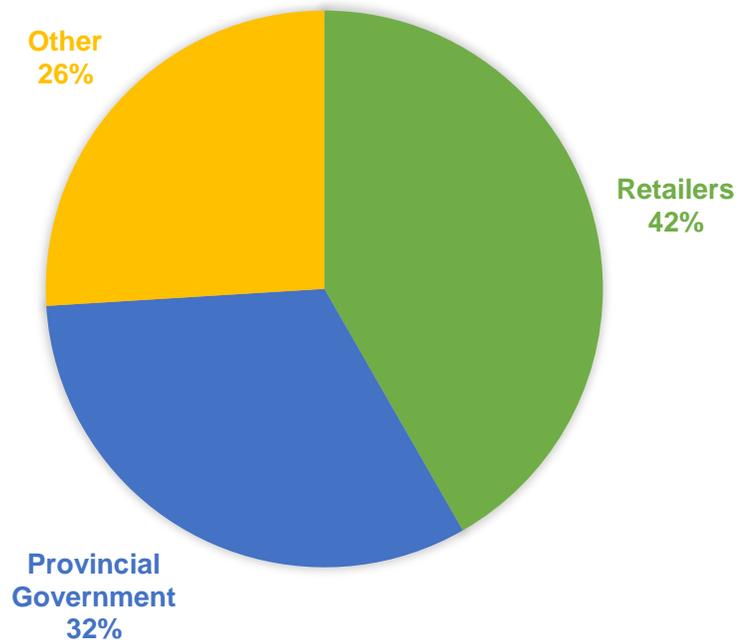


Figure 6. Who should keep fee on alternatives to plastic retail bags.



Next Steps

The results of the public consultation questionnaire are an essential element in ensuring any change meets the needs of businesses and residents in the province. The Department will use the results of the questionnaire, along with stakeholder consultations, to propose legislation that will reduce plastic retail bag use.

If you have questions, please email plasticbagconsultations@gov.nl.ca or call (709) 729-4147.

