

A campaign proposal to support a ban on plastic bags in NSW

Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance (Inc)



Some background

All Sustainable Neighbourhood groups have identified reducing waste and littering as major issues that they would like to address. As the representative organisation for Sustainable Neighbourhood groups, the Alliance aims to provide advocacy, support and assistance – particularly on issues that are relevant to all of our local groups.

Following a request from the Toronto Area Sustainable Neighbourhood Group, and a survey of our membership in June 2015, the Alliance is running a campaign to support and encourage a statewide (and possibly national) ban on plastic bags.

Toronto's experience

The Toronto Area Sustainable Neighbourhood Group and Toronto Tidy Towns have made considerable efforts to reduce and phase out plastic bag use in the Toronto area, including:

- making approaches to local supermarkets and retailers to voluntarily make changes to reduce plastic bag use
- running litter clean up days
- implementing the *Tossers can be bidders* project - an integrated litter reduction and awareness project including installation of signage and public place recycling bins, litter clean ups and a community mural.

While their projects have been successful to some extent, they recognise that a statewide or national effort is required to change business and community attitudes to address these complex issues.

The Alliance is well placed to support the statewide effort for a NSW ban on single use plastic bags.

Some plastic bag facts

(from <http://plasticbagfreensw.squarespace.com/about/>)

- Australians use more than 4,000,000,000 plastic checkout-style bags per year.
- Australians throw out more than 7,000 plastic bags per minute.
- Lightweight plastic bags are used for 12 minutes on average.
- They take up to 1,000 years to break down.
- In only 4 shopping trips, the average Australian family accumulates 60 plastic bags.
- Each year in Australia, an estimated 50 million plastic bags do not make it to landfill, instead entering the environment... and they never leave.
- Plastic bag litter kills tens of thousands of birds, whales, seals and turtles every year.
- These bags are made from fossil fuels – which are precious and non-renewable.

Why prioritise plastic bags?

The Alliance recognises that littering and waste encompasses a wide range of complex challenges to address behaviour change of individuals, community norms, and the priorities of businesses and government. We also recognise that Sustainable Neighbourhood groups are currently undertaking effective projects at a local level to address these issues such as regular litter clean up events, educational activities, and on-ground projects.

The Alliance is proposing a campaign that focuses on single use 'checkout style' plastic bags because:

- Plastic bags are symbolic of broader waste issues.
- Plastic bags are a relatively 'low hanging fruit' on which action can be taken as a first step to address broader waste issues and reduce the serious effects of plastic pollution.
- There is opportunity to utilise the considerable momentum created by the successful bans legislated in South Australia, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and the ACT, as well as by voluntary efforts undertaken in other Australian towns and localities.

Which bags?

The proposed ban would affect single use 'checkout style' plastic bags. Barrier bags, heavier boutique bags, reusable bags and compostable bags would still be allowed. The Tasmanian Government's [webpage](#) includes a helpful summary of what bags are restricted and allowed as part of that state's ban.

Previous actions

In March 2012, the Alliance agreed to join [Plastic Bag Free NSW](#), a coalition of environmental groups, and circulated their petition for a plastic bag ban in NSW. Their website includes information about the problems with plastic bags; hints for households to go plastic bag free; and information for retailers and businesses about going plastic bag free.

Campaign objectives and actions

Campaign objective.

To phase out and ban the supply of free single use plastic bags across all retail outlets in NSW and Australia.

The Alliance's position includes the following considerations.

- We see banning plastic bags as a first step to change attitudes about single use, disposable items, and to reduce the amount of plastic pollution in our environment.
- We will 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.
- We will utilise lessons from successful efforts in other jurisdictions.
- We do not support the use of biodegradable or degradable plastic bags as a viable alternative. Biodegradable plastic bags present their own environmental issues, and maintain the status quo of encouraging a single use, disposable mindset.
- We recognise that education and community engagement is an important component to ensure the success of a ban on plastic bags.

Campaign actions.

1. Advocate to local, state and federal government members to:
 - introduce and support legislation to deliver the above objective;
 - develop and deliver government education and support programs to assist businesses to implement the plastic bag ban; and
 - provide support for community programs to assist with education and awareness raising activities.
2. Continue to support the work of the Plastic Bag Free NSW coalition, including promoting their current petition.
3. Continue to support awareness-raising and on-ground projects aimed at addressing plastic bags and related issues in Lake Macquarie such as:
 - collaboration with local retailers to reduce and/or ban the use of plastic bags in their stores
 - educational and awareness raising activities to highlight the environmental impacts of plastics, and encourage individuals to reduce their use of plastic bags and other plastic products, especially single use items
 - promotion of alternatives to single use plastic products, eg reusable bags
 - local Eco Angel Clean Ups and litter audits

Some further reading

Organisations

- Plastic Bag Free NSW: www.plasticbagfreensw.squarespace.com
- Clean Up Australia: www.cleanup.org.au/au/Whatelsewesupport/SayNOtoPlasticBag

Where it's already been done

- BYO Bags – South Australian Government: www.byobags.com.au
- Tasmanian Government: www.plasticbags.tas.gov.au
- Northern Territory Government: www.ntepa.nt.gov.au/waste-pollution/plastic-bag-ban
- ACT Government: www.environment.act.gov.au/waste/plastic_bags
- Plastic Bag Free Torquay: www.plasticbagfreetorquay.org.au
- Plastic Bag Ban Freemantle: www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/One_Planet/Plastic_bags

Research

Various research papers, SA government:

www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au/resource-centre/publications/plastic-bag-phase-out

Give us your feedback

If you have comments, ideas or would like to discuss further, please contact us:

Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance

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