



Presentation to Standing Committee on Law Amendments on Bill No. 152 Plastic Bags Reduction Act

Mark Butler, Policy Director, Ecology Action Centre
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Good afternoon Chair, Vice Chair and Members.

We supported the Plastic Bags Reduction Act when it was announced. We continue to do so, but it is essential that it is designed to prevent any unintended consequences, environmental and social, and that there is a timeline for next steps.

It is important to remind ourselves why are we doing this? Remember the waste hierarchy:

Refuse
Reduce
Reuse
Recycle
Waste to Energy(Burn)
Landfill

Refuse and reduce are at the top. This bill is a reduction bill so that is good.

There are a number of benefits to reducing use of plastic:

- 1.Reduces plastic pollution
2. Reduces greenhouse gases; and
3. Reduces pollution associated with production of fossil fuels, plastic production and even plastic recycling

EAC's basic approach to plastic is to reduce the amount of plastic we use and recycle the plastic we do use. We support the banning of single use plastics, starting with bags. While bags are a relatively small proportion of the waste stream they make up a disproportionate amount of litter and have a disproportionate impact on wildlife. I think of sea turtles which enter our waters every summer.

That said it is critically important that a ban doesn't have unintended consequences. We do not want it to result in the increase in the use of paper bags, some is to be expected, but if paper simply replaces plastic we are only slightly ahead. Banning single use check-out bags will reduce plastic going into the environment which is important. However, the environmental footprint of paper is considerable.

The best choice is no bag or a reusable bag. And again as the plastic industry has likely already told you, reusable bags need to be reused...in most cases at least 50 times for the environmental benefits to start to count.



Recommendation:

We recommend that the Government put a fee on paper bags and that there is a price on reusable bags.

We also do not want everybody who had been using checkout plastic bags for other purposes to go out and buy bags. Yes, some of that will happen, but it is entirely possible to manage garbage in your own home without using 'Sobeys' bags or other similar small bags.

A UN study which looked at single use plastic bans in over 60 countries stated the following:

Public awareness is a common denominator for the success of any of the above-mentioned initiatives aiming at having a broader social impact (whether dictated by law or engaged in voluntary). Similarly, awareness raising, monitoring and continued communication of progress to the public will help to build confidence and strengthen commitment to the cause.¹

Recommendation

The Government should invest in public awareness and education.

Not surprisingly we want to see more ambition around reducing single use plastics. If we stop here this Bill will be more about show than impact. Other single use plastics that should be considered include Styrofoam, straws, cutlery, coffee cups... We also support reducing exemptions over time.

Again as I have said with plastic bag ban it is really important that next steps are well designed so that we minimize the unintended consequences including social consequences. For example, we do not want a bag ban to disproportionately impact low income Nova Scotians. A straw ban should make sure that those with disabilities who require a straw to drink can have access to one. The Department has considerable internal expertise and there are external experts like Dr. Tony Walker, Dalhousie, Doug Hickman, PHA Consulting, Plastic Free Lunenburg, Clean Foundation, Coastal Action, Plastic Free St. Margaret's Bay and others.

Recommendation

We recommend that Government commit to a review of the plastic bag ban in one year and to adding other single use plastics in a thoughtful way within a year.

I mentioned the waste hierarchy at the top. Along with reducing plastic, the government needs to catch up on the recycling side. We need extended producer responsibility for packaging and paper products. I also encourage the Province to support the Federal government on national bans and national standards for plastics.

¹ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic_sustainability.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

