



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Water and Environmental Regulation**

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

Western Australia's

Plan for Plastics

June 2021



Department of Water and Environmental
Regulation

Prime House, 8 Davidson Terrace
Joondalup Western Australia 6027

Locked Bag 10 Joondalup DC WA 6919

Phone: 08 6364 7000

Fax: 08 6364 7001

National Relay Service 13 36 77

www.dwer.wa.gov.au

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The problem with plastics



Plastics have become part of our everyday life. They are inexpensive, convenient and used in many applications. However, the single-use and disposable nature of many of these plastics contributes to a linear, wasteful, take-make-dispose economy.

Because many single-use plastics are used outside of the home, they are frequently littered. Single-use plastics are not currently recycled by recycling and composting facilities, and most end up in landfill. In the environment plastic waste breaks up into smaller fragments and takes a long time to break down, if at all. Plastics of all sizes pose a major threat to marine, aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity and reduce the amenity of our environment and pristine coastlines.

The impact and abundance of single-use and disposable plastics is significant. These quick facts illustrate why we need to take action:

- In 2018–19, a total of 3.4 million tonnes of plastic was consumed in Australia, generating about 3 million tonnes of plastic waste (120 kg per person).
- Only 11 per cent of Australia's plastic waste was recycled and 89 per cent was sent to landfill in 2018–19.
- It is estimated that eight million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean globally each year.
- Recent coastal debris collections identified that more than 75 per cent of rubbish collected on Western Australian beaches was plastic.
- Land-based sources account for up to 80 per cent of marine litter.

Core strategies

Western Australia's Plan for Plastics includes both key and complementary initiatives, all of which have a role to play. These actions were developed from the information received during the extensive community consultation on the [Let's not draw the short straw – reduce single-use plastics](#) issues paper, during which almost 9,500 responses were submitted. Over 98 per cent of responses from the consultation support action on single-use plastics.

Informed by this community input, we identified four core strategies to guide the development of Western Australia's actions on single-use plastics: engagement and education; government leadership and regulation; stewardship and sustainability; and research and innovation.



Engagement and education

Considering all stakeholders and developing education and behaviour change campaigns to support action.



Government leadership and regulation

Introducing regulation to support the phase-out of targeted single-use plastics.



Stewardship and sustainability

Supporting voluntary reduction measures and sustainable procurement.



Research and innovation

Conducting analysis and research to identify further action and encourage innovation.

The Plan for Plastics reflects the complexity of tackling plastic issues and aims to produce positive outcomes in households, businesses, the environment, and industry for our collective long-term future.

We will undertake consultation with the community, key stakeholders and all relevant government agencies in a staged approach as each of the initiatives are implemented.

Personal needs

We acknowledge that some people require single-use plastic items to maintain their quality of life and that alternatives (or going without) are not appropriate. We have established a Plastic Straws Working Group with all sectors, including representatives from the disability, health and aged-care sectors. This group is helping to develop regulatory exemptions to ensure ongoing access for individuals requiring straws is acceptable.



Our key actions

2020-21

▶ Engaging with community and key stakeholders

To ensure government actions are well considered, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation will consult with key stakeholders to ensure that unintended consequences or impacts of change are identified.

Key stakeholders include the community, industry, business, environmental, research and government sectors.

▶ Establishing a Plastic Straws Working Group to inform future actions

Plastic straws were ranked as a high priority during community consultation, with the preferred policy options being a statewide phase-out on their sale and supply (66 per cent) and sustainable product design (57 per cent).

The Government of Western Australia is committed to taking action to reduce the use of plastic straws. A working group has been established and are working through approaches to ensure any regulatory actions to phase-out plastic straws will not negatively impact people requiring straws to meet their life needs.

▶ Developing targeted education programs

Consultation identified that the community would like continued access to information on single-use plastics, their impacts and how to reduce their use. We will continue to develop, consult, test and implement education programs informed by behaviour change principles to ensure that these are effective and support community action on plastics.

Members of the group are providing guidance on exemptions to minimise any unintended consequences and to ensure ongoing access to the disability, health and aged-care sectors.

The group also includes members from the hospitality sector, as many of these businesses provide straws to their customers.

More information on the working group is available [online](#).

2021

► **Introducing Plastic Free Places program with community partners**

The Plastic Free Places program will invite partnerships with local governments, marketplaces, shopping centres, businesses, industry and community organisations to become single-use plastic free. These organisations will show leadership by meeting ongoing

business needs while reducing their impacts on the environment. We will support those involved in this voluntary change, providing organisations more opportunity to experience life without single-use plastic items, learn from others and test alternatives.

Late 2021

► **Developing new plastic regulations**

Your feedback was clear: the community want strong action on reducing plastics, particularly where sustainable alternatives are already available. Legislation will be developed and implemented by late 2021 for the statewide phase-out of plastic plates, bowls*, cups*, cutlery, stirrers, straws, thick plastic bags, takeaway polystyrene food containers and helium balloon releases.

Late 2022

► **Progressing further plastic regulations**

Legislation will be progressed for the statewide phase-out of barrier/produce bags, polystyrene packaging, cotton buds with plastic shafts, microbeads, coffee cups/lids*, polystyrene cups* and oxo-degradable plastics.

Plastic Free Foundation partnership

Western Australians have been at the forefront of taking the challenge to reduce their use and disposal of single-use plastics. This includes the internationally recognised Plastic Free July, which was started by a regional council in Western Australia in 2011 before taking on the world.

The Plastic Free Foundation is working in partnership with the State Government to engage individuals and communities in Western Australia to reduce plastic waste.

*After further consideration of their impacts, additional items were identified for action in this revised plan.



Summary of actions

Scientific studies indicate that each of the single-use plastic items we consulted with the community on has a high or very high environmental impact. The tables below illustrate the actions proposed for each item and how they align with the core strategies. Advisory group input and scientific research will interlink with each item. Community education programs, informed by behaviour change principles, will support the implementation of all actions.



Engagement and education



Government leadership and regulation



Stewardship and sustainability



Research and innovation

Short-term actions (2020–21)

Single-use plastic item	Strategy	Action
Plates		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2021. • Develop a targeted education campaign and behaviour change program to support the implementation of regulations. • Implement a Plastic Free Places program.
Bowls		
Stirrers		
Takeaway polystyrene food containers		
Cutlery		
Cups		
Thick plastic bags		
Plastic straws		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a Plastic Straws Working Group in February 2021 to inform future actions, including regulatory action and exemptions by late 2021.
Helium balloon releases		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2021. • Develop a targeted education campaign and behaviour change program to support the implementation of regulatory actions.



Engagement and education



Government leadership and regulation



Stewardship and sustainability



Research and innovation

Medium-term actions (2021–22)

Single-use plastic item	Strategy	Action
Microbeads	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2022.
Coffee cups/lids	 	
Polystyrene cups	 	
Cotton buds with plastic shafts	 	
Barrier/produce bags	  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2022. Develop a targeted education campaign and behaviour change program to support the implementation of regulatory actions. Implement a Plastic Free Places program.
Polystyrene packaging	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2022.
Oxo-degradable plastics	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend plastics regulations – statewide phase-out by late 2022.



Engagement and education



Government leadership and regulation



Stewardship and sustainability



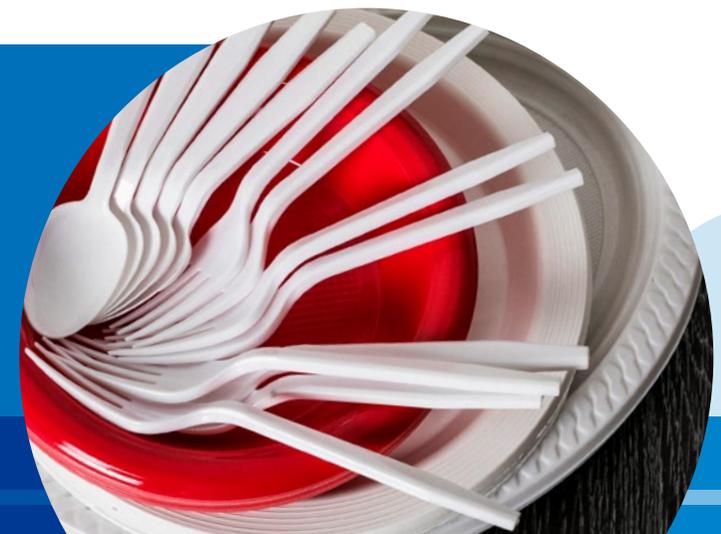
Research and innovation

Complementary actions

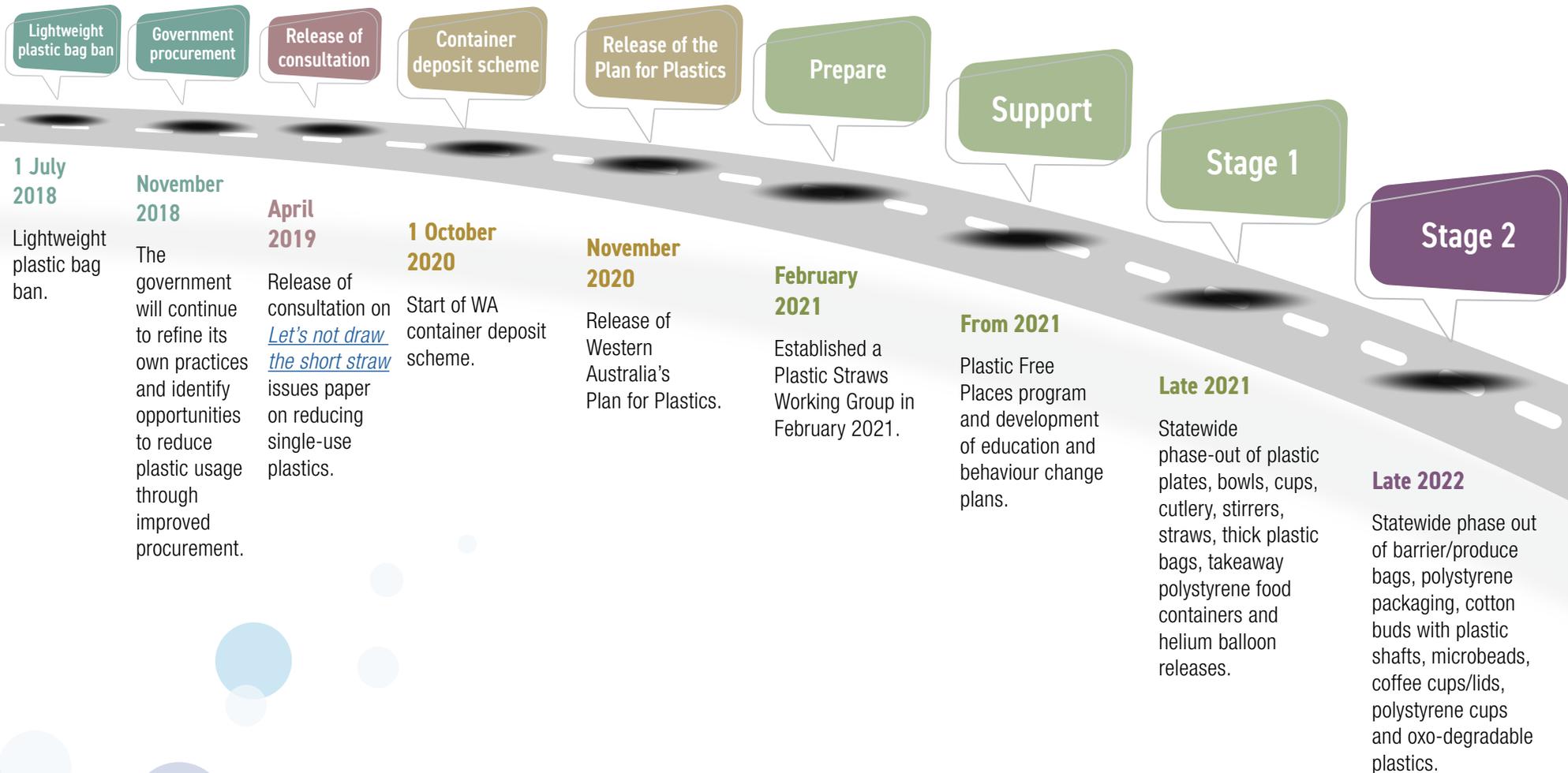
Single-use plastic item	Strategy	Action
Prepacked fruit and vegetables		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department will seek targeted feedback from industry and research experts, commencing in 2021.
Plastic beverage containers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Containers for Change implemented on 1 October 2020.
Takeaway food and beverage containers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department will seek targeted feedback from industry and research experts, commencing in 2021. Implement a Plastic Free Places program.
Plastic packaging		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department will seek targeted feedback from industry and research experts, commencing in 2021. Encourage innovative actions to reduce plastic packaging. Continue working with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation to achieve the 2025 National Packaging Targets.

Monitoring our environment

We will continue to research and analyse the impacts of plastics and consider this information during decision-making. For example, to understand local plastic pollution we are undertaking microplastic sampling in the Swan Canning Estuary, which started in 2021, to determine levels of microplastic pollution. By repeating these studies, we will be able to determine if reduction strategies have been effective.



Timeline overview





**Department of Water
and Environmental Regulation**

8 Davidson Terrace
Joondalup WA 6027

Locked Bag 10
Joondalup WA 6919

Phone: +61 8 6364 7000

Fax: +61 8 6364 7001

For further information

Telephone: (08) 6364 7000

Email: plastic-action@dwer.wa.gov.au