

Summary of submissions

Proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags



Waste free future

Have your say on plastic bags



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatu Mo Te Taiao

New Zealand Government

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Message from the Secretary for the Environment

Plastic pollution is an issue that many New Zealanders care deeply about. More and more, we are becoming aware of the harm caused to marine wildlife and the introduction of microplastics into the food chain.



More than 100,000 people have signed petitions in recent years, calling for action on single-use plastic bags in New Zealand. And retailers have called on the Government to level the playing field, by making a phase out of these plastic bags mandatory throughout the country.

So it was no surprise that this consultation on the proposed mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags received a very strong response, with more than 9,300 people having their say. We have now publicly released the submissions along with this summary document, which highlights the key themes that came through.

During the consultation, we heard from thousands of individuals, as well as businesses, non-government organisations, councils, and other groups. Thank you to all who have taken the time to make a submission or complete our short online survey. New Zealand belongs to all of us, and to our mokopuna, so it's important that we each have our say on decisions about our environment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "V Robertson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Vicky Robertson
Secretary for the Environment

Executive summary

From 10 August to 14 September, the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) consulted on a proposal to implement a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. The Government proposed to do this through regulation under the Waste Minimisation Act 2008.

This report summarises the views expressed in submissions received during this consultation process. It does not provide an analysis of those views, or recommendations in response to them. Any recommendations in response to these submissions will be made through policy advice to Associate Minister for the Environment, Hon Eugenie Sage.

Background to the consultation process

Petitions to Parliament calling for controls on single-use plastic bags have attracted over 103,000 signatures in recent years. Momentum for such a move had been building, with major New Zealand supermarkets and retailers announcing plans to phase out single-use plastic shopping bags at their check outs by the end of the year. More retailers have since followed suit.

This reflects global attention to the issue of single-use plastics – especially those that end up in our marine environments. Plastic bags are widely used, but there are now many alternatives. Governments around the world are taking action to tackle this issue, and the Government agrees that action is needed.

The Ministry sought feedback on the proposal to implement a mandatory phase out from local government, businesses, and the public. Information about the consultation process was communicated through a variety of media, including social media, a Ministerial press release, information on the Ministry website, and emails to groups of stakeholders, such as district and regional councils, iwi groups, and industry bodies.

The Ministry received 6,129 submissions on the proposal from local government, businesses, individuals, non-government organisations (NGOs) and industry bodies. A further 3,225 individuals responded to the Ministry's 'Waste Free Future' quiz, which covered issues of waste reduction in everyday life, including phasing out single-use plastic shopping bags. Total engagement across both submission platforms on the consultation was 9,354 submissions.

Key findings

The majority of submitters agree with the Government's proposal to implement a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags (8,631, 92 per cent).

Entities proposed to be covered by the regulations

The majority of submitters (5,799, 95 per cent) do not think that smaller retailers should be exempt from the phase out. The main reasons given by submitters were creating a level playing field and avoiding confusion for consumers. Submitters also observe that bags from any origin could contribute to litter.

Bag thickness

The majority (4,769, 78 per cent) submit that all single-use plastic shopping bags should be banned, rather than just plastic bags below a specified micron count.

The majority of submitters who did comment on the proposed micron counts (791, 13 per cent) prefer a thickness of 70 microns. These submitters considered this would have a higher chance of changing consumer behaviour, covering a broader spectrum of single-use plastic shopping bags and preventing potential loopholes.

Possible exemptions

Fifty submitters oppose inclusion of degradable (compostable, bio-degradable and oxo-degradable) bags in the phase out. In particular, some submitters view compostable bags as part of the solution to the problem of single-use plastic shopping bags.

Phase-out period

The majority of submissions (4,289 or 70 per cent) propose an implementation period of less than six months from Gazettal of regulations. These submitters consider that the level of public interest and dialogue has meant businesses have already had time to prepare, and that it would not be complex or difficult to phase the bags out.

Conversely, some submitters including most from local government consider a six month period would capitalise on the groundswell of public opinion, while providing sufficient time for adaptation, so long as support communications associated with the ban are comprehensive and widespread. Various business submitters (both importers and retailers) propose a phase out period of at least 12 months to enable existing stock and import orders to be fully run through.

Costs and benefits

Ninety-one per cent of submitters (5,582) consider the benefits of phasing out plastic bags exceed the costs of doing so.

The types of costs raised by submitters include the potential for loss of sales; higher packaging costs for businesses (and passed on to consumers); and the need for operational changes.

Submitters identified a range of environmental and social benefits for existing and future generations (eg, reduced litter and improved marine environments, changed perceptions of single-use items, and increased commitment to circular economy principles).

Supporting effective implementation

Ninety-three per cent of submitters agree that reasonably practicable alternatives are available – and in many cases, are in use already. Some submitters consider that alternatives would also be needed for the current secondary uses of single-use plastic shopping bags, eg, as bin liners. A number of submitters identify a strong need for the Ministry to provide information and guidance to support effective implementation (eg, on the most ‘environmentally friendly’ alternatives). Submitters provided suggestions on compliance, monitoring, and enforcement.

Consultation process

From 10 August to 14 September, the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) consulted on a proposal to implement a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. The Government proposed to do this through regulation under the Waste Minimisation Act 2008.

People were asked about their overall support for a proposal for a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags. Other matters canvassed included:

- the thickness of bags to be covered
- whether there should be any exemptions
- whether any businesses such as smaller retailers should be excluded
- the appropriate implementation period
- costs and benefits (including specific questions to elicit information from retailers and importers who may be affected by the phase out)
- the availability of alternatives
- questions designed to elicit information on how to help people adjust to the phase out and maximise its effectiveness.

Information about the consultation process was communicated through a variety of media, including social media, a Ministerial press release, information on our website, and emails to groups of stakeholders, such as district and regional councils, iwi groups, and industry bodies.

The Ministry received 6,129 submissions on the proposal from local government, businesses, individuals, non-government organisations (NGO), and industry bodies. A further 3,225 individuals responded to the Ministry's 'Waste Free Future' online short survey, which covered issues of waste reduction in everyday life. One question concerned phasing out single-use plastic shopping bags, using the same wording as in the main consultation. Total engagement across both submission platforms on the consultation was 9,354 submissions.

What we heard

1. The majority of submitters support the mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags

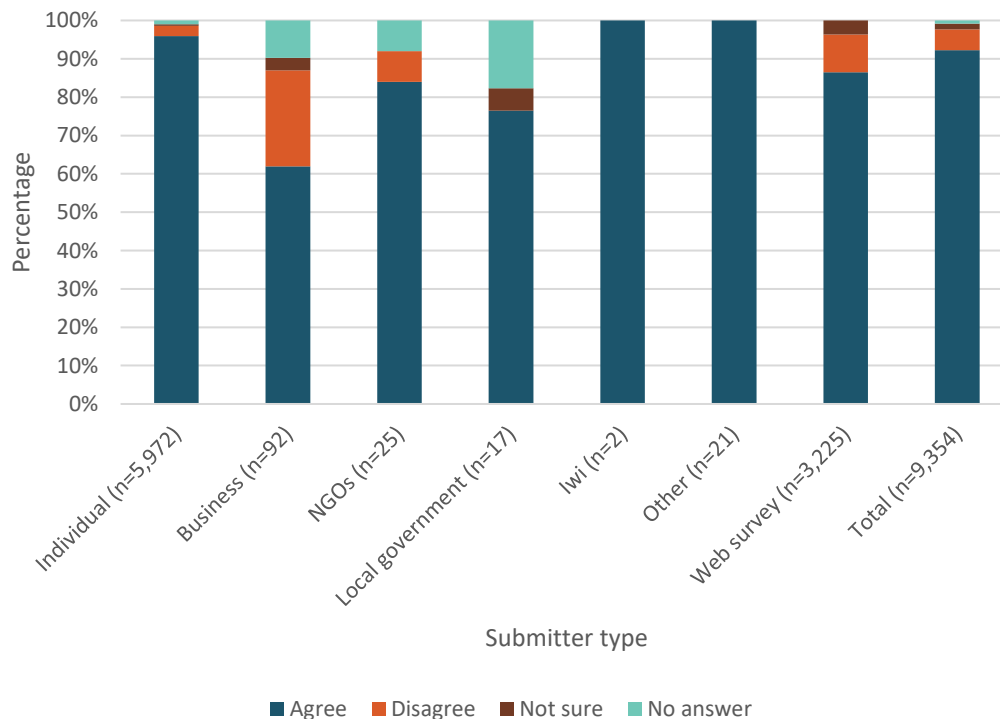
Submitters were asked if they agreed with a mandatory phase out of 'single-use plastic shopping bags', which were defined as:

- a new plastic bag (including those made of degradable plastic) which has handles and is below a particular level of thickness
- sold or distributed for the purpose of carrying sold goods.

A majority of consultation responses (8,631 submitters or 92 per cent) agree with the mandatory phase out proposal. Five hundred and four submitters (5 per cent) disagree, while a further 219 (2 per cent) did not answer or are not sure if they agree.¹

Majority support was evident in all types of submitters, from individuals (96 per cent), non-government organisations (NGOs) (84 per cent), local government (76 per cent), and business (62 per cent) (figure 1).

Figure 1: Responses to the proposed mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags in New Zealand by submitter type²



¹ Throughout the document, numbers may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding of figures.

² The percentages in figure 1 are from a total of 9,354 submissions received (the total number of submissions received including the short web survey).

Many submitters agree we need to phase out single-use plastic shopping bags to achieve environmental benefits

All submitter groups commonly cite reduction of waste and reduced harm for the marine environment as reasons for supporting a phase out. Providing a signal for future, wider action on plastic packaging (or waste in general) is also commonly cited.

Tanenuiarangi Manawatū Incorporated comments “Plastic bags made of any plastic-like material impact on our indigenous biodiversity.”

Local government submitters generally reiterate the problems that single-use plastic shopping bags cause in the litter stream, and that they may contaminate recycling. Some local government submitters note there may be limited local alternatives (such as soft plastics recycling).

For example, Waipā District Council comments “We see a phase out of plastic bags at point of sale as a way to make a large impact on the number of these bags becoming loose in our environment and polluting New Zealand’s marine and land environments.”

Wastebusters submits its full support for environmental reasons, particularly given what it considers to be New Zealand’s low rates of recycling; as a good first step for single-use plastics (noting that although plastic shopping bags are only one of many types of plastics entering the environment, they are a great starting point as an everyday item); and as an opportunity to provide a working model of the circular model.

A number of submitters note they support the proposal as part of a first step towards wider action on plastic packaging.³ For example, one local government submitter considers:

There are tangible benefits such as less marine litter and cleaner environment (reduced waste collection costs) and wastage of resources, but these will be small initially. However this ban should be considered as the first step towards reducing waste. The benefits will come as the community transitions to a waste reduction focus with further initiatives. More resource efficient production (cradle to cradle approach as opposed to current linear system - by using recycled materials saving virgin resources), more sustainable resource use (sourcing natural materials from NZ or recycling other recycling/waste streams - recycled PET/PP bags).⁴

Business submitters who support the proposals also outline environmental reasons. For example, Williams Corporation Ltd comments single-use plastic shopping bags are “polluting our water bodies and harming wildlife and entering the food chain.” Kmart submits banning single-use plastic shopping bags will reduce litter and plastic pollution, resulting in reduced impacts on wildlife and the environment.

³ For example, local government submitter, submission reference number 5991. Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 37, 41, 42, 261, 442, 641, 671, 803 and 1167. Other submitter, submission reference number 880.

⁴ Local government submitter, submission reference number 1220.

Other reasons given include single-use plastic shopping bags – whether plant-based or not – as a waste of natural resources;⁵ as a step towards sustainable practice that has the potential to engage and educate all New Zealanders;⁶ and because plastic takes a long time to degrade.⁷

Other submitters did not agree with the problem definition and/or the proposed solution

One hundred and eighty-six long-form submitters and a further 318 who answered the short online survey (5 per cent altogether) disagree with the proposal.

Thirteen individuals and three business submitters said the proposal was short-sighted and that there are more environmentally-damaging products that should be addressed instead.⁸

A common theme in these submissions was that New Zealand's single-use plastic shopping bags are only a small contribution to pollution.⁹ For example, one submitter highlights studies that show around 90 per cent of the plastic waste that ends up in the sea each year comes from just 10 rivers globally (eight in Asia and two in Africa), with most of the remainder coming from hundreds of minor Asian and African rivers, as well as lost fishing gear.¹⁰ Another comments that Tokyo uses more bags in a day than we use in a year, so in their opinion "there is really not much point."¹¹

A business submitter claims the consultation document was generally lacking in data, and particularly in relation to the impact of plastic bags on the New Zealand marine environment, making it difficult to compare options.¹² Overall, the submitter concludes "The proposed mandatory phase out is a micro solution for a worldwide macro problem which will have little, if any impact, on terrestrial and marine environments of NZ, let alone the world."

Various submitters who disagree with the proposal state that 'single-use' is a misnomer (47 of 186, 25 per cent). Submitters commonly said that single-use plastic shopping bags are reused as bin liners, and "will be replaced by the much thicker bin liners which are currently sold, thereby increasing rather than decreasing the amount of plastic going into landfills."¹³

⁵ For example, other submitter, submission reference number 880.

⁶ Sustainable Taranaki (NGO), submission reference number 6315.

⁷ Individual submitter, submission reference number 671.

⁸ For example, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 324 and 518. Convex NZ Ltd, submission reference number 5973.

⁹ TG Enterprises, submission reference number 5675. Flexoplas Packaging Ltd, submission reference number 6034. Product Distributors Ltd, submission reference number 6257. Murray Steward, submission reference number 1188.

¹⁰ Individual submitter, submission reference number 1041. Similar issues are raised in submission 1148.

¹¹ Individual submitter, submission reference number 5755.

¹² Business submitter, submission reference number 1148.

¹³ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 88, 200 and 709.

Other commonly-cited ways in which 'single-use' bags are reused include picking up pet waste,¹⁴ and transporting a range of items including sanitary pads,¹⁵ nappies,¹⁶ wet clothing,¹⁷ and meat products.¹⁸ Submitters were concerned that the alternatives people turn to for these uses would have a higher environmental impact than existing single-use plastic shopping bags.

Flexoplas Packaging Ltd observes that if alternatives to single-use plastic bags are not reused a sufficient number of times, they will have a greater environmental impact than single-use plastic bags. Flexoplas Packaging Ltd provides an example of cotton bags, which would need to be used 327 times (which Flexoplas Packaging Ltd views as extremely unlikely given the risk of spillage and cross contamination from food products).

A number of industry submitters view the proposals as a reductionist response to a broader issue relating to both the use of plastic packaging, and the facilities we have in place to encourage its recycling and reuse.¹⁹ For example, TG Enterprises comments that a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags will make little measurable difference to the broader issue of plastics ending up in the environment.

Instead, what is required is a whole-of-New Zealand industrial scale plastics waste mitigation policy and strategy. The bottom line of this submission is that all plastics are a resource; there is no 'waste' or 'away'. Every piece of plastics 'waste' has the potential to be rebranded as a 'resource' and recycled. Plastics waste removal or recycling is an engineering opportunity for the NZ Plastics industry to grasp and exploit.²⁰

A packaging manufacturer²¹ and Convex NZ Ltd submit governments should look at environmental issues and waste minimisation as a whole and not piecemeal. The packaging manufacturer considers it would be more appropriate to manage the stated problem through more effective litter management. Likewise, Convex NZ Ltd comments they do not consider there to be anything wrong with single-use plastics *per se*, but rather how people handle and dispose of the used plastics.

More submitters support a mandatory than voluntary approach

Across both business and non-business submitters (eg, local government) who commented on the topic, there was more support for a mandatory than a voluntary approach. For example, Countdown Supermarkets comments that legislation "provides clarity to everyone, evens things up and is vital to ensuring other businesses, regardless of size, are able to make the change, versus a voluntary or self-regulated approach." This view is shared by Foodstuffs, Wastebusters, the Packaging Forum, and various local government submitters and individual submitters. Foodstuffs identifies that retailers in Australia reverted to providing free single-use

¹⁴ For example, individual submitters, submission reference number 5662 and 5831. Christchurch Citizens Collective, submission reference number 5739.

¹⁵ Individual submitter, submission reference number 181.

¹⁶ For example, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 85 and 5750.

¹⁷ Individual submitter, submission reference number 450.

¹⁸ See section below on barrier bags.

¹⁹ Flexoplas, submission reference number 6034. Business submitter, submission reference number 1148.

²⁰ TG Enterprises, submission reference number 5675.

²¹ Business submitter, submission reference number 1148.

plastic shopping bags after an initial voluntary ban, in response to customer or competitive pressure.

Foodstuffs also considers a mandatory phase out will provide the best environmental outcome by removing all single-use plastic shopping bags from the market.

The Packaging Forum comments that introducing a charge for plastic bags would reduce consumption but not eliminate it.

If the ban is not comprehensive, then we will see shoppers potentially choose one retailer over another as has been seen in the past when stores have introduced charges or stopped providing bags. To create a level playing field for retailers, there needs to be one rule applied to all outlets.

The Northland Regional Council considers a mandatory phase out will address the issue at source, whereas a tax or levy is viewed as likely to be less effective, would create an administrative burden and requires amendment to existing law. Likewise a deposit/refund mechanism is seen as unlikely to be workable given the low value of the target product and the administrative costs of such a scheme.

Some submitters would prefer a levy to a mandatory phase out

Some submitters support a move away from single-use plastic shopping bags, but preferred a levy approach rather than a ban. These submitters highlight the revenue-raising potential of a levy,²² and some also prefer what they view as a less prescriptive approach.²³ An appropriately-set levy was seen to provide a strong financial incentive for people to remember to bring their reusable bags.²⁴

A 10 cent tax for "single-use" plastic bags would be much better - if 200 million bags are sold a year in NZ, then that's \$20 million that can be used to support environment clean-up efforts!²⁵

One submitter considers a ban would result in much greater use of high-impact cotton and plastic (eg, nylon) bags, at a cost of higher carbon emissions, and greater resource use. This submitter prefers a levy imposed on all single-use plastics.²⁶ Another submitter considers a levy on the use of the bags would incentivise reduction, while a ban could have perverse outcomes: "banning the bags is likely to result in consumers buying cotton and jute 'reusable' bags for unplanned 'quick' shops - and then not reusing them, at enormous environmental cost and some inefficient economic cost."²⁷

²² For example, individual submitters, submission reference number 131, 1175, 6337 and 6341 (as an alternative to a ban).

²³ For example, individual submitters, submission reference number 497 and 5755 "Levy them, but don't nano manage voters."

²⁴ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 1175 and 5681.

²⁵ Individual submitter, submission reference number 131.

²⁶ Individual submitter, submission reference number 641.

²⁷ Individual submitter, submission reference number 497.

Some submitters support a levy as a transitional approach to raise funds while working towards a complete phase out over a longer time period.²⁸ For example, Zero Waste Network submits that funds raised by a levy could form an independently managed environmental fund that could be used to build on the current soft plastics recycling scheme, in supporting clean-ups, in single-use plastics educational programmes, research and design for sustainable packaging alternatives, and to fund composting infrastructure and services for ‘genuine bioplastics’ and ecolabelling. Zero Waste Network notes funds could also be used to subsidise low income families. Zero Waste Network comments that levies have been used successfully in a number of countries, including Denmark, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and many other nations and states around the world.

2. Support by submitter groups

Iwi

Submissions were received from Tanenuiarangi Manawatū Incorporated and Ngati Whakatare. Both iwi submitters propose a phase out of plastic all together. Tanenuiarangi Manawatū Incorporated proposes a shift to New Zealand plant-based industries such as hemp or harakeke, which it considers are better for the environment and could provide local economic benefits.

Local government

Submissions were received from 16 local government submitters, as well as Local Government New Zealand, the umbrella organisation for local government.

Thirteen local government submitters support the proposal,²⁹ while three answered not applicable,³⁰ although from other responses it is clear they also support the proposal. Local government submitters support the intention to reduce waste in New Zealand, and transition to a circular economy approach to manage resources. Marlborough District Council answered not sure, noting some supermarket bags were already used more than once.

²⁸ Zero Waste Network, submission reference number 5962. Individual submitters, submission reference number 5550 and 5557. Algalita Marine Research & Education South Pacific Trust, submission reference number 5805.

²⁹ Local government submitters, submission reference numbers 1220 and 5991. Western Bay of Plenty District Council, submission reference number 5631. Kapiti Coast District Council, submission reference number 5852. Waipa District Council, submission reference number 5880. Watercare Services Limited, submission reference number 5893. Dunedin City Council, submission reference number 5988. Tasman District Council, submission reference number 6047. Queenstown Lakes District Council, submission reference number 6063. Masterton District Council, submission reference number 6163. Christchurch City Council, submission reference number 6239. Whanganui District Council, submission reference number 6250. Local Government NZ, submission reference number 6154.

³⁰ Northland Regional Council, submission reference number 5911. Hamilton City Council Staff, submission reference number 5855. South Taranaki District Council, submission reference number 5667.

Businesses

Ninety-two submissions were received from business submitters, covering a range from small to large organisations. Representative bodies including Retail NZ (which represents two-thirds of the retail market) and the Packaging Forum also submitted.³¹

Submissions were received from retailers, including Countdown, Foodstuffs, Kmart, Palmers Garden Centres, and Toyworld Tauranga. Submissions were also received from plastic bag manufacturers and importers.³²

Overall, 57 business submitters support the proposal (62 per cent). Twenty-three businesses (25 per cent) disagree, while a further three businesses (3 per cent) are not sure, and nine (10 per cent) gave no answer.

Businesses in support note the need to signal a shift in relation to single-use plastics. For example, Countdown comments it supports the phase out in order to:

Signal an intention that we have an issue in NZ with single use plastic, that more needs to be done to support the overburdened recycling and waste system...Send a strong message to industry and consumers that current attitudes and behaviours have to change.³³

Businesses who do not support the proposed phase out have a range of reasons, including a view that degradable bags should be excluded; or that the problem is inappropriate disposal (eg, as litter) rather than plastic bags *per se*.

Individuals

The Greenpeace form submission

The largest segment of consultation responses (4,170 or 45 per cent) were from individuals using a form submission provided by Greenpeace (either verbatim or with minor variation). These submitters support a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic bags, and consider the phase out “must include a ban on false solutions, such as degradable (eg, oxo degradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic.”

The web survey

A further 3,225 individuals (34 percent of total responses) completed the Ministry’s short web survey, which included a question about single-use plastic shopping bags amongst others about steps individuals could take to minimise waste. The survey covered only overall support for the proposal of a mandatory phase out, and not any additional questions about the suitable coverage (eg, retailers or types of bags to be included and the phase-out period).

³¹ Another representative body, the Packaging Council, also submitted, identifying itself as an NGO submitter, submission reference number 6153.

³² Submission reference numbers 967, 1148 and 5821. Flexoplas, submission reference number 6034. Convex, submission reference number 5973. EP Tech Ltd, submission reference number 6142.

³³ Countdown Supermarkets, submission reference number 436.

Individual submitters

A further 1,802 individuals submitted on the consultation document. Of these, 1,564 (87 per cent) support the proposal, while 161 (9 per cent) disagree. A further 25 (1 per cent) were not sure, and 52 (3 per cent) answered not applicable. Many submitters indicate a strong concern for reducing waste and human impact on the environment, and view the proposal as a symbolic first step that should be followed by additional actions to further reduce plastic waste.

Submissions received from overseas

Twenty-eight per cent of the Greenpeace individual submitters stated their location was outside of New Zealand. The short web survey did not have a location question so these could not be differentiated in the same way.

Overall, 12 per cent of consultation responses are known to be from overseas. Analysis of submissions without the international submissions does not result in a significantly different result.

Non-government organisations

Twenty-five submissions were received from NGOs and community groups, of which 21 (84 per cent) were in support.³⁴ Two NGOs do not support the proposal, because they do not support inclusion of biodegradable bags³⁵ or because the problem was considered to be litter, rather than plastic bags *per se*.³⁶

A further two NGOs answered not applicable. The Packaging Council of New Zealand (Packaging NZ) does not agree with the problem definition and considers more effective litter management is required rather than a phase out of plastic bags. From the context, the other NGO that answered not applicable appears to agree with the phase out and its coverage.³⁷

Submitters in support are pleased the proposal sends the signal that our current approach to resource consumption is unsustainable,³⁸ and raises collective consciousness about the issue of environmental pollution.³⁹

³⁴ NGO submitters, submission reference numbers 461, 954, 1092, 1153, 461 and 6071. Whaingaroa Environment Centre, submission reference number 374. Piri McCoubrie, submission reference number 642. Plastic Free Kaitiāia 2020, submission reference number 890. Envirohub Bay of Plenty, submission reference number 5765. Algalita Marine Research & Education South Pacific Trust, submission reference number 5805. Cliff Colquhoun, submission reference number 5847. Zero Waste Network, submission reference number 5962. Aotearoa Plastic Pollution Alliance, submission reference number 6221. Our Seas Our Future, submission reference number 6227. Sustainability Trust, submission reference number 6269. Kiwi bottle Drive, submission reference number 6286. Para Kore Marae Incorporated, submission reference number 6308. Sustainable Taranaki, submission reference number 6315. Sustainable Business Network, submission reference number 6331. Waiheke Resources Trust, submission reference number 6333. Plastic Free July Foundation, submission reference number 6343.

³⁵ Maui's Ark, submission reference number 5842.

³⁶ Christchurch Citizens Collective, submission reference number 5739.

³⁷ Plastic Diet, submission reference number 6324.

³⁸ NGO submitter, submission reference number 461.

³⁹ Envirohub Bay of Plenty, submission reference number 5765.

Other

Twenty-one submissions were received in the category 'other'. These submitters included some from the education sector (eg, the year six-eight class from Port Chalmers School, Massey University Student Project group); the waste sector (Russell Recyclers; sector group WasteMINZ); and community groups (eg, Sustaining Hawke's Bay Trust).

One hundred per cent of submitters in the 'other' category support the proposal for a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags.

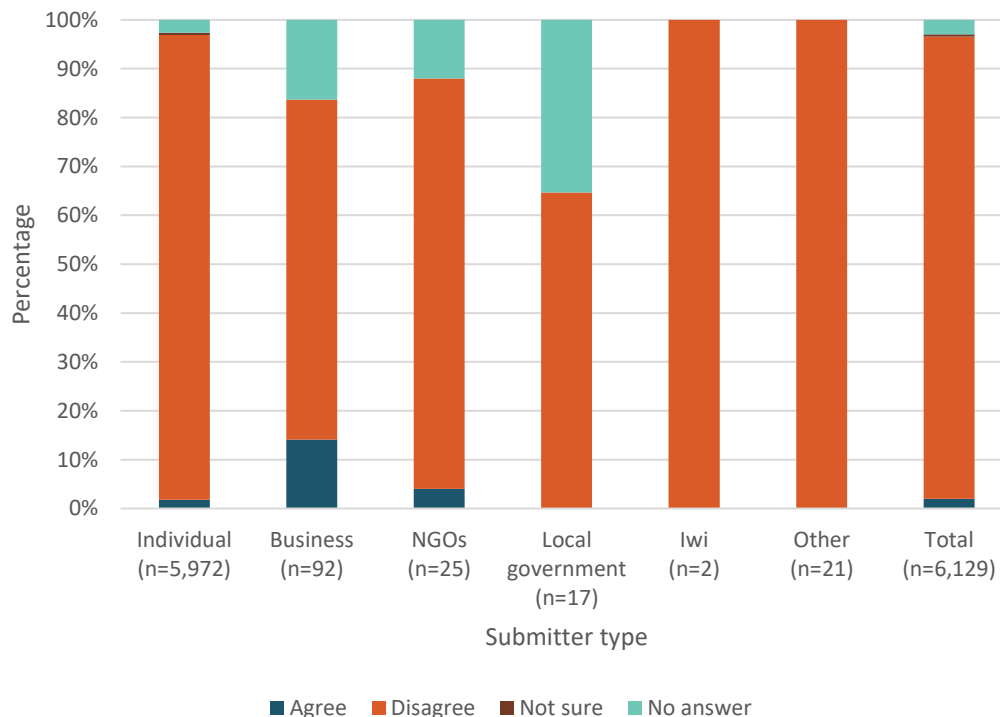
3. Entities proposed to be covered by the regulations

Most submitters agree all retailers should be covered by the phase out

The majority of submitters (5,799 or 95 per cent overall) do not consider small retailers should be exempt from a phase out. A majority within each group of submitters held this view (see figure 2 below and table 2 in the Appendix).

The main reasons given by submitters were creating a level playing field and avoiding confusion for consumers. Submitters also observe that bags from any origin could contribute to litter.

Figure 2: Responses on whether smaller retailers should be exempted from a phase-out⁴⁰



⁴⁰ The percentages in figure 2 and the following figures are from a total of 6,129 submissions (the total number of submissions received excluding responses from the short web survey, which did not cover these questions).

Reasons given for excluding small retailers

Thirteen business submitters (14 per cent of total business submissions) consider smaller retailers should be exempted, generally because of concerns about the potential impact on business operations. Some of these submitters thought customers had an expectation of being provided with a free bag, and the cost of alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags was too high.⁴¹

Other comments were that customers would be unlikely to bring reusable bags consistently, and that the market would find a viable solution if left to its own devices.

An NGO submitter considers bag bans can hurt businesses for a range of reasons:

Shoppers can choose to go to a nearby city to buy the same product and get free bags (many vow to do so) - Shoppers forget their reusable bags, or do not bring enough. They then are not as open to buying additional items. - Business have to be the ones to enforce the bag ban on their customers, angering their customers[.] More shopping carts and baskets are used by customers to transport their groceries to their cars farther away, because they refuse to pay for bags. Shopping baskets virtually disappear within a few months from stores in cities that implement bag bans.⁴²

An individual submitter considers:

It is more important for small retailers to be exempt as very often purchases, even groceries, can be unplanned. It is impractical to have on a person the correct storage container whenever they go out, especially for people who have limited capability to carry shopping bags with them. This is especially important when we are trying to get people to use public transport with no capability of having bags being left in a car, for example.⁴³

Reasons given for including small retailers

The main reasons submitters favour inclusion of smaller retailers include:

- *simplicity* – a belief that a blanket ban is simplest, and easiest to understand and implement
- *fairness* – a blanket ban prevents any businesses being unduly advantaged or disadvantaged. Further, some submitters were concerned about potential technicalities that would allow larger businesses to circumvent the intent of any size-based exclusions (eg, some submitters questioned how franchises would be treated)
- *effectiveness* – a high proportion of New Zealand businesses would fall into the “small business” category, and if they are not included it could undermine the intent of the phase out.

Retail NZ supports the proposed mandatory phase out across all businesses, and believes a national standard is the best approach:

It is important that any regulations introduced create a level playing field for retailers. A consistent national approach will eliminate any confusion about what the regulations are

⁴¹ Business submitters, submission reference numbers 268, 1046 and 1148. Individual submitter, submission reference 913 shared this view.

⁴² Christchurch Citizens Collective, submission reference number 5739.

⁴³ Individual submitter, submission reference number 5938.

or who is required to comply. This will also prevent certain businesses from being perceived as having a competitive advantage over others.⁴⁴

Retail NZ does note there is concern among small businesses about the cost of alternatives. Nonetheless, Retail NZ comments retailers are already generally preparing to remove single-use plastic shopping bags.

Comments from NGOs include:

We need a blanket signalling. Anything else vastly weakens the message and will be impossible to monitor.⁴⁵

We believe excluding smaller retailers from a mandatory phase-out will create a mixed message, dilute impact and prolong the process. By making it mandatory for all retailers ensures a clear transition to non-single use plastic bags. It would also give confidence to the sustainability sector to further invest in reusable alternatives, which in turn can create more employment within the sector.⁴⁶

Local government comments include:

Council does not consider smaller retailers should be exempt from the phase out / ban and that the regulations should apply to all for consistency, clarity and ease of implementation. Also, New Zealand has many small retailers - it would be perverse if the intent of the proposal was undermined due to an exemption for these outlets despite the fact that cumulatively their sale and distribution would be significant and widespread.⁴⁷

Consumer NZ considers that, given the proposed phase out period, all retailers should have sufficient time to source suitable alternatives, or advise their customers they will no longer be providing single-use bags.

Some individuals also note they would avoid shopping at any retailers that continued to use single-use shopping bags, if exceptions did apply.⁴⁸

The Packaging Forum notes the Soft Plastics Recycling Scheme already collects quite a lot of 'non-branded' plastic carrier bags ie, those not from major supermarket chains (which tend to have branded bags).⁴⁹

Small retailers may need more implementation support

Retail NZ supports coverage of all retailers, with sufficient phase out to allow smaller retailers to use up their existing bag stocks.

⁴⁴ Retail NZ, submission reference number 5826.

⁴⁵ Seed The Change | He Kākano Hāpai, submission reference number 342.

⁴⁶ Sustainability Trust, submission reference number 6269.

⁴⁷ Northland Regional Council, submission reference number 5911.

⁴⁸ Individual submitter, submission reference number 246.

⁴⁹ Based on a recent audit conducted for the Soft Plastic Recycling Scheme by Waste Not Consulting (August 2018) the single-use carrier bags from supermarkets, retail chains and dairies which are dropped off from consumers comprised 31.6% branded carrier bags and 68.4% unbranded carrier bags. Bags from smaller outlets also contribute to litter when disposed of incorrectly or as fugitive litter if they blow away from bins. For the ban to be effective in eliminating the estimated 800 million carrier bags consumed annually in New Zealand it needs to be comprehensive.

One submitter thought that small retailers should be given a longer phase-out period to adjust.⁵⁰ Another was concerned that the financial impact of the phase out on smaller retailers would be passed on to consumers, potentially turning public sentiment against the phase out.⁵¹

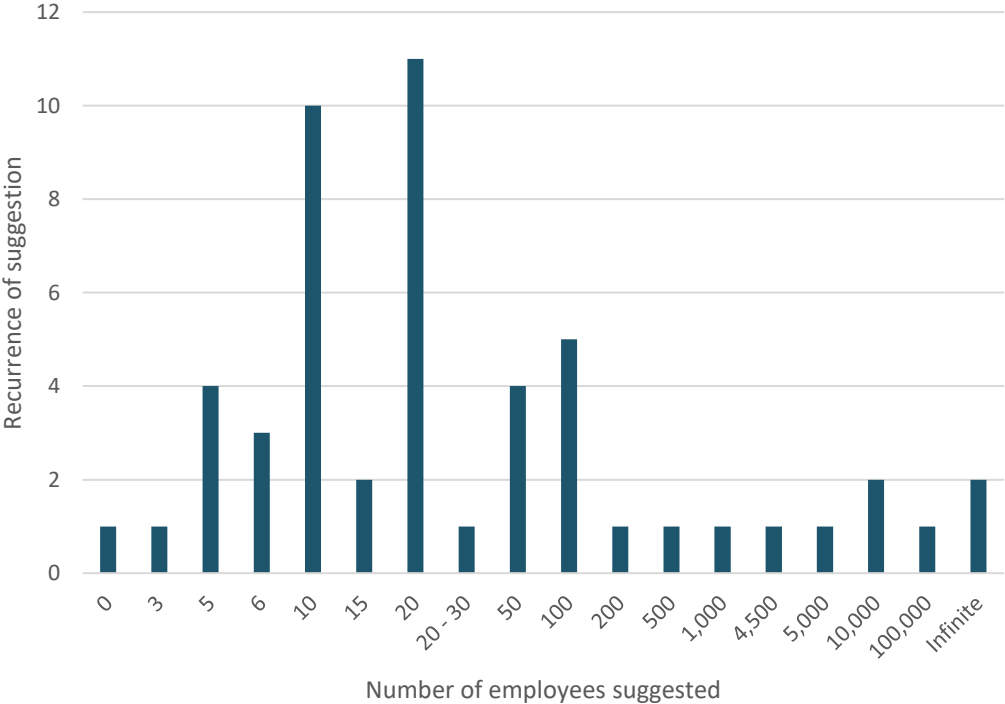
What constitutes a ‘small retailer’?

The consultation document asked what measure should be used to separate out smaller retailers, if they were to be excluded.

Not many submitters answered this question. Figure 3 shows the responses from those submitters who gave a numeric answer to the question.

Some submitters suggested the number of employees was the wrong metric, noting for example that boutique stores may have substantially higher staff numbers but give out fewer bags than a \$2 shop.⁵²

Figure 3: Responses on what should constitute a ‘small’ retailer



As depicted in figure 3, the most common suggested number is 20 employees, followed by 10 employees to determine a ‘small’ retailer.

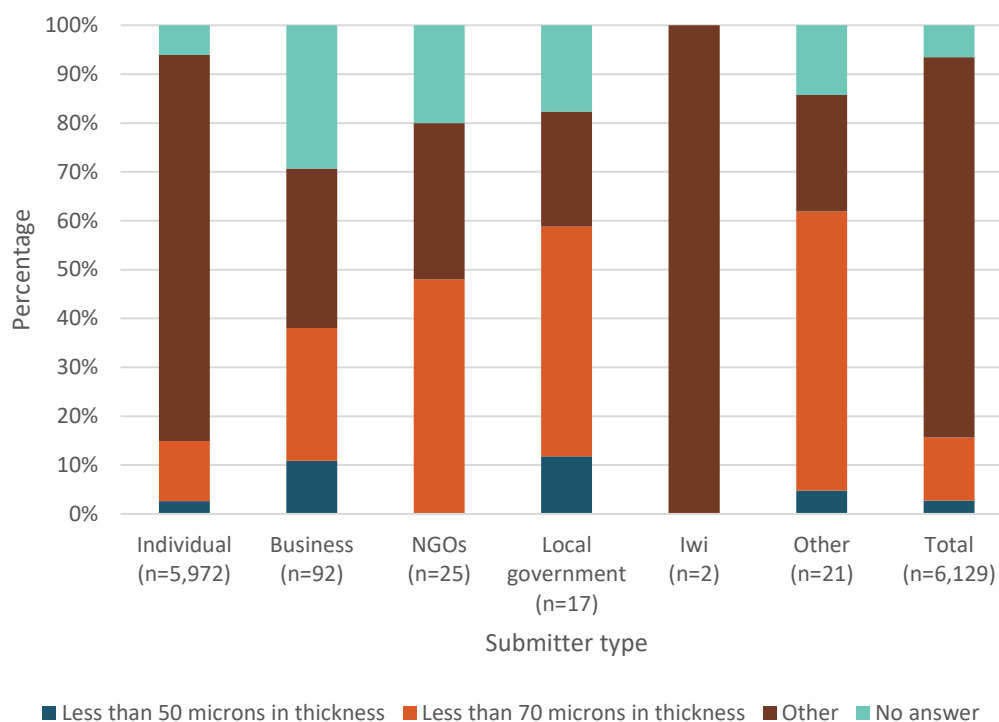
⁵⁰ Individual submitter, submission reference number 1084.
⁵¹ Individual submitter, submission reference number 6263.
⁵² Individual submitter, submission reference number 497.

4. Bag thickness

The consultation document consulted on bags to be phased out, either below 50 microns, below 70 microns, or other.

Overall responses are shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Responses on the question of what thickness of bags should be phased out



Many submitters want all ‘single-use’ plastic bags to be phased out

Many submitters want all ‘single-use’ plastic bags banned, regardless of microns. This was the view of the 4,170 Greenpeace form submissions and many of the 599 other respondents who also selected ‘other’ to this question (4,769 in all).

The Greenpeace form submission states:

I support a mandatory phase-out on the sale and distribution of all single-use plastic bags. The phase-out must include a ban on false solutions, such as degradable (eg, oxo degradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic. It must also include heavier weight singlet bags, lightweight boutique bags, and so called “emergency bags” of any thickness (microns).

Some individual submitters consider all plastic bags (rather than just single-use bags) should be phased out. These submitters point to a wide range of non-plastic alternatives.⁵³ In particular

⁵³ For example, Algalita Marine Research & Education South Pacific Trust, submission reference number 5805. Individual submitter, submission reference number 6074.

bags out of paper⁵⁴, cotton⁵⁵, hemp⁵⁶, and other recycled and natural fibre materials⁵⁷ are mentioned.

Submitters who supported a blanket ban provided such explanations as:

The phase-out should ban all single-use plastic bags in order to prevent loopholes being created and to more effectively encourage all New Zealanders to use reusable bags or other alternatives. Allowing single-use bags of a certain thickness complicates the understanding and implementation of the ban.⁵⁸

Some submitters support 50 microns

For those submitters who did comment further on the micron thickness, a majority (791 submitters) were in favour of 70 microns, while 169 submitters supported 50 microns.

Two local government submitters favour 50 microns,⁵⁹ while the remaining eight local council submissions favour 70 microns.⁶⁰ Local Government New Zealand has no specific view on the thickness of the bags subject to the ban but would prefer it to apply to all bags that are unlikely to be viable for collection for recycling.

Northland Regional Council observes bags below 50 microns appear to be the most common, are the least likely to be re-used or economically recycled, and are more likely to end up as an environmental problem. The Council considers bags of heavier plastics (50 microns and above) will be more likely to provide an alternative to single-use bags in the short term for those who do not wish to purchase more permanent alternatives. If needed, the Council notes, the regulations can be amended at a later date to cover such items.

Individuals who supported a phase out below 50 microns consider such bags are more easily distributed in the environment and therefore more likely to cause harm. Thicker plastic bags were considered more likely to last longer (ie, be more reusable).

Foodstuffs, Kmart, and some other retailers also support a 50 micron limit. Countdown comments it will accept any Government determination on this matter, although noting it does currently offer a 55 micron 'emergency bag' for customers who have forgotten their reusable bags.

These retailers have undertaken research with their customers on how to effectively move away from single-use plastic shopping bags. While these retailers note they strongly encourage customers to bring their own multi-use bags, they currently also offer a 55-65 micron

⁵⁴ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 2067 and 6049.

⁵⁵ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 5998 and 6049.

⁵⁶ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 5998 and 6049.

⁵⁷ Individual submitter, submission reference number 6074.

⁵⁸ Individual submitter, submission reference number 596.

⁵⁹ Northland Regional Council, submission reference number 5911. Whanganui District Council, submission reference number 6250.

⁶⁰ Local government submitters, submission reference numbers 1220 and 5991. Western Bay of Plenty District Council, submission reference number 5631. Kapiti Coast District Council, submission reference number 5852. Waipa District Council, submission reference number 5880. Dunedin City Council, submission reference number 5988. Tasman District Council, submission reference number 6047. Queenstown Lakes District Council favoured 70 microns, submission reference number 6063.

'emergency' plastic bag that is designed to be used multiple times (eg, the Countdown bag was tested at 20 uses).

Kmart notes its customers have an expectation of access to a basic, entry level (reusable) bag for those times they forget to bring one from home, particularly as customer visits to a department store are often unplanned. Kmart in Australia is replacing free single-use bags with an entry level, reusable bag (50 microns and made from 80 per cent recycled material) at a cost to the customer of 15 cents. Customers can also choose from an expanded range of reusable bags (70 micron and above). Kmart comments:

This two-pronged approach allows our impulse customers to access a genuinely reusable bag on a user pays basis when they forget their own bag or need additional bags to take their fragile, bulky or intimate goods home safely and privately.

The remainder of submitters generally prefer 70 microns

Amongst those who commented on a preferred bag thickness to be covered, there was majority support for 70 microns across all submitter types.

Retail NZ prefers 70 microns as it would have the greatest impact in reduction, because it would include not only supermarket or take-away style singlet bags, but also a number of other bags of varying thickness offered by retailers across the country. This view was supported by the local government, business, and individual submitters who support the 70 micron limit.

For example, Kapiti Coast District Council supports 70 microns, to ensure reusable bags are sufficiently robust for sustainable extended use and to avoid the potential for lighter bags to be erroneously treated as 'single use' by retailers.

5. Possible exemptions

Submitters were asked if there should be any exemptions to the proposed phase out.

Of the 6,129 respondents to the question, 196 agreed that there should be exemptions.⁶¹ The responses by submitter type are outlined in figure 5 below and table 3 in the Appendix.

The Christchurch City Council submission raises a number of scenarios in which exceptions could be considered:

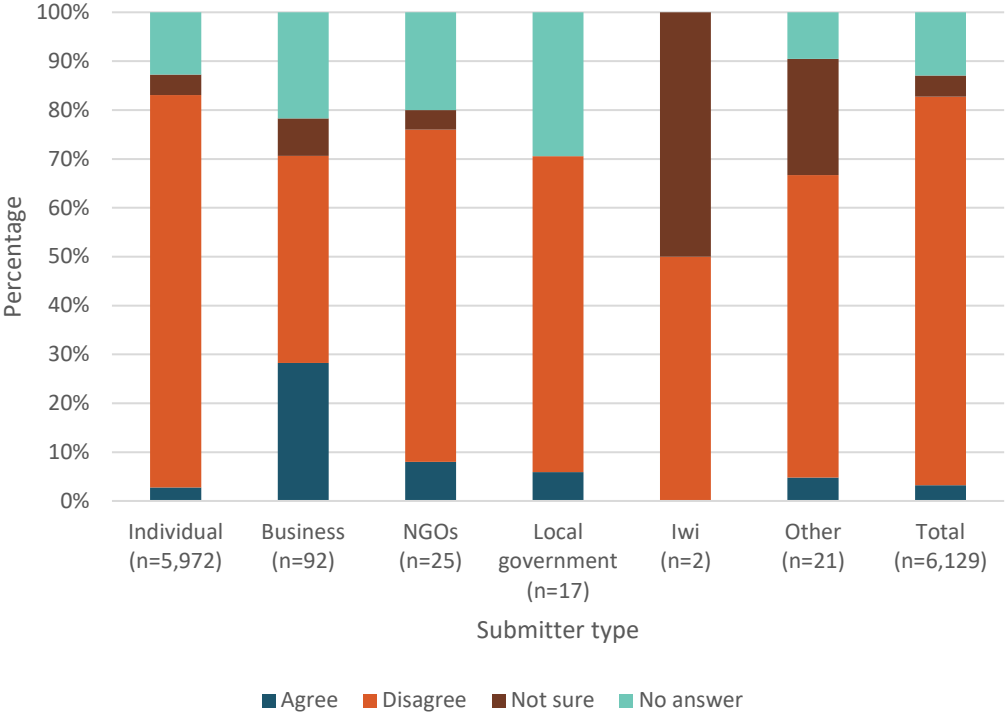
Exceptions could be considered on a case by case basis for example: A) Bags used to contain meat or fish that could contaminate other food if not properly contained, although traditionally paper sheets would have been used. B) Bags used by Pharmacies to support patient privacy when carrying prescriptions. Compostable plastics should not be exempt...⁶²

⁶¹ Of these, nine individuals said 'yes' there should be exemptions in the short form, but their long form answers made it clear they thought there should be no exemptions.

⁶² Christchurch City Council, the only local government submitter that said yes to this question, submission reference number 6239.

The main types of bag that submitters discussed were degradable bags (eg, biodegradable, compostable), and bags with other uses eg, bin liners, light-weight barrier bags, and bags used to pick up pet waste and store nappies.

Figure 5: Responses to whether there should be exemptions from a mandatory phase out



Some submitters consider some or all degradable bags should be exempted

The majority of submitters support the proposed inclusion of ‘degradable’ bags, which was defined as those made of biodegradable, compostable and oxo-degradable plastic.

However, 10 businesses and 40 individuals advocate that compostable bags not be included in the mandatory phase out, particularly those certified to break down in home composting systems. Variations included approved biodegradable or corn starch bags being excluded;⁶³ all certified compostable bags;⁶⁴ and compostable bags specifically for compostable kitchen waste.⁶⁵ Home compostable was distinguished from commercially compostable by eight individual submitters.⁶⁶

⁶³ Business submitter, submission reference number 268.
⁶⁴ Compost Me Ltd, submission reference number 485. Business submitter, submission reference number 713. Insinc Products Ltd, submission reference number 5901. Bags Not, submission reference number 5684. EP Tech Ltd, submission reference number 6124. Compostic, submission reference number 6198. Papamoa Physiotherapy, submission reference number 6218.
⁶⁵ Poynter Agencies Ltd, submission reference number 724.
⁶⁶ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 62, 883, 1090, 3752, 6192, 6232, 6237 and 6300.

A further three individuals⁶⁷ and one business⁶⁸ were unsure, but thought that bio-degradable, compostable, corn starch or oxo-degradable bags were a good option. Six individuals⁶⁹ were supportive of compostable or biodegradable options, provided there were systems to enable these bags to be broken down correctly, and that it was proven (with onus on the manufacturer) that this actually occurred.

Submissions were both from importers or distributors of such bags, and from those who used compostable bags. These submitters consider that compostable bags represent a substantial improvement when compared to single-use plastic bags, and that moves towards adoption of such packaging should be supported.

Submitters who answered 'yes' to the first consultation question can be assumed to support the inclusion of degradable bags in the mandatory phase out. Nonetheless, some submitters who answered 'yes' to this question also comment explicitly on their support for the inclusion of degradable bags. For example, some submitters argue that compostable plastics should not be exempt due to resource consumption and lack of facilities to process them properly at end of life.⁷⁰

The waste sector organisation WasteMINZ supports the proposed phase out. WasteMINZ surveyed its members, and notes 94 per cent of its members support including oxo-degradable bags in the phase out. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. Firstly, the recycling industry has confirmed that these bags cannot be recycled as they cause contamination when mixed with other films. As an example, they are not acceptable in The Packaging Forum's soft plastics recycling scheme. They also cannot be composted
2. Secondly, scientific evidence indicates that oxo-degradable plastics do not quickly degrade into harmless residues in the marine environment, but instead initially fragment into 'tiny pieces' of plastic and contribute to microplastic pollution
3. Thirdly, there are a variety of other alternatives on the market which can replace these products.

WasteMINZ members had a wider variety of views on compostable bags, which 67 per cent of members felt should be included. Those who felt compostable bags should not be included generally felt that compostable bags had a role to play in the future, more specifically when considered in tandem with kerbside food waste collections. WasteMINZ submits that to ensure a balanced response on this issue, it contacted all industrial composters in New Zealand and asked whether they were currently able to process compostable bags. WasteMINZ notes one facility now has the technology to trial taking them; another two facilities would consider taking them, but only if used as bin liners for food waste collections.

In conclusion, WasteMINZ comments:

When balancing the waste hierarchy and the factors outlined above, we agree that, at this time, compostable bags should be included in the phase-out. However, when appropriate infrastructure is available to collect and process these products (such as a kerbside food waste collection, paired with composting infrastructure designed to accept these

⁶⁷ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 400, 508 and 5554.

⁶⁸ Live Green NZ, submission reference number 6199.

⁶⁹ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 66, 804, 1454, 1468 and 2252. Other submitter, submission reference number 5639.

⁷⁰ Individual submitter, submission reference number 1016.

products), it would be appropriate to review this position and consider if it is still appropriate.

WasteMINZ notes it is currently working with the composting industry to identify the infrastructure and investment needed nationally to process compostable packaging at scale, and the role that such packaging should play.

Some submitters raised questions about the coverage of other types of bag

Some submitters raise the question of possible implications for specific types of plastic bags commonly in use. In particular, questions were raised about light-weight 'barrier bags' of the type currently offered in produce, butchery, and deli departments. Submitters also asked about bags used as bin liners, to pick up pet waste, and for putting nappies in (see [section 1](#)).

Barrier bags

Barrier bags are thin plastic bags without handles that are used for unpackaged perishable food such as fruit, vegetables, meat and fish

A number of submitters consider barrier bags are required for food safety reasons,⁷¹ particularly for the safe handling of meat or chicken, where the product needs to be kept separate from other food products to avoid cross-contamination.

These submitters did not consider reusable alternatives are as effective, or could increase overall plastic waste.

Foodstuffs comments an exemption is needed for:

Barrier bags, which are necessary to provide a barrier between a risk item e.g. raw meat, laundry products, cleaning products, etc and ready-to-eat-food. Produce roll bags should also be exempt. These provide a very hygienic option for packaging fresh, loose produce, but can be reused, fall within the tare weight tolerance for Weights and Measures Act compliance removing the requirement for produce to be unpacked for weighing at checkout, and can be readily recycled via the soft plastics recycling scheme.

Conversely, some submitters explicitly call for the proposed phase out to also include bags without handles "otherwise all fruit bags at the supermarket will still be allowed - there is no need for this type of single use bags."⁷²

Some submitters consider certain types of business should be exempted

A small number of submitters raised specific scenarios which they consider should be exempt from a phase out, including:

⁷¹ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 124, 215, 229, 456, 671, 1595, 5778, 6060, 6175 and 6186. Retail NZ, submission reference number 5826. Mad Butcher Holdings Ltd, submission reference number 6229. Foodstuffs NZ Limited, submission reference number 6238. Kmart NZ, submission reference number 5731.

⁷² Individual submitter, submission reference number 6174.

- to wrap around cut flowers⁷³
- shops catering to tourists (who may not have or wish to purchase a reusable bag)⁷⁴
- farmers markets⁷⁵
- for carrying fish from a pet store to place of residence⁷⁶ (although the submitter notes it is not proposed to cover bags without handles, so this type of use would not be affected)
- to preserve patient confidentiality⁷⁷.

6. Phase-out period

The consultation document proposed an implementation period of at least six months, which is the minimum period necessary to fulfil New Zealand's obligations under the World Trade Organisation.

The majority (4,769 or 78 per cent) did not support an implementation period of at least six months (figure 6). Those who did not support this proposal include individuals (4,721), businesses (32), NGOs (9), other (6) and local government (1).

⁷³ Business submitter, submission reference number 268.

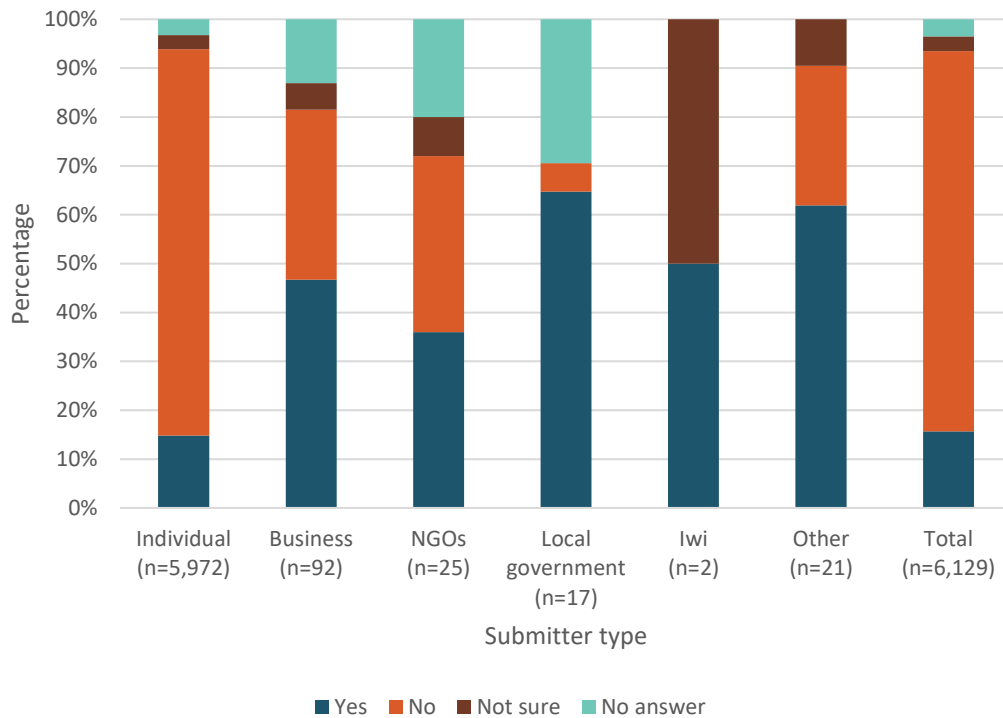
⁷⁴ Hisato Ibe, submission reference number 233.

⁷⁵ Whangarei Growers Market Association Ltd, submission reference number 5773, which comments that a blanket ban on singlet style shopping bags would necessitate individual packaging of many items currently sold loose, e.g. lettuce, watercress, rocket. Conversely, several submitters specifically commented on their support for phasing out single-use plastic shopping bags, including individual submitter, submission reference number 372 (who runs Wesley Market in Auckland), business submitters, submission reference number 613 and 675, and Spring Grove Olives, submission reference number 999.

⁷⁶ Retail NZ, submission reference number 5826.

⁷⁷ Christchurch City Council, submission reference number 6239.

Figure 6: Responses on whether submitters agreed with a proposed mandatory phase-out period of at least six months



Many submitters believe the phase out should take place as soon as possible

The majority of submissions (4,289 or 70 per cent, including 4,170 Greenpeace form submissions) propose an implementation period of less than six months from Gazettal of regulations. For example, the Greenpeace submission states “The phase-out should take effect as soon as possible (2-6 months).”

Submitters also state that we need action now⁷⁸ or as soon as possible.⁷⁹ Those submitters who provided an explanation for their response generally consider that the level of public interest and dialogue has meant businesses have already had time to prepare⁸⁰, and that it would not be complex or difficult to phase the bags out.⁸¹

Some submitters agree six months is adequate

Most local government submitters see six months as providing an appropriate balance between addressing a pressing environmental concern, and allowing consumers and the private sector to adjust.

Submissions in favour of a six month phase out note there is already a high level of public and industry interest in the issue of single-use plastic shopping bags. Submitters suggest that six

⁷⁸ Whaingaroa Environment Centre, submission reference number 374.

⁷⁹ The New Zealand Adventure Company, submission reference number 412.

⁸⁰ NGO submitter, submission reference number 6071.

⁸¹ For example, individual submitter, submission reference number 19.

months capitalises on “groundswell”⁸² while providing sufficient time for adaptation, so long as support communications associated with the ban are comprehensive and widespread.⁸³

Countdown and Kmart both submit that six months is sufficient for them to make the required changes.

Although it supports a six month timeframe, Tasman District Council comments that regulations should be in place so the phase out comes to an end before December 2019. This view is shared by Para Kore Marae Incorporated.

Five submitters believe that the phase out period should be at least nine months. The core reasoning of these submitters is that nine months is slightly more accommodating to consumers and retailers.

Waipa District Council comments that:

Allowing a little more lead in time will allow more people to be accepting and ready for change... Allowing a little more time will mean a longer conversation can be had with New Zealanders to prepare for the change and we can take them on the journey with us. Retailers will then have adequate time to prepare signage and other tools to help remind their customers to bring their bags or plan similar initiatives to support their customers to change their behaviours. This will also allow the Ministry to work on supporting needs and enforcement....

Other submitters believe 12 months or more is required

Various business submitters (both importers and retailers) propose a phase in period of at least 12 months to enable existing stock and import orders to be fully run through.

Retail NZ advises that major supermarkets and retailers are already moving to phase out lightweight carry-bags and so will not need more than a six month phase in period. However, Retail NZ notes some of its smaller members typically buy a two-year supply of bags or more to get a cost-effective price. Consequently Retail NZ considers a two-year timeframe would allow small to medium enterprises to work through their supplies and reduce the risk of perverse outcomes, such as dumping of surplus bags.

In total, 29 submitters support a one year phase out period. Many of these submissions are from businesses who are concerned about the commercial consequences of a faster phase out.

These submitters state that six months is too soon for imported stocks of goods to be used up, and that this will involve costs for the retailers.⁸⁴ Further, some submitters state that the time from placing an order to importation to sell is too long to facilitate a six month phase out period.⁸⁵ This is because importing lead-times are three to four months and customers will be

⁸² Western Bay of Plenty District Council, submission reference number 5631.

⁸³ Kapiti Coast District Council, submission reference number 5852.

⁸⁴ Business submitter, submission reference number 1148.

⁸⁵ Flexoplas Packaging Ltd, submission reference number 6034.

warehousing six months' worth of bags⁸⁶ and potentially holding custom-printed stock for clients for up to a year in order to take advantage of cost scaling.⁸⁷

Some submitters are concerned with the unknown costs of having to destroy stock at a loss⁸⁸ or dumping non-compliant bags.⁸⁹

A local council supports the position of WasteMINZ that retailers should be provided with information at least four months before the regulations come into force, as it will allow them 10 months altogether to source appropriate alternatives.⁹⁰

7. Costs and benefits

We asked submitters whether they agreed that the benefits expected from implementing a mandatory phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags exceed the costs expected from implementing the phase out.

Submitters were asked to consider both monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits (those that can be measured by money as well as those that can't).

Overall, 91 per cent (5,582) of the submissions agree the expected benefits exceed the expected costs. Two per cent (133) are not sure and four per cent (251) did not answer. More submitters agreed than disagreed across each submitter type (see figure 7 below and table 4 in the Appendix).

⁸⁶ Convex Ltd, submission reference number 5973.

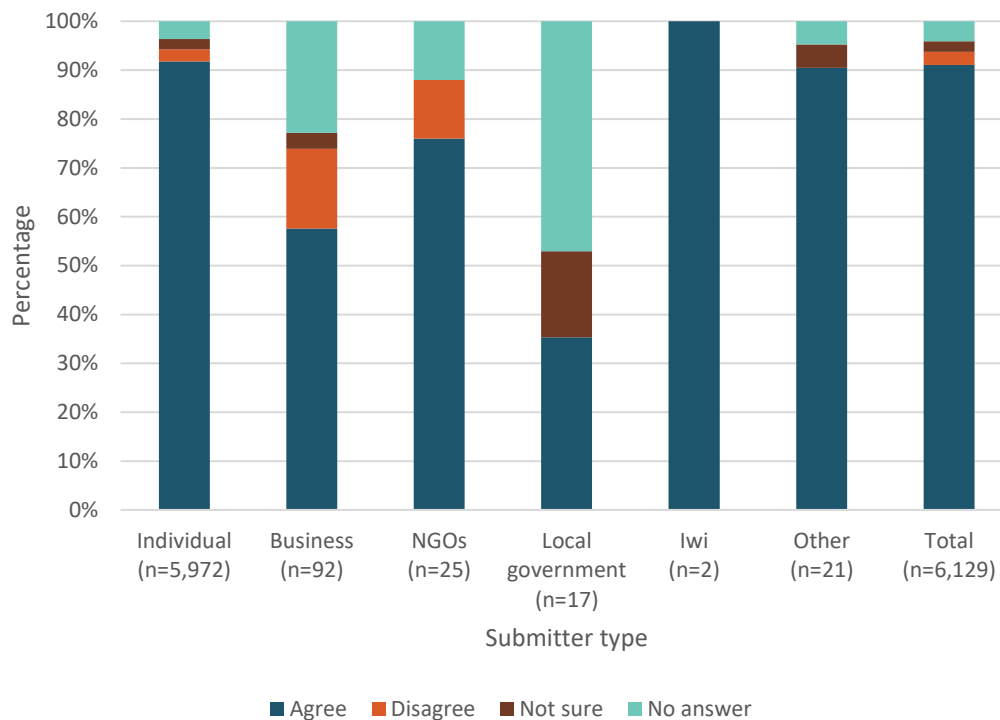
⁸⁷ The Packaging Company, submission reference number 6373.

⁸⁸ Palmers Garden Centres, submission reference number 5589.

⁸⁹ The Packaging Company, submission reference number 6373. Data Harvest Limited, submission reference number 878.

⁹⁰ Local government submitter, submission reference number 5991.

Figure 7: Responses on whether the expected benefits exceed the expected costs of phasing out single-use plastic shopping bags



Some businesses submit they will incur costs as a result of a phase out

Among the 92 responses from businesses, two businesses claim negative effects for local workforces. Other submitters note they will need to come up with new solutions for their business or cannot yet forecast the consequences until shopping behaviour has been reviewed. Some companies note they may need to price products higher to cover the increased cost of reusable bags.

Impacts of proposal on New Zealand importers and manufacturers of single-use plastic shopping bags

Businesses submit the following types of potential impacts on their operations:

- potential for loss of sales:* Convex, York Paper Company, Compostic, Kiwi Plastic, and EP Tech sell single-use plastic shopping bags (both in the less than 50 micron and 50–70 micron range). These submitters note potential for loss of sales, if customers switch to alternative suppliers. Some also note potential for sales of certain product lines to increase, if existing or new customers wish them to supply thicker, reusable bags instead⁹¹
- reduced orders of products not proposed to be phased out:* one submitter, Kiwi Plastic, comments it has experienced a significant drop-off in orders after recent media coverage of proposals to ban plastic bags, as well as high uncertainty from clients (even those with special orders not proposed to be covered by the phase out)

⁹¹ For example, Convex submits it has annual sales of around \$105,000 that would be affected. Convex employs 130 staff.

- *substantially higher packaging costs*: Convex comments that the costs of packaging to retailers/consumers would go up considerably based on the need to provide thicker bags. Depending on the thickness that is adopted (50 or 70 microns), Convex considers this could easily increase packaging spending by 200–300 per cent.
- *need for adjustment period*: some businesses note that they would take time to reconfigure their businesses to adjust to any phase out (eg, Convex would require a 12 month period for phasing out raw materials which are imported with 3–4 month order placement times).

Impacts of proposal on New Zealand retailers

Retailers provided information on the types of impact on their businesses.

One large-scale retailer⁹² notes it removed single-use plastic bags from all its stores in 2008. It notes that more than \$500,000 was invested in remodelling stores across Australia and New Zealand to accommodate the box bays (so customers could use boxes instead of plastic bags). Countdown provides information on the types of configuration changes needed to accommodate a move away from plastic bags: “changing our bag carousel design, training our team, providing additional resource at peak times, exchange rate factors on the bags etc.” Countdown notes that while some of these costs have been offset by no longer having to buy and provide single-use plastic bags for customers, they are donating the profits for one of their reusable bag options to charitable causes.

Foodstuffs comments it has spent a large sum implementing its own voluntary initiative. Costs include: project management, the costs of trialling alternate bag options, consumer communications and marketing, and giving away more than 2 million long-life reusable bags to date.

Some submitters raise the possibility of increased risk of store theft (because it is harder to monitor if people are placing purchases in their own bags).⁹³ One submitter notes international experience supports this concern.⁹⁴

Other types of impacts on businesses:

Other types of impact identified by submitters include:

- *reduction in research and development on alternatives to plastic*: Complast and EP Tech submit that covering compostable bags in the phase out would cause all research and development into environmentally-sustainable alternatives to petroleum-based single-use plastic shopping bags to stop. EP Tech considers a ban on single-use plastic shopping bags is likely to hinder research and development into green technologies in relation to product packaging, domestic shopping, and domestic storage

⁹² Business submitter, submission reference number 6252.

⁹³ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 5647 and 6200. Toyworld Tauranga, submission reference number 987. Collars by Chris, submission reference number 220.

⁹⁴ The Packaging Forum, submission reference number 5879.

- *potential for worse options to be adopted:* As covered elsewhere (see [section 1](#)), some business submitters consider the alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags that are adopted could be more harmful environmentally, which they view as a potential environmental ‘cost’⁹⁵
- *potential for impact on types of product that can be sold:* For example, Whangarei Growers Market comments “Vegetable and fruit vendors can pack several items in a single singlet bag. If these are phased out many items will be individually wrapped. If individual wrapping is phased out, some items will disappear from markets.”

Benefits

A majority of submitters (91 per cent) consider the benefits outweigh the costs. The types of sentiment raised by submitters include:

- better reflecting the true costs of using and disposing of plastic⁹⁶
- that it is not possible to cost New Zealand’s environment. For example, one individual comments “New Zealand’s landscape cannot have a price put on it. It is one of a kind and if it became affected by climate change, we cannot simply just buy it back. Once it is lost, it will be lost forever and it is our responsibly to preserve it for future generations to enjoy”⁹⁷
- that phasing out bags will bring a range of benefits, including protecting marine life, reducing movement of microplastics in the food web, and strengthening our clean green image and promoting tourism⁹⁸
- reductions in litter in the environment in general, and marine environments in particular⁹⁹
- that the change is an initial step that would lead to wider societal changes in relation to waste and resource use¹⁰⁰
- that future generations will also benefit.¹⁰¹

Some submitters also commented that they consider potential costs to be low. For example, a business comments “From our experience customers bring their own shopping bags, boxes, baskets, container etc. We never had a drop in sales because of the plastic shopping bag ban.”¹⁰²

Additional information on submitters’ views of the benefits of the proposed phase out are contained in [section 1](#).

⁹⁵ For example, ComPlast, submission reference number 5929.

⁹⁶ For example, individual submitter, submission reference number 6223.

⁹⁷ For example, individual submitter, submission reference number 6272.

⁹⁸ For example, individual submitter, submission reference number 6342.

⁹⁹ For example, various local government submissions.

¹⁰⁰ See section one above.

¹⁰¹ For example, Countdown submits it “overwhelmingly believe[s] that the benefits of a phase out for the environment and for future generations of New Zealanders outweigh any incurred costs.”, submission reference number 436.

¹⁰² Business submitter, submission reference number 613.

8. Supporting effective implementation

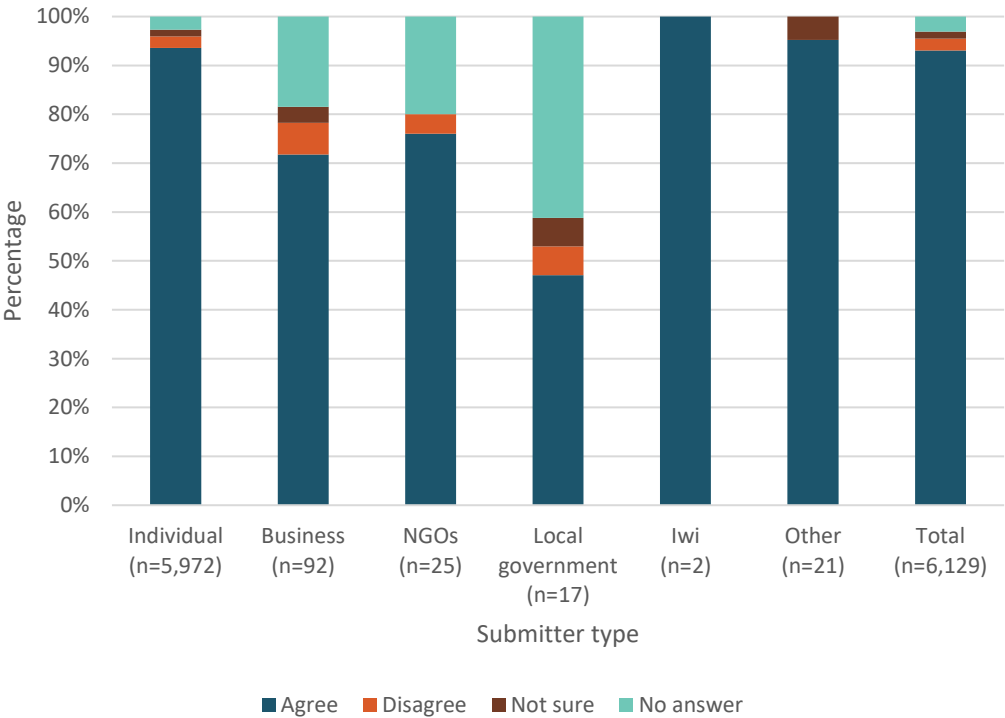
Availability of reasonably practicable alternatives

Submitters were asked:

- “Do you think that reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags exist in New Zealand? Why / why not?”
- “If no, what do you think is missing currently that would need to be available?”

Figure 8 breaks down the 6,129 received responses to the first question by submitter type and general position.

Figure 8: Responses to whether there are ‘reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags’



Most submitters consider there are reasonably practicable alternatives

Ninety-three per cent of submitters agree that reasonably practicable alternatives are available – and in many cases, are in use already. Further, submitters think that as the phase out takes effect, more alternatives will emerge as the public and business innovate and adapt.¹⁰³

Businesses like Kmart, Foodstuffs and Countdown submit that they are already offering alternatives. Paper bags, medium- and long-life reusable bags made from plastic and non-plastic materials are all seen as alternatives. Kmart notes that reusable bags can be purchased across a range of quality, fashion and price points to suit different budgets and needs.

¹⁰³ Northland Regional Council, submission reference number 5911.

Countdown states that although their first preference is customers bringing their own reusable bag, they have a range of alternatives available to aid the transition for customers.

Other themes included significant support for paper bags and a focus on the issue being a behavioural one.

Some submitters agree that there are alternatives, but “thought and support is required from a central government and business perspective to ensure their practical implementation.”¹⁰⁴

Transcontinental New Zealand comments that governmental support will be required to mitigate the impact on their business as people transition away from using single-use plastic shopping bags toward alternatives.

A minority consider reasonably practicable alternatives are not available

Two per cent of submitters do not think there are practicable alternatives. A further one per cent are not sure, while three per cent did not answer or answered not applicable.

These submitters commonly feel that the costs of reusable bags are currently too high, and that cheaper alternatives are required.¹⁰⁵ Some felt that people are lazy, so the alternative of reusable bags would not get used enough to offset their production.¹⁰⁶ These submitters considered this would result in a worse environmental outcome than the use of single-use plastic shopping bags.¹⁰⁷

Some submitters consider that alternatives would also be needed for the current secondary uses of single-use plastic shopping bags, for example as bin liners. For example, one submitter claims:

There needs to also be affordable or free initiatives available to homeowners/renters/ individuals to enable better disposing of household general rubbish. Affordable bag alternatives for household rubbish should become available to the general public ASAP.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Western Bay of Plenty District Council, submission reference number 5631.

¹⁰⁵ Green Essentials Produce Ltd, submission reference number 6037.

¹⁰⁶ Business submitter, submission reference number 6170. Flexoplas Packaging Limited, submission reference number 6034.

¹⁰⁷ Individual submitter, submission reference number 5957.

¹⁰⁸ Individual submitter, submission reference number 362.

Education and support

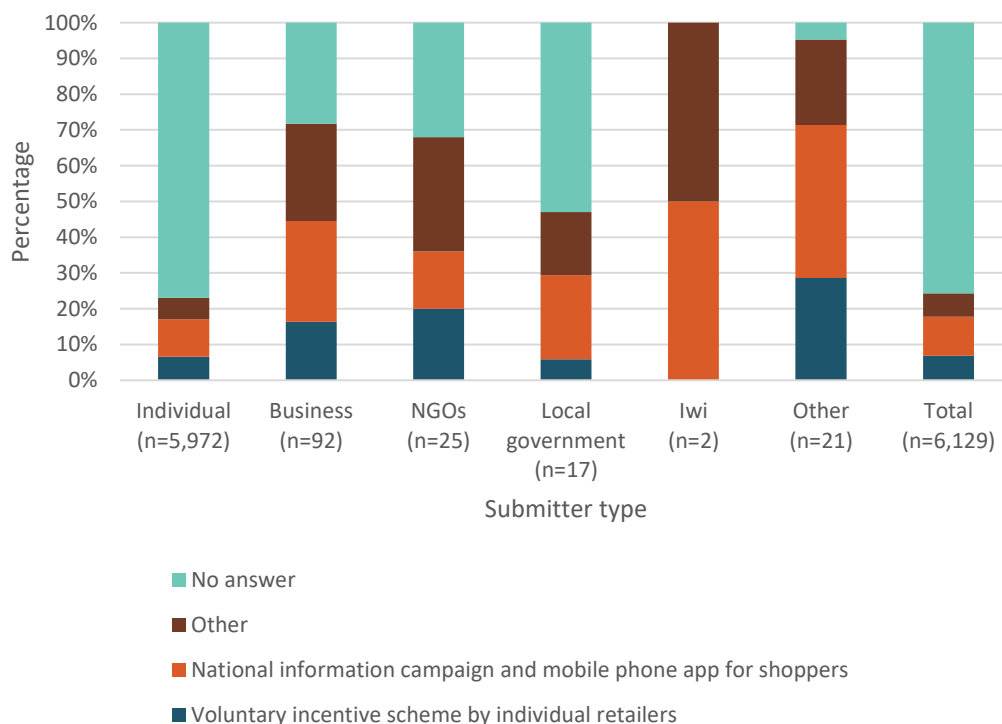
Submitters were asked:

- How can people be encouraged to reuse multiple-use shopping bags enough times to offset the environmental impacts of producing them? Submitters were invited to pick one or more of:¹⁰⁹
 - voluntary schemes by individual retailers
 - national information campaign and mobile phone app for shoppers
 - other (please specify).
- What would help you and your family adjust to life without single-use plastic shopping bags?

Submitters support various options for encouraging re-use of multiple-use shopping bags

Twenty-four per cent of submitters answered this question. Of those who did answer, most favoured the national information campaign (667 submitters), with 422 favouring a voluntary incentive scheme by retailers (see figure 9 below and table 6 in the Appendix). Due to a survey malfunction, submitters could only choose one option rather than several; some of those selecting 'other' did so in order to note their support for a voluntary incentive scheme being carried out alongside a national information campaign.

Figure 9: Responses on options for encouraging re-use of multiple-use shopping bags



¹⁰⁹ Although the question was intended to allow multiple responses, a technical malfunction meant some submitters were only able to select one response.

“Education is key” was a common sentiment.¹¹⁰ Some submitters gave specific examples, such as providing education in schools and large businesses.¹¹¹

A number of submitters identify a strong need for the Ministry for the Environment to provide information and guidance to support effective implementation. In particular, local government submissions tend to request national guidance on a range of matters. For example, submission 5991 considers retailers should be provided information on:

1. The most environmentally friendly alternatives
2. The need to avoid bags made from compound materials e.g. jute bags lined with plastic and paper bags with rope handles
3. What standard reusable compostable bags need to be certified to be accepted by commercial composting facilities; and
4. The importance of providing disposal information on the bag for end of life.

A common theme was that some alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags are better for the environment than others, and that the public and retailers both need guidance on this.

... both of the above. Also "boomerang bags" and similar initiatives where shoppers are able to borrow bags to return to the shop if they forget to bring theirs so they don't need to buy new ones. Less reusable bags for sale at stores - counterproductive to have so many different bags/different designs as it encourages people to want to buy more reusable bags with different designs. Encouraging the use/creation to Maori kete from harakeke, a sustainable alternative.¹¹²

Some submitters who commented on compostable plastics in particular also identified the need for further guidance for the public for example, on facilities available, appropriate use, and disposal. Manufacturer Convex would like to see new technologies investigated, with the support of Government funding, to help packaging companies achieve high percentage levels of recycled plastics when making flexible packaging. Convex would also like to contribute to better design for compostable packaging and infrastructure.

Another theme was financial incentives, that is that raising the cost of bags would help people remember to take their own bags with them, rather than having to purchase more.¹¹³ Financial support for community initiatives such as Boomerang Bags was also mentioned.¹¹⁴

Some submitters note specific consideration should be given to supporting lower-income families to adjust.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 1021, 1027 and 6114.

¹¹¹ Individual submitter, submission reference number 67.

¹¹² Individual submitter, submission reference number 68.

¹¹³ For example, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 82 and 85.

¹¹⁴ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 65 and 393.

¹¹⁵ Individual submitters, submission reference numbers 393, 1157, 5612, 6179, 6214 and 6329. NGO submitter, submission reference number 461.

A number of submitters comment they had already adapted readily to living without single-use plastic shopping bags.¹¹⁶

Some submitters comment on the need to find alternatives to the secondary uses of single-use plastic shopping bags (eg, for picking up pet waste, as bin liners and so on). This topic is discussed further above.

The Western Bay of Plenty District Council comments that:

The main concern raised by individuals about the phase out of single-use plastic shopping bags is not adjusting to shopping without them, but rather with their secondary uses, such as bin liners, picking up dog poo, carrying school children’s wet swimming gear, etc. Providing support and education to help families identify alternative bags or practices would help aid a successful transition.¹¹⁷

Monitoring and reporting

Need for data

Tasman District Council comments “There is currently a demonstrated lack of reliable information on the fate of plastics in New Zealand.” The Council recommends that central government improve data collection on the import, production, distribution, use and disposal of plastics in New Zealand.

WasteMINZ highlights the current lack of data on the numbers of single-use plastic shopping bags imported into New Zealand (either by unit count or weight). WasteMINZ proposes that reporting (by weight, unit count, and dollar value) should be required for any packaging material that is produced or imported into New Zealand (above a certain volume or value threshold). WasteMINZ considers this information would enable the Government to focus on successive targeted material types that have the greatest potential for reducing environmental harm. Local government submitters 1220, 5991 and Kapiti Coast District Council support this position.

Kapiti Coast District Council comments that requiring importers and local manufacturers of other single-use plastics to report to the Ministry on volumes by type, weight and unit number imported or manufactured would provide accurate data on which to base proposals for future actions as New Zealand transitions to a circular economy.

Various local government submissions support the setting of targets for reducing retailers’ use of single-use plastics, with mandatory reporting (eg, as part of a mandatory product stewardship scheme).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Including individual submitters (eg, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 6, 9, 10, 19, 34, 35, 39 and 43) and businesses (eg, Krollmann Software, submission reference number 33. Business submitter, submission reference number 7).

¹¹⁷ Western Bay of Plenty District Council, submission reference number 5631.

¹¹⁸ Queenstown Lakes District Council, submission reference number 5807. Russell Recyclers, submission reference number 5670.

Christchurch City Council proposes utilising data sources such as:

- industry records of avoided single-use plastic bags (reduction in bag use)
- number of reusable bags sold
- reductions in household plastic waste disposal and council audits of recycling contamination
- records from litter monitoring and observations from community clean-ups of parks, rivers and coasts
- customer satisfaction surveys.

Northland Regional Council comments that gross litter monitoring sites in representative urban areas could be established before the regulations take effect to provide a baseline for monitoring.

Western Bay of Plenty District Council views the Packaging Forum as best placed to gather and monitor the data about plastic bags and containers entering the New Zealand market. The Council considers to measure the success of the changes, data from supermarkets on the number of multi-use bags sold and replaced (if applicable) may be useful. The Council also considers waste audits may also be beneficial to see if the make-up of household waste has radically changed as a result of the ban.

Some submitters note existing data sources are available, such as Customs import data.¹¹⁹ Others comment that companies should be required to report more data on their use of single-use plastics.¹²⁰

Monitoring and enforcement

Northland Regional Council considers a comprehensive compliance and enforcement regime would not be necessary over the long term, as it considers the regulations will largely become self-policing (either through consumer complaints, or businesses responding to consumer preference). However, the Council comments that:

Random compliance monitoring of statistically significant sample sizes of various representative business sectors / retailers would however be advisable in the period after the phase out takes effect. This would give an indication of compliance rates by sector / group and identify any problem areas where greater efforts are needed.

Northland Regional Council further comments that Council strongly supports compliance and enforcement being the responsibility of central government through the Environmental Protection Authority as is the case with microbeads, or by other means available under the Waste Minimisation Act.

Kapiti Coast comments “the on-going education, compliance and enforcement of the phase out will require sufficient resourcing to ensure its effectiveness across the country.”

¹¹⁹ For example, Kmart, submission reference number 5731, NZ Stocked Ltd, submission reference number 917.

¹²⁰ For example, Clever Green Ltd, submission reference number 1003, NZ Stocked Ltd, submission reference number 917.

Other themes submitters raise include:

- a need for penalties for non-compliance¹²¹
- not having any exemptions to the rules, for ease of monitoring¹²²
- community assistance in monitoring – a “neighbourhood watch” approach.¹²³

¹²¹ For example, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 727, 785, 1076 and 5577.

¹²² For example, individual submitters, submission reference numbers 1048, 1063, 5681 and 5768.

¹²³ For example, individual submitter, submission reference number 1076. Ahika Consulting, submission reference number 5772.

Appendix: Additional tables

Table 1: Summary of submitter types and response to the proposal for a mandatory phase out of the sale or distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags in New Zealand, including those made of degradable (eg, oxo-degradable, biodegradable and compostable) plastic

			Response to proposal by type							
Submitter type	Count	Per cent	Agree		Disagree		Not sure		No answer	
			Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent	Count	Per cent
Submissions										
Individual	5,972	64%	5,727	96%	161	3%	25	-	59	1%
Business	92	1%	57	62%	23	25%	3	3%	9	10%
NGOs	25	< 1%	21	84%	2	8%	0	-	2	8%
Local govt	16	< 1%	13	76%	0	-	1	6%	3	19%
Iwi	2	< 1%	2	100%	0	-	0	-	0	-
Other	21	< 1%	21	100%	0	-	0	-	0	-
Web survey	3,225	34%	2,790	87%	318	10%	117	4%	0	-
Total	9,354	100%	8,631	92%	504	5%	146	2%	73	1%

Note: Individual submissions include 4,170 Greenpeace form submissions and 1,802 other individual submissions.

Table 2: Responses to the exemption of smaller retailers by submitter type

	Individual	Local govt	NGO	Iwi	Business	Other	Total
Yes	107	-	1	-	13	-	121
No	5,680	11	21	2	64	21	5,799
Not sure	26	-	-	-	-	-	26
N/A	159	6	3	-	15	-	183
Total	5,972	17	25	2	92	21	6,129

Table 3: Responses to exemptions from a mandatory phase out by submitter type

	Individual	Local govt	NGO	Iwi	Business	Other	Total
Yes	166	1	2	-	26	1	196
No	4,794	11	17	1	39	13	4,875
Not sure	252	-	1	1	7	5	266
N/A	760	5	5	-	20	2	792
Total	5,972	17	25	2	92	21	6,129

Table 4: Responses to whether benefits exceed costs by submitter type

	Individual	Local govt	NGO	Iwi	Business	Other	Total
Yes	5,483	6	19	2	53	19	5,582
No	145	-	3	-	15	-	163
Not sure	126	3	-	-	3	1	133
N/A	218	8	3	-	21	1	251
Total	5,972	17	25	2	92	21	6,129

Table 5: Responses to reasonably practicable alternatives to single-use plastic shopping bags by submitter type

	Individual	Local govt	NGO	Iwi	Business	Other	Total
Yes	5,590	8	19	2	66	20	5,705
No	138	1	1	-	6	-	146
Not sure	84	1	-	-	3	1	89
N/A	160	7	5	-	17	-	189
Total	5,972	17	25	2	92	21	6,129

Table 6: Responses on options for encouraging re-use of multiple-use shopping bags by submitter type

	Individual	Local govt	NGO	Iwi	Business	Other	Total
Voluntary incentive scheme	395	1	5	-	15	6	422
National information campaign	623	4	4	1	26	9	667
Other	358	3	8	1	25	5	400
N/A	4,596	9	8	-	26	1	4,640
Total	5,972	17	25	2	92	21	6,129