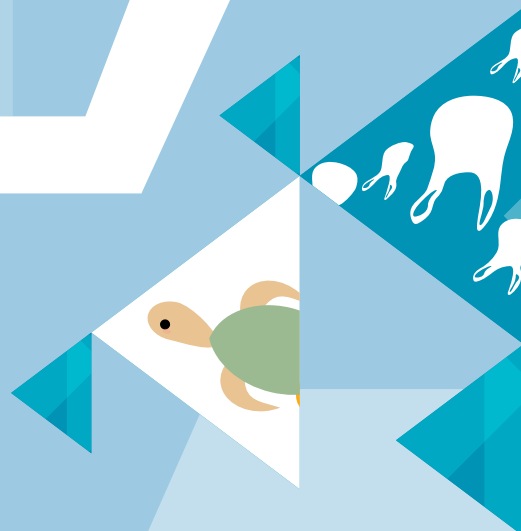
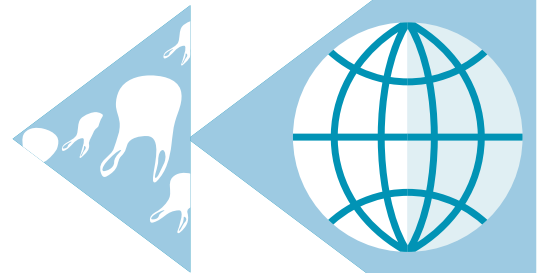


Implementing a lightweight plastic bag ban in Western Australia

Consultation summary



Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
168 St Georges Terrace
Perth Western Australia 6000
Telephone +61 8 6364 7000
Facsimile +61 8 6364 7001
National Relay Service 13 36 77
www.dwer.wa.gov.au

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Summary

This report summarises the information received through consultation about the Western Australian Government's intention to ban on lightweight plastic bags from 1 July 2018.

A discussion paper titled *Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia* was released in December 2017 for an eleven week comment period. The discussion paper discussed five options to manage plastic bag litter, including the Government's preferred option of a state-wide ban. Stakeholders were able to respond in writing or through an on-line survey. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) also held fifteen public information sessions.

DWER received a total of 4 441 responses during the comment period:

- 2,260 written submissions, including 94 unique submissions and 2,166 pro forma submissions (some of which also included individual responses);
- 2,181 on-line survey responses; and
- 431 participants attended the 15 public information sessions.

There was strong support for taking action on lightweight plastic bags:

- 94.7 per cent of respondents supporting a ban on lightweight plastic bags;
- 92.7 per cent support for including degradable, biodegradable and compostable lightweight plastic bags in the ban; and
- 92.0 per cent of respondents supporting future action to extend the ban to thicker department store bags.

Of the options considered by Government, the responses indicated strong support for a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic bags (the Government's preferred option) and for an education campaign. Maintaining the status quo was strongly opposed, while a levy on plastic bags and voluntary agreements with retailers each attracted some support.

A significant number of comments indicated that an education campaign to explain the ban, and the options to adapt to it, would be important to the ban's success.

Businesses affected by the ban (retailers and plastic bag suppliers) sought early notification of the types of bags to be banned (in order to arrange the supply of alternatives), advised that a transition period to assist them make necessary business changes and rundown existing stocks was important, and wanted information and communication materials as soon as possible to assist staff and consumers to adapt to the ban.

1 Consultation

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the Department) released a discussion paper, *Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia*, on 20 December 2017 for an eleven week public comment period. The consultation process included an invitation to provide written submissions, an online survey, a series of public information sessions and meetings with stakeholders.

The discussion paper sought feedback on how the Government can reduce the impact of lightweight plastic bags. It focused on the Government's preferred option, a state-wide ban, and sought stakeholder and community views on the potential impacts and how they would prepare for the proposed changes.

The discussion paper contained a series of questions to elicit responses on key issues, which could be provided through a written submission to the Department or through the online survey.

The questions appear in Appendix A of this report.

1.1 Online survey

The online survey received 2,181 responses. Respondents were asked to identify as a consumer, retailer, plastic bag supplier, local government or waste facility operator. The number of responses from each sector is shown in Table 1.

Most respondents were consumers, with two per cent of respondents being retailers. The number of responses from retailers, local governments, manufacturers and waste facilities were proportionate to the size of each sector¹

Table 1: Summary of online survey submissions received

Sector	Number
Consumer	2,089
Local government	14
Plastic bag supplier	1
Retailer	54
Waste facility operator	2
Didn't identify	21
TOTAL	2,181

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that Western Australia has 2.47 million consumers; 27,000 retailers, of which 5,160 are food retailers; and 138 local governments

1.2 Written submissions

A total of 2,260 submissions were received.

Almost 96 per cent of the written submissions were 'pro forma' submissions based on a template drafted by the Conservation Council of WA with Sea Shepherd. These submissions were categorised as consumer submissions.

Ninety four non-pro forma written submissions were received from consumers, local government and waste facility operators, non-government organisations, retailers, plastic bag suppliers and reusable bag suppliers. The number of responses from each sector is shown in Table 2.

Most respondents were consumers, with two per cent of respondents being retailers. The number of responses from retailers, local governments, manufacturers and waste facilities were proportionate to the size of each sector.

Table 2: Summary of non pro forma written submissions received

Sector	Number
Consumer	64
Local government	12
Non-government organisation	12
Retail sector	3
Plastic bag supplier	1
Reusable bag supplier	2
Total	94

1.3 Public information sessions

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, in partnership with the Boomerang Alliance, presented fifteen information-sharing sessions in the Perth metropolitan and regional areas between 29 January and 1 March 2018. The sessions were attended by 431 participants.

The sessions were designed to inform plastic bag suppliers, retailers and consumers about the ban and consultation process and help them prepare for and comply with the proposed ban.

1.4 Stakeholder meetings

Meetings were held in regional areas with key stakeholders, including Aboriginal corporations, local governments, peak natural resource management groups and chambers of commerce and industry.

Door to door retailer engagement was undertaken in regional areas to promote awareness of the plastic bag ban and to encourage retailers to attend an information session and make a submission.

The major supermarkets (Woolworths, Coles and Metcash (IGA)) were also consulted.



2 Key findings

2.1 Support for the ban

2.1.1 Support for ban

Table 3 summarises responses received through written submissions and the online survey. A total of 4,441 submissions were received however, not every respondent addressed every question.

Table 3: Summary of responses on support for the ban

Question	Yes	No
Do you support a lightweight plastic bag ban for Western Australia?	94.7%	5.3%
Would you support thicker department store bags being included in a ban in the future?	92.0%	8.0%
Biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags have been shown to persist in the environment and break down into smaller pieces. Do you agree that they should be included in the bag ban?	91.7%	8.3%

A breakdown of responses by submission type is presented in Appendix B.

Do you support a lightweight plastic bag ban for Western Australia?

Support for the introduction of a lightweight plastic bag ban in Western Australia was 94.7 per cent with 5.3 per cent opposed. This finding was higher than 83.6 per cent support (seven per cent opposed) found in the community survey undertaken by the Boomerang Alliance (November 2017)².

Would you support thicker department store bags being included in a ban in the future?

Ninety-two per cent of respondents supported thicker department store bags being included in a ban in the future.

Many people attending public information sessions expressed strong support for thicker department store bags being included in a future ban. A number commented that lightweight plastic bag bans in other states and territories have resulted in a switch to use of thicker plastic bags (35 microns and above) and it was suggested that plastic bags less than 60 or 80 microns should also be included in the ban.

² www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/our-work/consultation/Plastic_bag_ban/Attachment_1_Plastics_Survey_FINAL.pdf

Biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags have been shown to persist in the environment and break down into smaller pieces. Do you agree that they should be included in the bag ban?

Almost 92 percent of respondents agreed that biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags should be included in the ban. This is higher than the community survey undertaken by the Boomerang Alliance (November 2017) in which 85 per cent of households supported the inclusion of these bags in the ban.

It was evident that there are some misconceptions about biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags. Many participants at public information sessions did not realise that these types of bags break into smaller plastic pieces and that commercial composting systems are required to breakdown biodegradable and compostable bags.

This replicates the findings of the Boomerang Alliance (November 2017) survey which found that providing information on the limitations of degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags shifted community support for a ban from 69 per cent to the same level of support as a ban on standard light weight plastic bags.

2.1.2 Policy options

The discussion paper identified five options for the long-term reduction of lightweight plastic bags: status quo; state-wide ban on the sale or supply of lightweight shopping bags; plastic bag levy; voluntary agreements with retailers; and education campaign.

There was strong support for the Government's preferred approach, a state-wide ban on the sale or supply of lightweight plastic bags, with 83.6 per cent of respondents to the online survey strongly supporting this option.

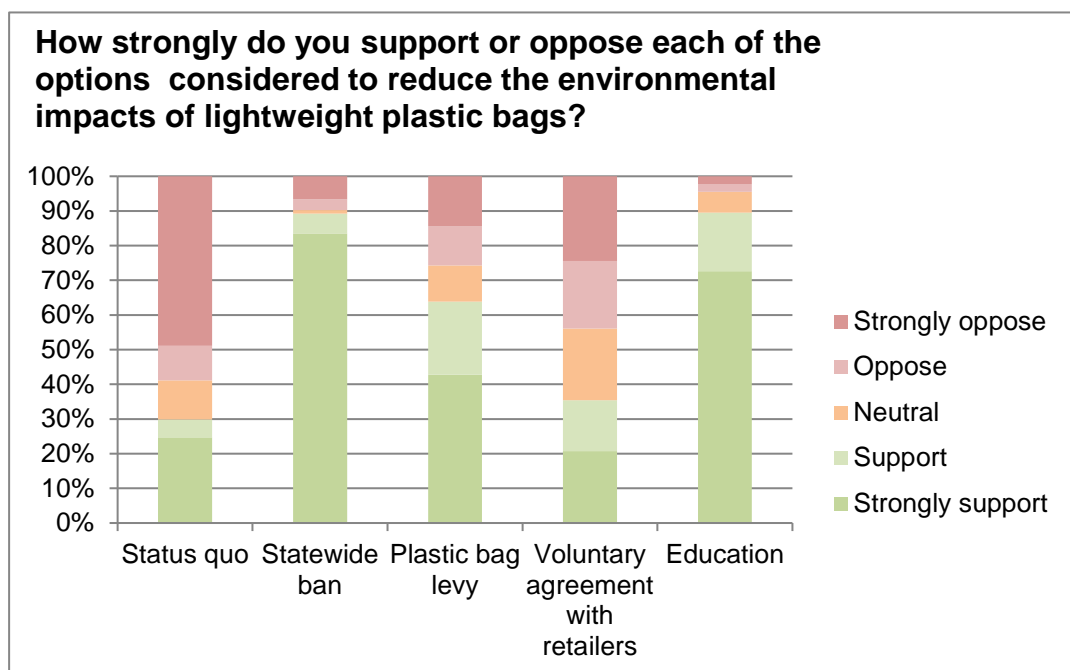


Figure 1: Responses for each of the policy options



2.2 Community concern (about the impacts of plastics)

Almost 86 per cent of respondents to the online survey were very concerned about plastic waste and pollution from lightweight plastic bags (Figure 2).

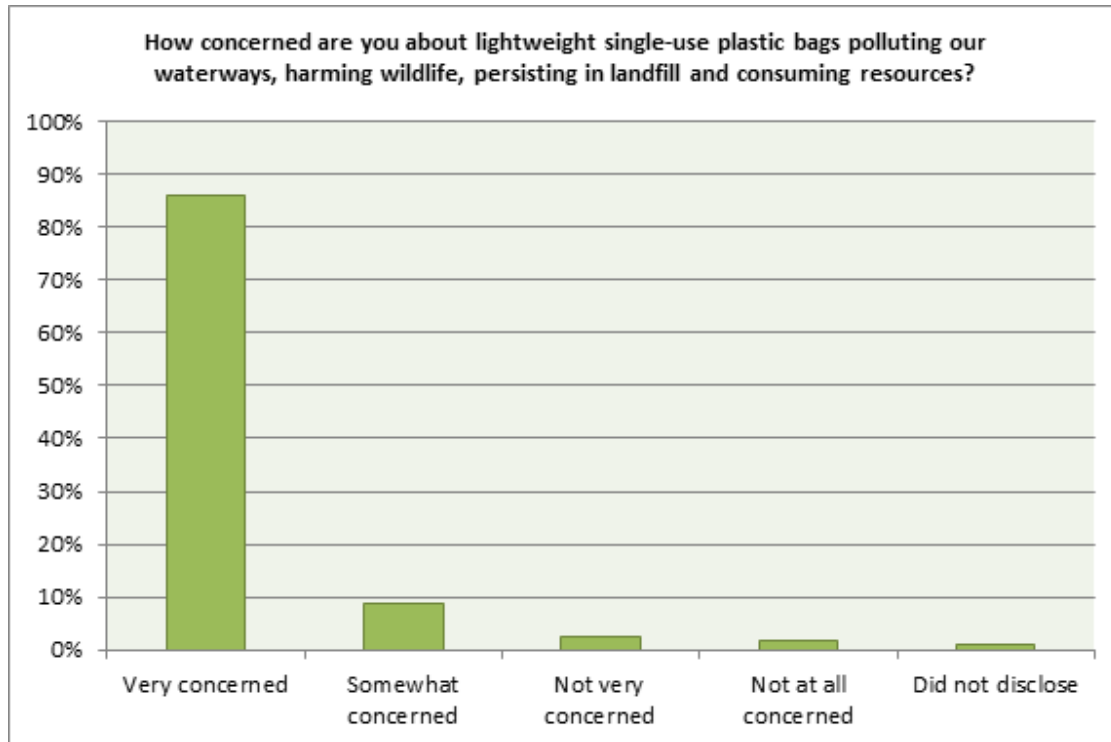


Figure 2: Level of community concern about the impacts of plastics

2.3 Consumer behaviours

The discussion paper considered the actions required to adapt once the ban is in place on 1 July 2018.

2.3.1 Current methods to carry shopping

Figure 3 shows the methods respondents to the online survey have used over the previous six months to carry grocery shopping. The total of all responses is more than 100 percent because consumers use several methods over a six-month period.

Bringing own reusable bags is the most common method (85.4 per cent), followed by a box supplied by a retailer and lightweight plastic bags. This highlights that the section of the community responding to the survey is already engaged in the issue and using reusable bag options.

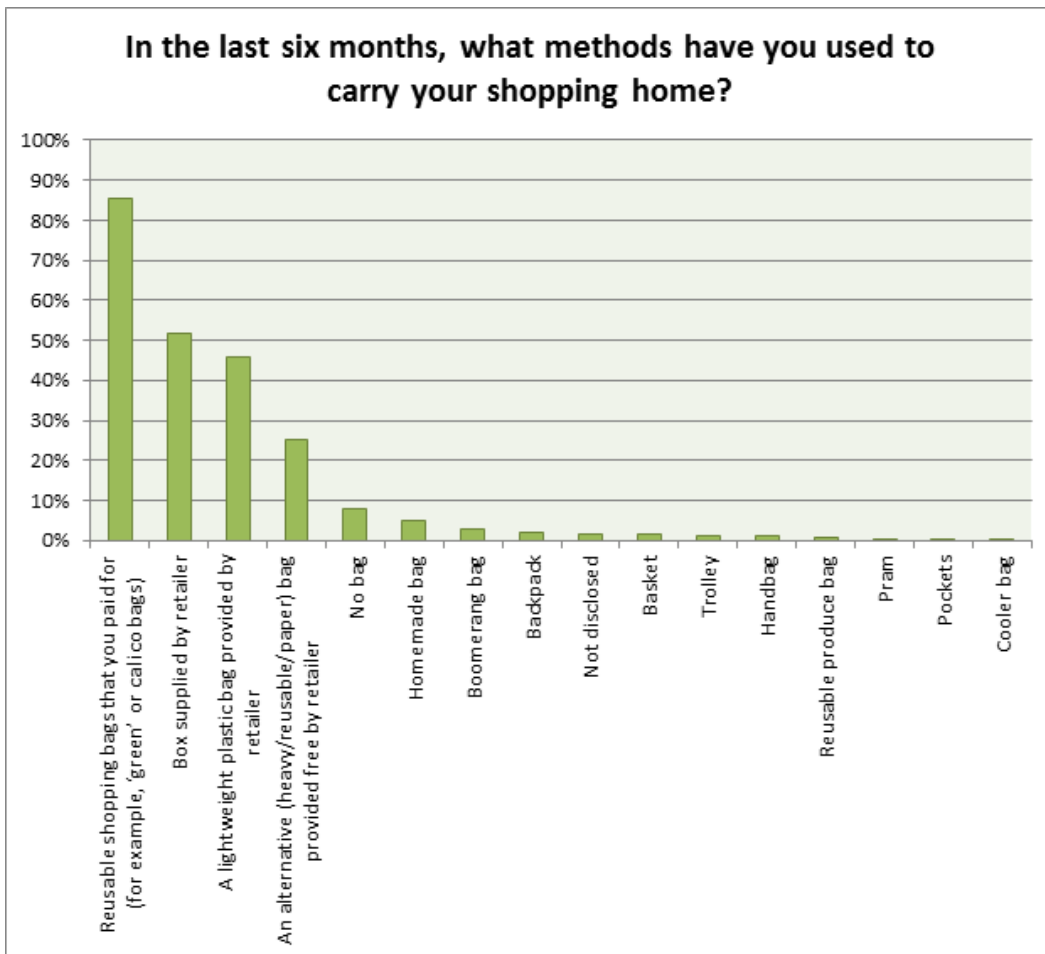


Figure 3: Current consumer practices

2.3.2 Use of alternatives to lightweight plastic bags

The majority of respondents to the online survey indicated that they almost always or most of the time (79 per cent) use an alternative to lightweight plastic bags (Figure4).

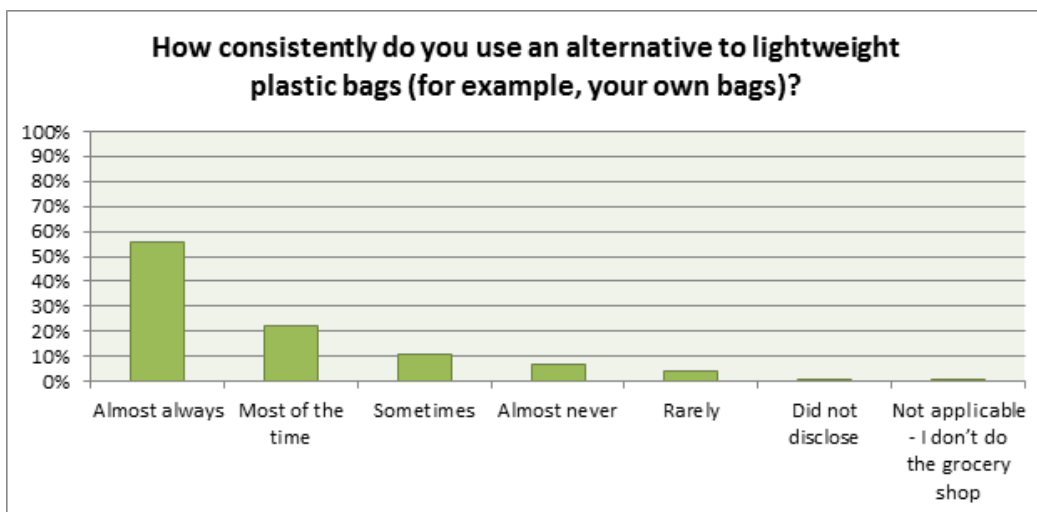


Figure 4: Current use of alternatives to plastic bags

2.3.3 Post ban preferences

When lightweight plastic shopping bags are banned, the majority of respondents indicated they would use reusable cotton or calico bags (80.8 per cent). Reusing a cardboard box (62.3 per cent) and using ‘green’ bags (48.7 per cent) and paper bags (38.0 per cent) were the next most common responses (Figure 5).

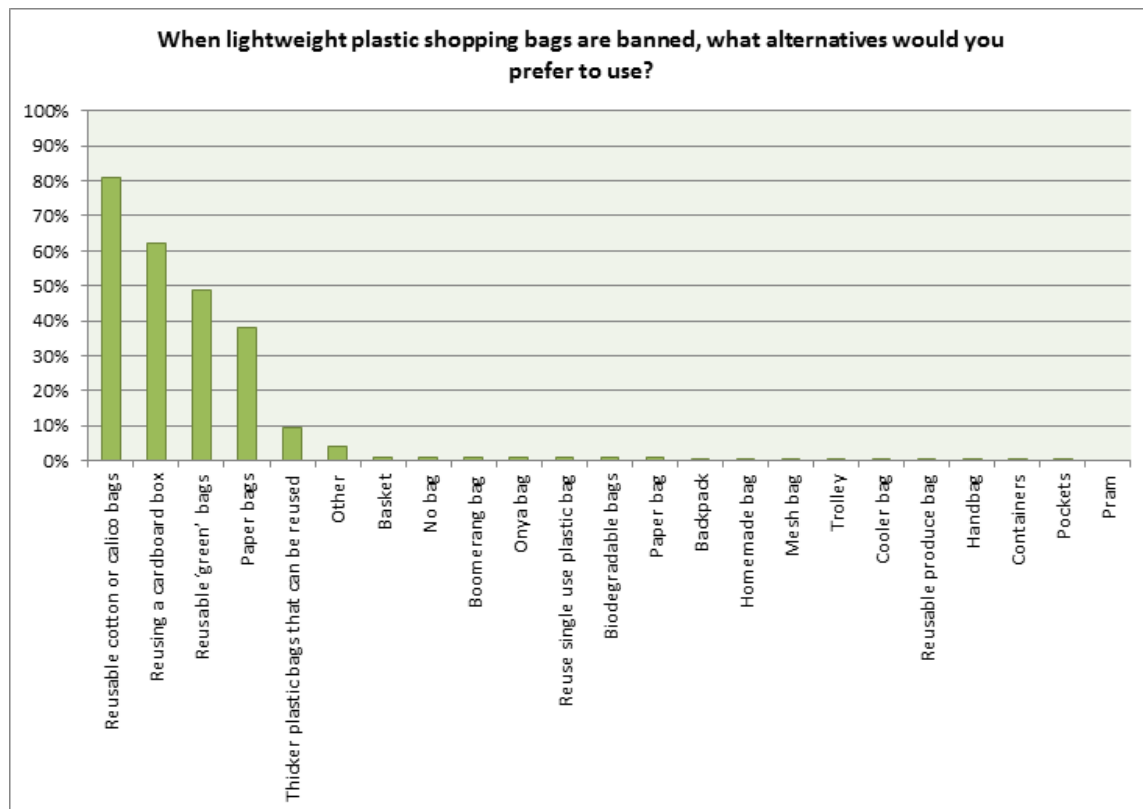


Figure 5: Future use of alternatives to plastic bags

2.4 Other plastics

In response to ‘What other plastic pollution should the Government, businesses and communities work together to address?’, 2,466 responses suggested other plastic pollution items to address.

Of the individuals answering this question 67.5 per cent of people identified straws, 55.0 per cent identified plastic microbeads and 53.4 per cent identified balloon releases (plus an additional 5.9 per cent balloons) as requiring a ban (Figure 6).



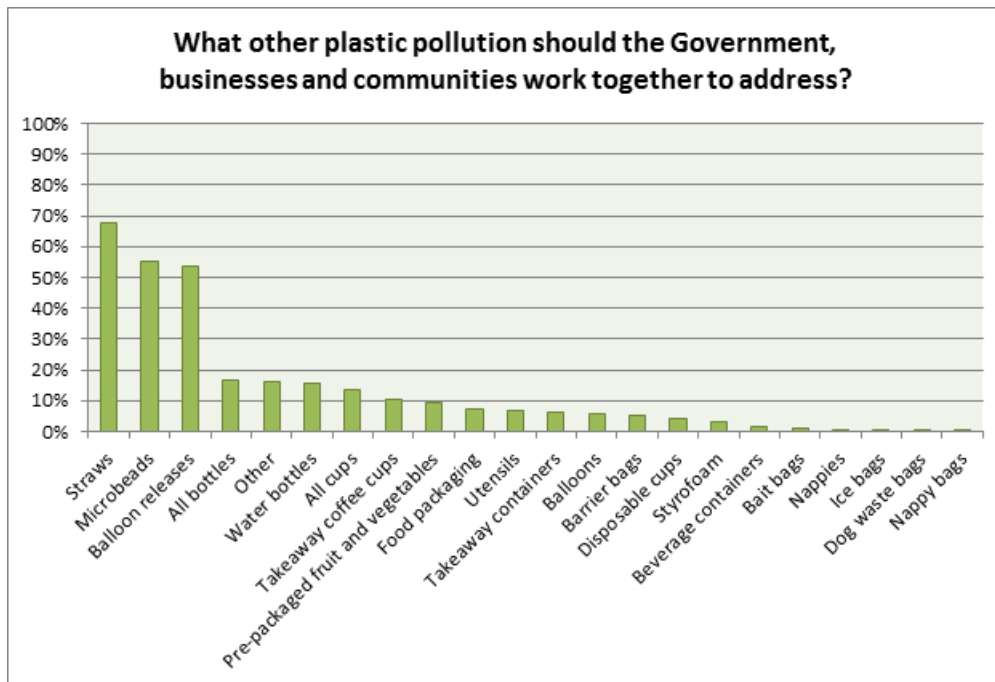


Figure 6: Future use of alternatives to plastic bags

2.5 Impacts

Responses to questions about potential impacts of the ban have been categorised according to stakeholder type.

2.5.1 Consumers

Impacts

The majority of submissions received were from consumers (97 per cent of 4,435 submissions). The main themes from the online survey indicated that:

- 59 per cent of respondents reported they are prepared for the ban;
- 37 per cent indicated that they already use reusable bags;
- 10 per cent do not use lightweight bags as bin liners;
- 7 per cent reported that they would be forced to buy bin liners after the ban; and
- 5 per cent reported that they are stockpiling plastic bags prior to the ban, to use as bin liners.

Benefits

Respondents indicated that they are aware the ban will lead to improved environmental outcomes in terms of waste, litter and marine animal impacts through ingestion and entanglement. To reduce their use of plastic, respondents indicated the following:

- 15 per cent plan to, or would like to, use an alternative to a bin liner (noting that most people reuse the bags as bin liners);

- 15 per cent indicated that they will purchase reusable bags; and
- 11 per cent have already started or plan to start practices to reduce plastic waste such as using reusable produce bags, avoiding plastic packaging, composting to reduce bin liner use and avoiding straws.

Preparing for the ban

To prepare for the ban, respondents and workshop participant feedback sought information on:

- the most environmentally responsible reusable bags and where to source them;
- the different foldable and non-foldable bag options;
- alternative bin liner options, to replace current use of lightweight bags for this purpose; and
- how to remember to take their reusable bags from their home to the car and then from the car into the shop.

Some respondents proposed that online shopping could be delivered without plastic bags and packaging and others indicated that they would like retailers to provide cardboard boxes at the checkout as an alternative to taking a bag.

The matters raised are included in Figure 7.

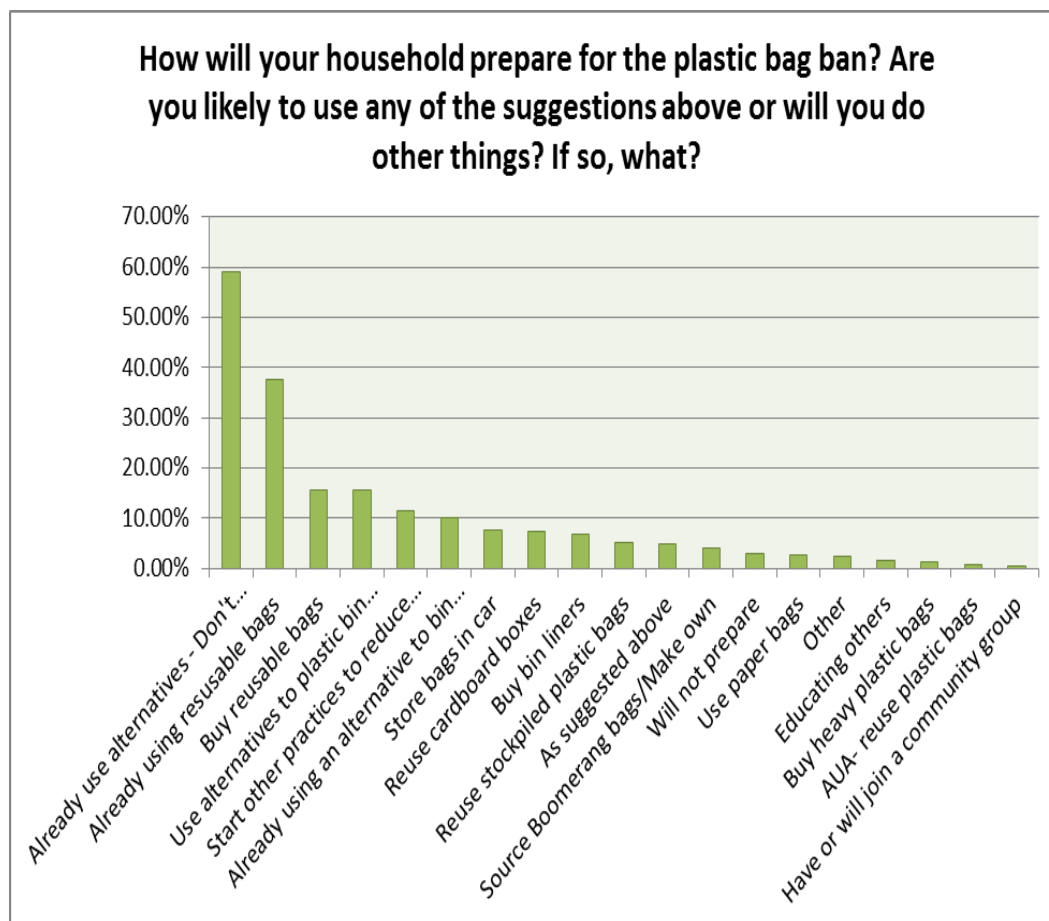


Figure 7: Percentage of respondents per preferred ban preparation method.

Additional costs and other concerns

Some respondents to the online survey expressed concern regarding the impact, on low income earners and other disadvantaged people, of the costs of purchasing reusable bags. Another concern raised was the cost of purchasing bin liners. Some consumers were concerned about health and hygiene issues as a consequence of reusing bags.

2.5.2 Retailers

Impacts

Fifty-seven submissions were received from respondents who identified as retailers.

The online survey responses indicate that the majority of retailers do not expect the ban on lightweight plastic bags to change the way they do business although 39 per cent of retailers expect increased costs as a result of the ban.

A quarter of retailer respondents indicated they would absorb any additional costs, and the same percentage indicated that they intend to pass on additional costs to consumers.

Nearly half of retailer respondents indicated they would provide alternatives to lightweight plastic bags and a third of them said that they already do so.

The majority of retailer respondents indicated they would not supply thicker plastic bags. Many of the retailer respondents that do intend to supply thicker plastic bags indicated that they will pass costs on to consumers.

Written responses were received from two retailer associations both of which recommended that the lightweight plastic bag ban be deferred or that there be a transition period to provide time for suppliers, retailers and consumers to prepare and make the transition away from lightweight plastic bags. They also suggested that a comprehensive education and engagement campaign for retailers and consumers be implemented.

Benefits

Benefits identified by respondents from the retail sector include the savings from not providing free lightweight bags and from waste disposal if customers use cardboard boxes supplied.

Retail sector respondents also suggested that they may benefit from increased sales of bin liners and reusable bag sales.

Some indicated that it will be better for the environment and easier to do as part of a state-wide initiative rather than individual stores.

Preparing for the ban

The retail sector respondents indicated that they need information on the details of the bags to be banned and a comprehensive retailer education and engagement campaign as soon as possible.



Many requested that there be a transition period after the ban comes into place on 1 July 2018 to allow them to use existing stocks of lightweight bags, source alternatives and educate staff and customers. They also requested information on how to dispose of surplus lightweight bags once the ban is introduced (for reuse and recycling).

Some requested information on alternative bags (which are the best ones, where to source and the costs of getting bags printed) and it was suggested that a 'better bag guide' be produced to allow them to make informed decisions on the best alternative bags and educate their consumers.

2.5.3 Plastic bag suppliers

Impacts

Two submissions were received from respondents who identified as plastic bag suppliers. Both expressed concern for the environmental impacts of lightweight plastic bags on the marine environment and supported the ban. Neither supported a ban on thicker plastic bags.

One of the two suppliers supported the inclusion of degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags. The other company did not support this inclusion, advising that it supplies lightweight plastic bags that are labelled as synthetic biodegradable bioplastic with corn starch. This company indicated that including these bags in the ban would not negatively impact its business.

Six other plastic bag suppliers attended either a peak body workshop or one of the public information sessions. These suppliers would prefer to continue to supply bags of all types, but accepted the intention of the lightweight bag ban.

All suppliers expressed a concern that the details of the ban will not be provided with sufficient time for suppliers to manage their existing stock and that they would suffer losses as a consequence. They advised that the lead time for ordering bags varies among retailers and is between 12 and 24 weeks. Suppliers also advised that they need time to source alternative bag types to have stock in place to meet the requirements of the ban.

To ensure bags supplied by importers to suppliers comply with the ban it was suggested that the importation of bags should be regulated and that importers should be required to print the bag thickness and a tracking identifier (licence number) on each bag and the cartons they are supplied in.

Costs

Plastic bag suppliers will be impacted financially if left with unused stock. One supplier has indicated that it will have a stockpile of lightweight bags (including printed bags) which will not be depleted by 1 July 2018.



2.5.4 Local governments and waste facility operators

Twenty six submissions were received from local governments including the WA Local Government Association (WALGA), two regional councils and two waste facility operators.

Preparing for the ban

Local governments sought further information about the details of the ban and its enforcement. A comprehensive community and retailer education and engagement strategy was also recommended.

Costs

Local governments advised that if the ban results in a switch to thicker plastic bags the costs to waste and recycling facilities could increase.

Benefits

Local governments identified benefits including reduced costs associated with waste transport, processing, disposal to landfill and plastic bag litter and an increased price for recyclables (due to less contamination). They also identified that there is likely to be reduced contamination in commercial composting facilities.

2.5.5 Non-government organisations

Other groups responding to the discussion paper include reusable bag suppliers, educators, community groups, schools, charities, mining companies, natural resource management groups, wildlife groups and catchment councils. Many of these groups are involved in clean-ups in their local areas and are already engaged in initiatives to reduce plastic waste and litter. These groups were supportive of the ban and of extending the scope of the plastic bag ban.

Some respondents indicated that there is a need for long term education for consumers and retailers to change behaviour from using disposable plastics. Some businesses and charities, for example, mining company camps supplying packed lunches and charities donating and selling items, indicated that they were not clear whether they will be classified as retailers.

This group of respondents also noted that in addition to wildlife impacts, plastic bags can cause damage to vessels (blocking water intake pipes and fouling propellers), contribute to blockages in storm water systems causing flooding after rain events, have aesthetic impacts and can have a negative economic impact by affecting tourism and fishing industries.

Litter in Western Australia

Sea Shepherd's submission included results of its clean-ups which included a total of 269,672 pieces of litter collected at 42 Western Australian beach and river clean-ups in 2017, 73 per cent of which were made from plastic.



Tangaroa Blue Foundation's submission noted that two per cent of total debris removed in 2017 during clean-ups was plastic bags (total of 6,995 plastic bags), and that plastic film remnants (pieces of bags and wrapping) increased from 10 per cent of all items collected in 2016, to 13 per cent in 2017.

2.6 Community education plan

Many submissions to the discussion paper and comments at the workshop sessions highlighted the importance of a well-designed and delivered, multi-channel community education program to achieve the goals of the plastic bag ban.

It was suggested that the plan should focus on the 'reduce' message and explain 'why' the ban is important. It was also considered that the community education campaign should support behaviour by informing people about alternatives to plastic bags and providing reminders to bring reusable bags.

APPENDIX A

Discussion paper and online survey questions

General questions

- Do you support a lightweight plastic bag ban for Western Australia?
- How concerned are you about lightweight plastic bags polluting our waterways, harming wildlife, persisting in landfill and consuming resources?
- In the last six months, what methods have you used to carry your shopping home?
- How consistently do you use an alternative to lightweight plastic bags (for example, your own bags)?
- When lightweight plastic shopping bags are banned, what alternatives would you prefer to use?
- Would you support thicker department store bags being included in a ban in the future?
- How strongly do you support or oppose each of the options considered to reduce the environmental impacts of lightweight plastic bags?
- Biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags have been shown to persist in the environment and break down into smaller pieces. Do you agree that they should be included in the bag ban?
- What other plastic pollution should the Government, businesses and communities work together to address?
- What strategies to address other plastic pollution do you think would be most effective?

Questions about the impact of the proposed ban

Consumers

- When lightweight bags are no longer available, how many of the following bags are you likely to buy each year?
- How will your household prepare for the plastic bag ban?
- Are you likely to use any of the suggestions above or will you do other things? If so, what?

Retailers

- Please list the likely impacts (benefits or costs) of the ban on your business. Are any costs likely to be passed on to consumers or absorbed?
- Do you expect the ban on lightweight plastic bags to change the way you do business?
- How will the services you provide for customers change?
- How do you plan to adapt to the ban after 1 July 2018?

- If you intend to supply heavier weight plastic bags for free, would this incur additional costs?
- Do you intend to pass any of the additional costs of providing a heavier weight plastic bag on to consumers?

Plastic bag suppliers

- Can you outline how the plastic bag ban will impact your business?
- How will your business adapt to the ban and how long do you need in order to be ready to offer alternatives to your customers?

Local government

- Can you foresee any unintended consequences arising as a result of the proposed compliance and enforcement regime?

Local government and waste facility operators

- Can you quantify the costs that will be avoided when the amount of lightweight plastic bags entering the waste stream is reduced and there is less contamination by lightweight plastic bags in recyclables?
- Are the savings likely to be passed on to ratepayers?

APPENDIX B

Breakdown of responses on support for the ban

Table 4: Breakdown of responses on support for the ban

Do you support a lightweight plastic bag ban for Western Australia?

Pooled data		Online survey		Pro forma		Non pro forma	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
94.7%	5.3%	89.4%	10.6%	100%	0%	90.8%	9.2%
(n=4,413)		(n=2,160)		(n=2,166)		(n=87)	

Would you support thicker department store bags being included in a ban in the future?

Pooled data		Online survey		Pro forma		Non pro forma	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
92.0%	8.0%	83.8%	16.2%	100%	0%	100%	0%
(n=4,358)		(n=2,159)		(n=2,163)		(n=36)	

Biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags have been shown to persist in the environment and break down into smaller pieces. Do you agree that they should be included in the bag ban?

Pooled data		Online survey		Pro forma		Non pro forma	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
91.7%	8.3%	83.3%	16.7%	100%	0%	100%	0%
(n=4,349)		(n=2,158)		(n=2,161)		(n=30)	

The 'n' values presented in Table 4 are the number of responses analysed for each question