

ITEM D

NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR MERRIN - REDUCE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS IN WOLLONGONG

Councillor Merrin has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that Council -

- 1 Acknowledge the efforts taken by many local businesses and residents to reduce the number of single-use or non-biodegradable plastic bags used throughout the Wollongong local government area;
- 2 Acknowledge that single-use plastic bags are a major litter problem in our parks and waterways, and can result in the deaths or injury of many turtles, marine mammals, birds and other animal species - this to be included in Council's weekly newspaper notices, newsletter and the Council website, along with educational materials;
- 3 Write to the State and Federal Governments urging them to introduce legislation that would ban non-biodegradable single-use plastic shopping bags;
- 4 Ensure all Council owned or controlled business and commercial activities, and Council owned or controlled venues, eliminate the availability of non-biodegradable plastic shopping bags;
- 5 Commit to the installation of gross litter traps at all appropriate stormwater and watercourse outlets to the ocean and Lake Illawarra over the medium term;
- 6 Introduce a trial cooperative programme in the northern suburbs of Wollongong, to place a small price on plastic bags sold by retailers;
- 7 Contact major local retailers to encourage them to collaborate with Council voluntarily in a staged approach to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, plastic shopping bags from the Wollongong local government area; this programme to be evaluated after two years;
- 8 Council's Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy be amended to reflect these changes.”

Rationale provided by Councillor Merrin

The devastating effects that plastic bags have on local species of birds, turtles, marine mammals and other animals, have been widely reported. Wollongong is home to the South Coast Branch of the world-renowned Australian Seabird Rescue that rehabilitates many injured species, including pelicans and turtles. A high percentage of animals admitted for care have consumed or become entangled in plastic products, including plastic bags.

Single-use plastic bags are lightweight, made from non-renewable fossil fuel, are used for a very short time, and then end up at landfill sites, recycled or as litter in streams and

oceans. They take many hundreds of years to break down. In 2007, almost 4 billion single-use bags were used in Australia. The single-use plastic bag has been banned in many countries throughout the world, including:

In Australia:

- The ACT, NT, SA and Tasmania, as well as the cities of Adelaide, Darwin, and Fremantle, and a number of small towns in Victoria,
- Several towns in NSW banned plastic bags in 2003 and 2004: Huskisson; Kangaroo Valley; Mogo and Oyster Bay (from NSW Parliamentary e-brief 'Plastic Bags: an update', Montoya, D, April 2013).

In the USA: 85 communities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Aspen and Seattle,

In other countries: including Mauritania, Mexico City, Bangladesh and Italy.

Many countries have applied levies or restrictions on bags, such as Ireland, Belgium, Spain, Wales, Denmark, Bulgaria, Kenya, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Germany and China. Many small towns and cities around the world have also initiated voluntary bans.

Ballina Council supported a community-based program to reduce single-use plastic bag use which led many shops to stop providing plastic bags or reduce the number used. Victoria has legislated to allow compulsory bag levies to be imposed and has run a 10c levy trial in some towns. A number of small businesses in Wollongong have already stopped using single-use plastic bags, as have some of the larger chain stores.

There is strong community support to ban the use of single-use plastic bags in Wollongong, with the local media opinion poll showing 71% of respondents supporting a ban. It is particularly important for Wollongong to reduce this damaging waste product due to our long coast-line with many well-used beaches and rock shelves; our proximity to the Royal National Park, Lake Illawarra, Bushrangers Bay Aquatic Reserve and Bass Point, as well as many creeks and wetlands. However without legislative support, or a voluntary ban by the major supermarkets, it will be hard to gain the momentum to make a significant change to the volumes of plastic bags discarded every day throughout Wollongong.

Wollongong City Council now has the opportunity to show leadership. We have lobbied State and Federal Governments for legislative change on container deposits in an attempt to reduce the environmental and economic costs of litter. In order to address the increasing amounts of plastic waste, we also need State legislation to enable State and local action on single-use plastic bags. Previous NSW Governments have expressed an intention to introduce bans or levies, but this has not yet occurred.

We can ensure that Council's own activities, premises and events become plastic-bag free. We can also provide education and support to assist retailers and consumers with the changes in behaviour that are needed to reduce plastic bag use in our area.