



Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
PO Box 762, Mossman, Qld. 4873

To: Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
ATTN: Waste Policy and Legislation

25 February 2017

DSSG Submission - Banning lightweight plastic shopping bags in Queensland

The Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) is an environmental advocacy group, founded in 2005, the objectives of which are:

1. To promote and encourage the adoption of the principles of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire area.
2. To promote the protection and conservation of the unique environment in the Douglas Shire area and it's surrounds including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas.
3. To promote social, economic and environmental balance.
4. To promote and support environmentally sustainable practices education and greater environmental awareness of visitors and residents of the Douglas Shire area.
5. To recognise and promote the sustainable practices of the Traditional Owners of the Douglas Shire area.

In 2015 the DSSG facilitated a local working group with the aim of reducing or banning single use plastics from the Douglas Shire. This working group included representatives from the DSSG, Tangaroa Blue, Douglas Shire Council, Bendigo Bank, Cairns & Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) and Low Isles Preservation Society (LIPS). The group allowed for the formation of "Plastic Free Douglas", a collaboration of local environmental organisations, businesses and residents to encourage retailers and shoppers in the Douglas Shire to voluntarily refrain from using single-use plastic bags. The 'Keep Paradise Plastic Free' campaign has included a Plastic Bag Free July with 100 participants, a Business Ambassador Program with over 50 local businesses committing to remain plastic bag free, and community education campaigns about the harms caused by disposable plastic.

The DSSG strongly supports the Queensland Government's decision to ban the use of lightweight plastic shopping bags.

In Douglas Shire, we observe that plastic litter impacts visual amenity and detracts from a tourist economy.

We know that plastic in our environment has proven impacts upon marine wildlife including birds and endangered turtles.

We are concerned that as plastics break up they leach toxins, triggering longer term impacts including potentially upon human health.

We are aware that the manufacture of single use packaging is an unsustainable use of fossil fuel reserves and in addition, it places pressure upon waste management and drainage systems.

Q1. Do you think that 1 July 2018 allows enough time for consumers and retailers to transition to plastic bag alternatives?

- Yes, people will adapt quickly to bringing their own bags.
- It has shown to be successful in many other states and countries.
- An education program for both consumers and retailers should be introduced prior to the ban date to educate on the problem of single-use plastic and the benefits of, and best alternatives to use.
- Important it is introduced at an appropriate time for retailers, i.e. not at Easter or Christmas.

Q2. Do you agree that biodegradable bags should be included?

- Yes
- Taking away all plastic bags will help people to transition.
- Degradable bags are designed to break into smaller pieces and resemble food for wildlife even more than standard bags.
- Biodegradable bags contain toxic agents to slow down decomposition taking up to two years to fully decompose. Throughout this time they are in the environment doing damage.
- People are more likely to litter biodegradable bags thinking that they are ok for the environment.

Q3. Do you support the Queensland Government working with other states and territories to encourage industry to reduce the number of heavier weight plastic department store bags?

- **Include heavier plastic bags in the policy now.** Voluntary action to reduce will include education coupled with either a ban/alternative product or a levy on bags anyway.
- Alternatives to thicker bags, such as consumers just using their own bags or recycled paper bags, must be encouraged.
- Heavy duty plastic bags take even longer to break down in the environment than normal ones

Q4. What else can be done by the Queensland Government to address plastic pollution?

- Stop mass release of helium balloons in Queensland. Once released they end up in the ocean and become a serious threat to wildlife.
- Find alternative to single use bait bags for fishing
- Adopt measures to reduce shipping and fishing debris
- Plastic items such as polystyrene cups and plates, plastic straws, plastic food ware, and other plastic packaging and food trays should be added to a list of problematic plastics for future policy and education campaigns. Ideally, a future ban (as in France) should take place.
- Microplastics (fibres, film, pellets and beads) also need to be managed – either through bans, take back schemes, filtration systems or simply using alternative, non-disposable, or organic items
- Action needs to be taken towards disposal of cigarette butts, which are plastic fibres and usually contaminated with chemicals.
- Provide incentives for outlets to use compostable crockery, such as the brand BioPak, as alternatives to plastic
- Put in place more bottle refilling stations to encourage people to bring their own bottle and not buy bottled a water
- Provide better education around recycling, especially in schools
- Provide more bins in public places, with a recycling bin alongside each one
- Include tip fees in house rates to reduce illegal dumping
- More monitoring and strict prosecution of people who dump illegally
- Advertise and encourage more clean-up campaigns, such as Clean Up Australia Day and Great Northern Clean Up Day
- Re-introduce littering advertisements on television
- Put filters on washing machines to prevent synthetic remnants from entering the drain system
- Collect and monitor rubbish at tributaries, particularly after the first flood of the season, as is done in Port Douglas, FNQ
- Introduce soft plastics recycling in all cities, not just major ones
- Effective implementation of the Container Deposit Scheme scheduled for 2017
- Provide funding for programs for non-profit groups working on the ground to reduce plastic in the environment e.g. Boomerang Bags, Tangaroa Blue and other community initiatives such as the Drain Stencil Project that spread the message about litter polluting the Great Barrier Reef

Yours faithfully



Laurene Hull

Secretary