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Waste and Resource Recovery Team
Economics, Governance and Waste
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To whom it may concern,

Discussion paper on reducing the impacts of plastics on the Victorian environment

Hobsons Bay City Council is pleased to provide input to the issues raised in the discussion paper on reducing the impacts of plastics and banning plastic bags.

Our submission supports a ban on plastic bags, and reinforces the importance of the Victorian Government's increased effort and funding into supporting plastic bag alternatives, reuse and recycling. It is also essential for communities to be fully engaged in the planning, establishment and operation of the plastic bag ban.

If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact Kaylene Johnson, Coordinator Environmental Management on 9932 1107 or email kjohnson@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Eddy", written over a horizontal line.

Chris Eddy
Chief Executive Officer



Submission to reducing impact of plastic

Hobsons Bay City Council's response to questions raised in the discussion paper on reducing the impacts of plastics on the Victorian environment are summarised below.

1a. Do you support a ban on single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags?

Yes

1b. Why Do you support a ban on single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags?

It is considered that plastic packaging and microbeads, including plastic bags, pose a risk to marine life and human health and are detrimental to local amenity. Council has previously been petitioned by community groups to support the ban on plastic bags. Council's response to date has been limited to its area of control and the availability of information relative to the economic, social and environmental effects that restrictions on single use plastic may pose to the broader community.

It is acknowledged that restrictions on plastic, including plastic bag bans, are likely to have broader and local economic implications and that more research would be required at higher levels of government. It is also important that the implementation of the ban on plastic bags be a well-considered decision that includes life cycle assessments of alternatives that a limited ban might cause. It is understood from the discussion paper that these assessments have been done and they indicate different benefits and costs to consumers and retailers but banning plastic bags would likely have overall economic benefits to Victoria, the environment and the community. The discussion paper highlights that if no action was taken, it is estimated that over 10 years, annual consumption of lightweight plastic bags could increase from 1.6 billion to 1.9 billion. Therefore, a ban on lightweight shopping bags makes sense.

2a. Should a ban include thick plastic shopping bags?

Yes

2b. Why should a ban include thick plastic shopping bags?

Banning certain types of plastic bags and not others may lead to flow on effects including more resource and energy intensive replacements including heavier, thicker plastic reusable bags. Alternatives such as thick bags have also been shown to breakdown into microplastics, an issue which Council has previously recognised poses a threat to marine and human life.

Bans in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and South Australia (SA) have exempted bin liners and thicker boutique plastic bags. This has led to an increase in sales of thicker plastic bags and an increase of 65 per cent for bin liners purchases. If a thick plastic bag ban is implemented alternatives should be considered to support impacted industries as well as support for a transition period.

3a. Should a ban include plastic bags that break down over time such as biodegradable, degradable or compostable bags?

Yes

3b. Why should a ban include plastic bags that break down over time such as biodegradable, degradable or compostable bags?



All existing plastic bag ban legislation in Australia exempts biodegradable bags where they meet the Australian Standard for compostability. However studies have shown there is no significant difference between standard and 'biodegradable' plastics in the way these plastics behave when ingested and they do not break down any faster (source: Implementing a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban in Queensland: Discussion Paper).

Queensland has banned all petrochemical-based oxo or hydro-degradable bags that break down into tiny pieces of microplastic as they can spread contamination in the environment. This is now a growing concern in overseas countries which have seen a proliferation of degradable bags. Even fully biodegradable or compostable plastics can still have the same physical impacts as conventional plastics when eaten by animals.

However councils use biodegradable packaging for other purposes such as in parks for dog waste to prevent littering. Many councils across Australia have implemented or are investigating the collection of organic waste using biodegradable bags for reprocessing. This direction and systems are supported by the Victorian Government through its Organics Strategy, Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation Plan and Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan. The Victorian Government should therefore consider exempting a ban on biodegradable plastic bags for the purpose of recovering organics from the land fill stream and collecting dog waste in parks.

4. If lightweight plastic bags were banned, we will need to consider exemptions for some purposes, like medical or security activities. Are there any types of businesses, organisations or activities that you think should be exempt from a plastic bag ban?

An exemption for medical and security activities is supported. It would also be important that Council's home delivered meals provided through the Community Chef initiative, which use plastic packaging, would be exempt under the health or medical related category. These home delivered meals provide nutritious meals to older people and people with a disability and their carers, who have been assessed as nutritionally at risk and are unable to prepare regular meals.

As previously mentioned the Victorian Government should also consider exempting a ban on biodegradable plastic bags for the purpose of recovering organics from the land fill stream or collecting dog waste in parks.

5. If lightweight plastic shopping bags were banned, what alternative bags would you prefer to use?

- Reusable 'green bags'
- Reusable cotton or calico bags
- Others (please specify) – reusing boxes used for packaging products

As the discussion paper suggests, the key to reducing the impacts of any type of bag is to reuse it as many times as possible. Therefore it would be important to have government and industry investment of time and resources in changing the attitude and behaviour of consumers on the reuse of these alternatives.

6. What other options should the government consider to reduce plastic packaging in Victoria?

It is expected that the Australian Government continue research into the extent, source, threats and effects of plastic pollution on the environment and human health, particularly microplastics,



provide support for innovative packaging solutions that offer alternatives to plastic, and support state and territories to implement targeted consumer behaviour change education campaigns. Council has previously made a submission with respect to container deposit schemes and supported the Victorian Government initiatives in which the packaging industry shares responsibility and costs.

7. What else should the Victorian Government do to reduce the impacts of litter at a local level and across the state?

Council has focused its attention on providing public place litter management services, supporting Clean Up Australia Day activities, raising awareness within the community and within Council to reduce and, if possible, eliminate single use plastic use. It also supports local community groups in litter reduction and clean-up activities throughout the year. However Council has limited resources, therefore Victorian Government support for behaviour change and education of the community and local businesses will be required. The Victorian Government can lead community awareness raising activities of the issues relating to single use plastics, ways to avoid their use and alternatives, and supporting local groups particularly in their reduction and clean-up activities. The Victorian Government will also need to fund ongoing education campaigns, which do not rely on local government to deliver, to draw attention to bans, alternatives and outcomes.

8. How can Victorians be encouraged to further reduce the impacts of litter in their communities?

There has been community interest broadly across Australia advocating and petitioning to reduce or eliminate single use plastic use, and undertake clean up and data collection activities. Locally this interest has come from sustainability groups including Friends Groups, Williamstown and Altona Beach Patrols, Port Phillip EcoCentre, Scab Duty, Tangaroa Blue Foundation, Sea Shepherd, Plastic Bag Free Victoria and Inner West, individuals and Council's Sustainable Environment Advisory Group. Victorians can be encouraged to further reduce their impacts through joining a community group as well as being provided with or encouraged to use alternatives such as reusable options.

9. What other plastic pollution issues should government, business and communities work together to address?

The focus of action should be plastics in general, not just shopping bags. Plastic packaging and microbeads pose a risk to marine life and human health and are detrimental to local amenity.

The last land based litter audit conducted in Hobsons Bay in 2008 showed that plastic (excluding beverage related items) accounted for three per cent of litter by number of items across the municipality. Plastic bags make up approximately 0.9 per cent by number of all littered items across Hobson Bay. Plastic bags made up 29 per cent of all plastic littered items by number while wrappers and plastic film accounted for 41 and 30 per cent respectively. By comparison, cigarette butts accounted for 59 per cent by number of litter while paper and beverage containers made up 16 and 11 per cent respectively. Beverage container litter includes glass and plastic bottles, plastic caps, straws, aluminium cans and ring pulls. Therefore research into pollution relating to cigarettes and beverage containers would be important to address for Hobsons Bay. Decisions on addressing other plastic pollution issues should also consider their impacts on environmental, social and economic factors.



Activities including research undertaken or proposed to be undertaken and past experiences of other jurisdictions, should be considered. These include the Senate Inquiry into the threat of marine plastic pollution in Australia and Australian waters (the Senate Inquiry), the National Ministerial roundtable discussion on a plastic bag ban and experiences in South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and regional towns.

10. What strategies to address plastic pollution do you think would be most effective?

Recommendations of the Senate Inquiry that are of particular importance to local government and also apply to the Victorian Government are as follows:

- continued research into the extent, source, threats and effects of plastic pollution on the environment and human health
- industry contribution to funding this research
- establishment of a working group of environment ministers to address marine plastic pollution
- pursuit of mechanisms to improve support and coordination of clean-up activities
- support to states and territories in banning single use plastic bags
- bans on the importation and productions of personal care products containing microbeads
- that the Australian Government encourage states and territories to support container deposit schemes
- support for innovative packaging solutions that offer alternatives to plastic
- support for state and territories to implement targeted consumer behaviour change education campaigns

It is also important to Council that local businesses and industry have input into further strategies and are allowed a transitional period to adapt with support from the Victorian Government.