

Survey Results, July 2015

Proposal to support a plastic bag ban in NSW

Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance (Inc)



Survey background and methodology

In June 2015, the Alliance developed a proposal and background paper to guide discussion around a possible campaign to support a ban on plastic bags in NSW. The background paper is available here: www.sustainableneighbourhoods.org.au/plastic-bag-campaign. The Alliance Board wanted to gauge the level of support from our network; whether our members would be supportive of a plastic bag ban; and what kinds of actions our members believe we should focus on.

The survey was set up electronically in survey monkey, and the background paper and survey link was sent in the 'Sustainable Neighbourhood News' email newsletter, sent to 379 subscribers. The same was also sent to each Sustainable Neighbourhood group with a request for them to forward to their contact lists.

The survey was open for 3 weeks from 22 June to 10 July 2015.

25 people completed the survey.

Summary of results and discussion

In general, respondents were supportive of a campaign to support a ban on plastic bags (96%), and of the proposed positions and actions that were included in the background paper.

In terms of developing an effective campaign and communicating about the issues of plastic bags, the results highlighted some interesting perspectives to note.

- **Uncertainty or confusion about different types of plastic bags, eg biodegradable, degradable, compostable, barrier bags, checkout bags etc – what they are, and their various properties and impacts.**

The highest disagreement or level of uncertainty was related to the proposed position that "The campaign should not support the use of biodegradable or degradable plastic bags as a viable alternative."

The variety and names of different plastic bags, and especially the difference between biodegradable and compostable can be confusing, and it will be important to provide clarification and explanation about this point in any awareness raising or education activities.

- **Importance of education and community engagement**

Many respondents commented about the importance of education, community engagement and practical solutions as either a first or concurrent step to addressing the problem of plastic bags. Engaging with local businesses was also highlighted as an important strategy to undertake.

- **Finding alternative bin liners**

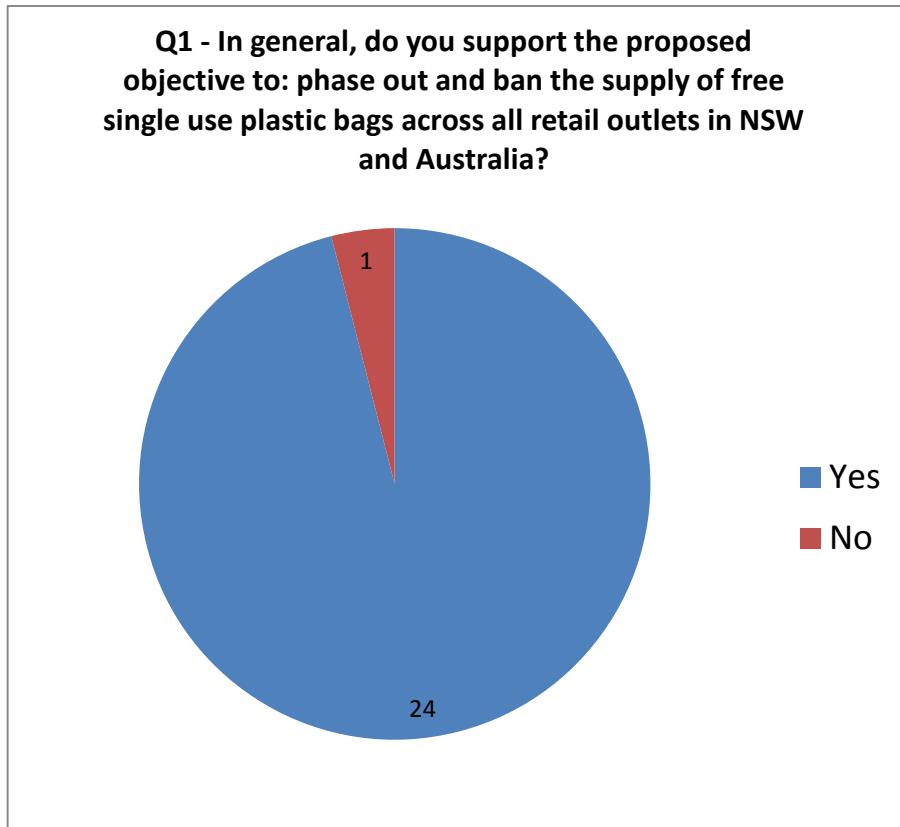
Some respondents noted that they currently use checkout bags as bin liners.

- **Community attitudes vs 'ours'**

While there is a clear general agreement from respondents about the aspiration to ban plastic bags, it is important to note that our survey is drawing from a relatively select pool of respondents. Many comments highlight the fact that it is difficult to change behaviour, convenience is important, and that retailers are unlikely to respond well to a campaign, at least in the first instance.

Detailed survey responses

Question 1. Support for the campaign in general



Comments

Supportive of a ban:

- I believe they need to be phased out completely, to eliminate this issue of plastic bags being left in the environment killing our native wildlife. I have seen it first hand and strongly support this move, go the Alliance. I also believe that the Alliance need to engage with local businesses, to help business educate their customers to the idea of reusable bags. A suggestion I have is to encourage the Alliance to ask local businesses like a group of shops to install a green reusable bag depository box, where people can drop off or take a reusable bag whenever they like, for free. e.g., there's an architecturally designed container box, roughly the size of a recycling bin, full of reusable bags. People can drop off or pick up a bag whenever they like, it gives them a constant visual message for reusable bags. This is just one idea for you to explore, I have personally seen this in action where I used to live in Sydney. Worth looking into it.*
- The sooner the better. NSW needs to get on board with the more progressive states.*
- Absolutely necessary.*
- Plastic "fruit" bags may be harder to eliminate*
- I pick up plastic from the beach always and we need to do some prevention.*
- Great idea, we already use our own bags for our shopping, BUT! in our kitchen and bathroom where things that are likely to go smell and leave the bin in a mess, it is so convenient to use a disposable waterproof bag of sorts that yes we do in spite of feeling guilty allow the odd plastic bag to slip through the net loaded with rubbish tied in with the handles. compulsory degradable bags would solve this problem, no?*
- If Tasmania, South Australia etc etc can ban the use of plastic bags then NSW should do so ASAP.*

Not supportive of a ban:

- I don't support the plastic bag campaign; I reuse the plastic bags I get at the checkout for my household garbage bins. If I didn't get them with my regular shopping, I'd have to buy packets of plastic bags to use instead. They're necessary if you duck in for shopping and you've forgotten to take your reusable bags and you don't want to/can't afford to buy a reusable bag. Some of the reusable bags are actually worse than a plastic bag when they break down. Plastic bags can be recycled in the soft plastics bins and people have the choice to bring their own bags, by all means increase the education and marketing in these areas. Bags are used and needed. Why not target the manufacture of the bag itself to one that is compostable. Why not educate people to compost their food waste, recycle packaging where possible and be more environmentally sensitive? The larger problem of food packaging and especially unnecessary food packaging, should be targeted for some sort of regulation and minimum requirements so that packaging is designed to be more environmentally sensitive.*

Question 2. Feedback about proposed campaign position

Q2. The statements below have been drafted to guide the Alliance's campaign position and activities. Please indicate whether you agree, disagree, or are unsure about each of the statements

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

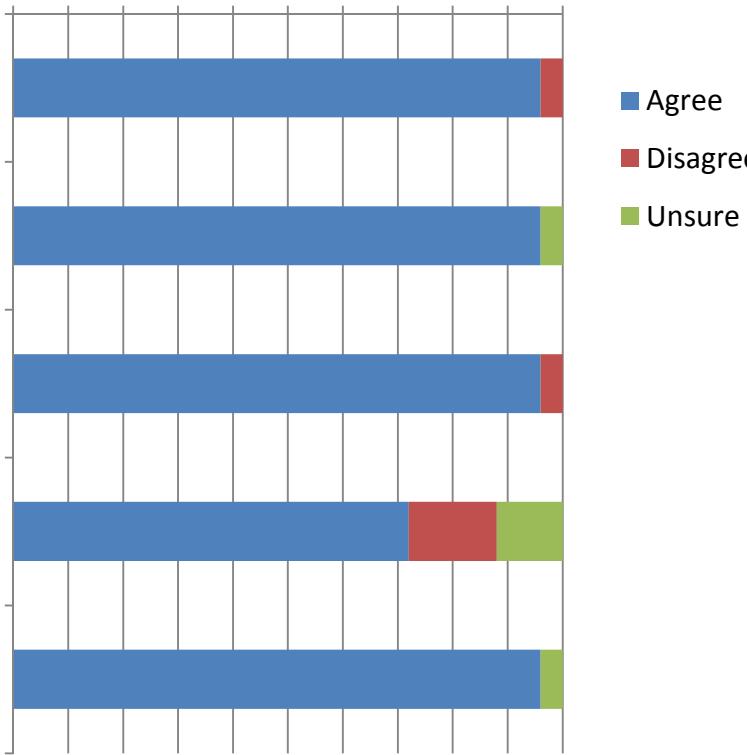
Banning plastic bags is an effective first step to change attitudes about single use, disposable items, and to reduce the amount of plastic pollution in our environment.

The Alliance should work closely with the Plastic Bag Free NSW coalition, and other relevant groups to ensure consistent campaign messaging and to leverage statewide and national support.

The Alliance should utilise lessons from successful efforts in other jurisdictions.

The campaign should not support the use of biodegradable or degradable plastic bags as a viable alternative.

Education and community engagement is an important component to ensure the success of a ban on plastic bags.

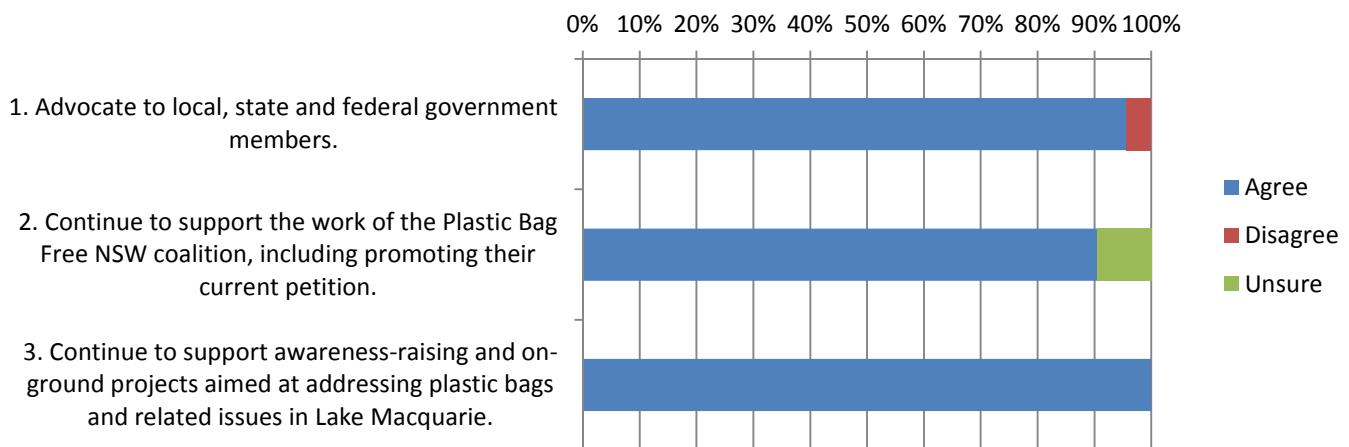


Comments

- *Business engagement is also a critical component. But, Banning plastic bags alone is not an effective first step, if there is no alternative way for customers and businesses to see what can be done differently. If we provide an alternative, such as a reusable bag container box that everyone has the freedom to use, then the possibilities can be endless. The Alliance could have their brand all over these architecturally designed reusable bag depository boxes. There would be a constant message that people can see in action, as they watch others dropping off and picking up bags. It's a positive thing for onlookers to see, as each person does it, it is a reinforcing positive message.*
- *Banning is perhaps not the "first step". Steps in education should precede, or at least be concurrent with banning.*
- *item 1: I believe education changes attitudes not banning something. item 2: I am unfamiliar with this group and do not know what other groups. item 3 Utilising lessons from successful AND unsuccessful efforts is important. item 4: Compostable / recycled paper bags may be better than the plastic bags? item 5 Education and community engagement is important in any campaign. But I don't agree with a ban.*
- *If there is the development of a fully biodegradable, compostable plastic product then perhaps it should be permissible*
- *The incentive is to get people to bring re-usable bags of their own. Many use these bags for rubbish. So this will not change that habit, as long as plastic bags are sold. In other countries (Sweden) recycled brown paper bags, thicker than typical are used for rubbish rather than plastic bags- I saw this happen. We don't see these for sale? Am I being cynical thinking the oil industry would not like to see plastic bag production diminish...*
- *I think that supporting the use of biodegradable plastic bags is not a good idea as it would encourage people to believe that there are no alternatives to plastic bags. I think that education and information are critical to the success of a ban on plastic bags*
- *what are the problems with using biodegradable plastic bags? I haven't studied the subject.*
- *Not so long ago, people were encouraged to bring their own (purchased) fabric bags and not use the plastic ones. Many people did this, as was in evidence at supermarket checkouts, but, with the continued availability of plastic, then this practice subsided.*
- *There has to be an alternative to the single use plastic bag, ideally one made of natural fibre - which would be biodegradable by definition*

Question 3. Proposed campaign actions

Q3. The statements below summarise the actions the Alliance is proposing to take. Please indicate whether you agree, disagree, or are unsure about each of the proposed actions.



Comments

- *For a reusable bag depository box, there would need to be grants involved as well as local business sponsorship to make such a suggestion work. I think it's worth a shot. I support all statements above.*
- *Our lake should be a real focus. Litter in the lake is deplorable. It is a local and meaningful factor in the campaign.*
- *I am a member of a local SNG. After receiving a request for feedback, I provided feedback by email on the 26.06.15 saying I did not support the campaign to ban plastic bags. I was surprised to see that on the Sustainable Neighbourhood News email dated 09.07.15 the following statement, which is inaccurate: The results so far are 100% supportive of the Alliance running a campaign.*
- *My name is Renee. On the 26th July 2015 I am holding an Eco Angel Clean Up in the Swansea Lake area.*
- *Not read the detail of these focus groups... I assume they have a balanced approach. But I need to confirm by further reading.*
- *Assisting and encouraging businesses to make alternatives available will be crucial as part of the education and awareness campaign.*
- *Collaboration with local businesses is vital. Providing them with information and easy to access resources to inform their customers of a plastic bag ban would contribute to businesses supporting the ban.*
- *These questions were not able to be answered properly.*
- *I agree with all the above but it would not print.*

**** For the first few days of the survey, this question was set up incorrectly (to force ranking of the 3 proposed actions). This resulted in 4 responses not registering correctly in the results. That is, those 4 people were only able to indicate one action that they agreed with.**

Q4. Do you have additional ideas or comments about what the Alliance and Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups could do to phase out single use plastic bags?

- *I think this campaign is a worthy cause to support, I may suggest to get into contact with Tim Silverwood from Take 3, a partnership with him would be beneficial to the campaign. He has had experience with lobbying NSW Gov over the 10c container deposit scheme. He has other most valuable contacts, that could be useful to the campaign.*
- *We need a united effort. The retailers are not enthusiastic about banning, or even reducing, plastic bags, without pressure from government. Lake Macquarie alone cannot achieve the banning of bags. We can start a groundswell of support, though, by publicity and education within our area, and then networking across the state.*
- *Hold market stalls around Macquarie Lake to introduce the ban of plastic and encouraging to support go green cloth bags.*
- *Radical proposals often result in no positive consequence...as one is telling the other party, what they strongly believe in/support, is quite wrong and detrimental. Hence a natural negative perspective from the 'other side'. They, like us, are also human one would like to believe. Only time and education of the newer generations will help in the longer term. Unless a crisis ensues to make people change or legislators legislate rapidly. Unlikely with this issue... Plastic bags are so convenient...they even replace the cloth nappy... We need to accept we live in a 'convenience society'...and perceived radical changes are always going to be difficult.*
- *After watching the trailer for Bag It, I thought it might be a good idea to challenge other Neighbourhood groups or Newcastle Council to a plastic bag ban competition - see which group can reduce plastic bag use the most. Not sure how that would work but people are naturally competitive and could be a motivating factor for businesses and the public.*
- *Like I said personally I would have no reason to use the odd regular plastic bag for my rubbish if biodegradable ones were supplied by the supermarkets. Is this not practical, or is there some other catch that I'm not aware of?*
- *Just lobby the governments to ban plastic bags. Is it that difficult?*

Q5. Would you like to suggest ideas for other campaigns that need to be addressed at a regional level?

- *Cigarette butts are a major problem, something to eliminate this issue. Illegal dumping of waste Coal trains*
- *Large natural bushland reserve(s) preserved for our future generations and for the sustaining of a diverse natural ecology. They must be set aside NOW as part of a long term vision for our wonderful city. Once gone, impossible to replace. Where is our Lane Cove National Park, our Blackbutt Reserve, our Kuringai Chase? (I know they are not all Council reserves, but you know what I mean.)*
- *Yes*
- *Recycling bins are in place for the public to use to dispose of plastic/glass bottles. Some members of the community still place these items in the general waste bins. I suggest more publicity about these recycling bins would be helpful to educate the public and promote these bins.*
- *Action on Climate Change*
- *Start education in schools as children will often accompany parents shopping and influence could be beneficial*
- *I recon that all stores stop handing out plastic bags make the public pay for any bags that they require from the check outs. Then that will make people bring their own green bags from home for their shopping you can build up enough bags as you like at \$1 dollar each and in no time you should have enough to pack your shopping. If you hand over your green bags to the checkout operator they will pack them as they do with the plastic ones and then that should help to do away with the plastic ones. If you don't have your bags with you, you will buy more green bags and that is extra cost to your shopping or otherwise wheel the trolley to your car and off load into the boot or onto the back seat. People will still come to the stores to do their shopping but will think twice about their green bags before they leave home. Ban the plastic bags.*
- *Make direct contact with big supermarket chains (Woolworths and Coles in first instance) and get into their headspace. TASNG has started this process already. They must identify their corporate image with this strategy and not necessarily have to wait for state regulation. After all they are corporates that transcend state boundaries.*
- *Preserve open space for animal habitat, clean air, water retention and a better environment.*

Spread of respondents

