

Phasing out single-use plastics

Next Steps Policy | November 2021



Transport Canberra and
City Services Directorate

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Single-use plastics are especially problematic, as they are used for only minutes but can have a damaging impact on our environment for hundreds of years.

Chris Steel

Minister for Transport and City Services



Minister's foreword

Plastic presents an enormous challenge to our society. Its many useful properties have seen it become an essential part of our daily lives, and it is used extensively in manufacturing and industry, medicines and pharmaceuticals, retail and hospitality.

Unfortunately, plastics have an environmental cost. The plastics problem is now so bad that it is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by weight.¹ Single-use plastics are especially problematic, as they are used for only minutes but can have a damaging impact on our environment for hundreds of years.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the problems caused by single-use plastics, and Canberrans are increasingly concerned about the environmental, social, and economic problems caused by plastic waste. This concern is reflected across Australia and the world, with communities calling for action to address the issues and challenges associated with single-use plastics.

We are acting on that call.

The ACT was one of the first Australian jurisdictions to pass laws to reduce single-use plastics through the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021* – an achievement we are rightly proud of. The first items banned through the Act – single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers and expanded polystyrene takeaway food and beverage containers – have received widespread support from the community and business.

These items were the start of our longer-term journey to reduce waste, move away from the idea of a 'throw-away' society and embrace options to deliver Canberra a sustainable future.

This *Next Steps 2021* policy document lays out our future plans to tackle the plastic problem in the ACT. The document:

- updates the community on the progress to date on the single-use plastics ban
- identifies additional unnecessary and problematic single-use plastic items
- shares a roadmap for the ban of further single-use items.

I would like to thank all businesses and community groups that have helped the ACT reduce its reliance on plastic. We look forward to your continued support for the coming phases of strong action to reduce plastic waste for a cleaner environment and a healthier planet.

Chris Steel

Minister for Transport and City Services



Plastic presents an enormous challenge to our society. Its many useful properties have seen it become an essential part of our daily lives, and it is used extensively in manufacturing and industry, medicines and pharmaceuticals, retail and hospitality.

¹ World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company (2016), www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications



Setting the scene

Tackling waste generated by single-use plastics is a challenge faced by governments of all levels.

Australian states and territories, as well as the Commonwealth Government, agreed to the National Waste Policy Action Plan in 2019. This includes a commitment to phasing out problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2025.²

Australian states and territories have committed to a ban on single-use plastics. While all jurisdictions are at different stages of phasing out single-use plastic, the most common items to be banned are single-use plastic straws, cutlery, stirrers and expanded polystyrene takeaway containers. Jurisdictions have taken the following actions:

- The ACT, South Australia and Queensland have commenced their single-use plastic ban on certain items with further items under consideration
- Western Australia will commence their ban by the end of 2021
- New South Wales will commence their ban from 1 June 2022
- Victoria will commence their ban in 2023.

Further information on items being banned by different jurisdictions is provided later in this document.

In 2021, the Commonwealth Government released the National Plastics Plan, which outlined key actions and milestones to reduce Australia's plastics problem. This included detailed timelines for the phase out of the following problematic and unnecessary plastics:

- plastic packaging products with additive fragmentable technology (for example, oxo-degradable bin liners, dog waste bags, and dry-cleaning bags) that do not meet relevant compostable standards (AS4736-2006, AS5810-2010, and EN13432)
- expanded polystyrene (EPS) from loose packaging fill and moulded packaging in consumer packaging
- EPS consumer food and beverage containers
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) packaging labels.

This plan aligns with and supports the ACT Government's commitment to reduce the plastic problem locally. Some of the problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics identified above have already been banned in the ACT or have been identified for future bans.

² Australian Government 2019, *National Waste Policy Action Plan*, <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-waste-policy-action-plan-2019.pdf>

Tackling waste generated by single-use plastics is a challenge faced by governments of all levels.



What have we done so far?

The ACT Government began investigating options to reduce plastic waste in the Territory over a decade ago. In 2011 we introduced a plastic shopping bag ban, which reduced plastic bag use in the ACT by around 55 million bags in 2017-18 alone.³

In 2019 the ACT Government undertook extensive community consultation about single-use plastics through the *Phasing out single-use plastics* discussion paper. Those who participated in the consultation showed strong support for the government to take regulatory action in phasing out specific unnecessary and problematic single-use plastics which have readily available alternatives.

As a next step, the ACT Government began work on a single-use plastic policy in consultation with key stakeholders. The Plastic Reduction Taskforce was established to help guide policy development. This Taskforce comprises members from key national and local businesses, industry, environment and disability advocacy bodies. Additionally, in-depth collaboration with other jurisdictions provided a valuable forum for sharing ideas and promoting a harmonised approach to addressing single-use plastic. This led to a regulatory approach to banning single-use plastics that both supports businesses to make more sustainable choices while also meeting the community's expectations.

³ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment 2018, *Unfantastic Plastic – Review of the ACT Plastic Shopping Bag Ban*

In March 2021, the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021* was passed in the ACT and the first tranche commenced on 1 July 2021. This banned the sale, supply and distribution of:

- single-use plastic cutlery
- single-use plastic drink stirrers
- single-use expanded polystyrene containers for takeaway food or beverages.

There are 12-month exemptions in place for expanded polystyrene gelato tubs and single-use plastic soup spoons to provide additional time for businesses who rely on these items to transition to non-plastic alternatives. On 30 June 2022, the Tranche 1 exemptions expire and are unlikely to be extended.

The ACT Government engaged the National Retail Association (NRA) to assist and support local businesses ahead of the transition. In the months leading up to the ban, the NRA met with approximately 500 businesses across the Territory and staffed an information hotline for any queries regarding the single-use plastic ban.

This was further supported by the work of ACT Government staff who visited 398 businesses and wrote to businesses and community organisations across the ACT to provide information on the ban.



What's next?

Tranche 2

While the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021* initially banned three types of problematic and unnecessary single use plastic items, it also established a framework to ban additional items in the future.

Following the 2019 consultation, the *Updated Next Steps Policy* document was published in August 2020, identifying a second tranche of items to be phased out. The ACT Government is now focusing on banning these additional items. From 1 July 2022, the following items will be banned in the ACT:

- single-use plastic drinking straws (with an exemption for those who need them)
- single-use plastic fruit and vegetable 'barrier bags'
- oxo-degradable plastic products
- cotton buds with plastic sticks.

As part of this update to the *Next Steps Policy*, the ACT Government is also adding cotton buds with plastic sticks to Tranche 2. Cotton buds with non-plastic sticks are already widely available as substitutes for plastic sticks, and major consumer brands are voluntarily making this shift as part of their own commitments to reduce single-use plastics. The ready availability of alternatives leads us to believe these products can now be accelerated for phasing out.

In accordance with section 42 of the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021*, these items will undergo a 12-week public notice period to support the development of regulations for the ban in July 2022.

Tranche 3

A third tranche of items will be considered for banning from 1 July 2023. These items include:

- microbeads
- expanded polystyrene products and packaging (with potential exemptions for white and brown goods)
- plastic takeaway containers.

These items will also go through the required 12-week public notice period.

Why have these items been chosen?

These items have been chosen as they are single-use items that are used frequently but have a very short lifespan. After use, they cannot be easily recycled and will either end up in landfill or as harmful litter, polluting the natural environment and waterways.

By moving away from single-use plastic items and shifting to reusable, recyclable or compostable alternatives, we are supporting a cleaner environment and a more sustainable future for the ACT.

Longer-term consideration

The ACT's commitment to phase out single-use plastic is dependent on the growing availability of non-plastic products and packaging alternatives as well as the ability to effectively process those alternative items. Future problematic single-use plastic products under longer-term consideration include:

- single-use plastic plates, bowls and cups
- boutique or heavyweight plastic bags
- plastic-lined coffee cups and lids.

The ACT Government will work with key stakeholders, including the Plastic Reduction Taskforce, to identify a road map to ban these items at an appropriate future time.



Proposed timeline



1 July 2021

ACT single-use plastic ban Tranche 1 commenced (complete)



Late 2021 – early 2022

Public notice on regulation development for Tranche 2 items



Early – mid 2022

Evaluation of submissions from the public notice period for Tranche 2 items



1 July 2022

Ban on Tranche 2 items commences



Late 2022

Public notice on regulation development for Tranche 3 items



Early – mid 2023

Evaluation of submissions from the public notice period for Tranche 3 items



1 July 2023

Ban on Tranche 3 items commences

Complementary government initiatives

Other ACT Government policy decisions may support the phase out of future single-use plastic items. These are detailed below.

Improved waste services and infrastructure

To help cut the volume of waste sent to landfill and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions, the ACT Government is working to deliver a food organics and garden organics (FOGO) waste collection service for Canberrans. The FOGO service will allow households to place food waste with garden organics to be processed and turned into valuable compost. A pilot service commenced in November 2021 within the Belconnen region, to inform the design of a future citywide service.

Many alternatives to single-use plastic products are made from plant-based materials that can be industrially composted. These products could be suitable for processing through the FOGO service, however the capabilities of a future FOGO processing facility will affect the type of compostable items that can be accepted.

In 2020, the Commonwealth Government established the Recycling Modernisation Fund (RMF) to support the upgrade of recycling infrastructure across Australia. Through the RMF, the ACT's Material Recovery Facility will be upgraded in the future, enabling better separation and processing of recycling streams. This will turn plastic that was previously seen as waste into a valuable resource that can be reused.

Declared public events

Under the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021*, the ACT Government may declare that single-use plastic products additional to those already prohibited under the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021* are prohibited from public events. It is the Government's intention that all large government public events will reduce the amount of plastic waste they produce.

Events ACT is responsible for planning, marketing and delivering a quality suite of significant events for the city that provide strategic economic and social benefits to the ACT. This event portfolio includes Floriade, the Enlighten Festival, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, Reconciliation Day, Windows to the World, the Canberra Nara Candle Festival and celebrations held in conjunction with Australia Day, Canberra Day and New Year's Eve.

The ACT Government's ability to declare plastic products banned at events also extends to non-government public events. The ACT Government may declare a non-government public event to prohibit the supply of certain single-use plastic items in consultation with the event organisers, and will provide advice in finding suitable non-plastic alternative items.

Impacts of COVID-19

As the ACT gradually lifts restrictions from the global COVID-19 pandemic, there is uncertainty about how and when large events will be run in the future. When events can be held again, the health and safety of participants will always be the highest priority.

The ACT Government will continue to monitor the evolving COVID-19 situation, acknowledging the challenges faced by the community, event organisers and businesses by the lockdowns, and that COVID-19 may impact future single-use plastics bans.

The ACT Government is working to deliver a food organics and garden organics (FOGO) waste collection service.



Market drivers for industry development

Industry development of alternative products will also influence the phase out of single-use plastics. As more countries around the world take action on single-use plastics, the demand for sustainable alternative products continues to increase. Manufacturers are investing in research and development to create new technological and commercial innovations in bioplastics and non-plastic compostable materials. As new innovations become available, businesses reliant on single-use plastics will be able to access a wider variety of alternative products and it may allow further bans on single-use plastic items.



The future of single-use plastics in Australia

What are other jurisdictions doing?

Australian jurisdictions are committed to taking action on single-use plastics. Six out of eight Australian states and territories have announced their intentions to ban certain single-use plastics. The table below summarises each jurisdiction's progress as well as their current and proposed future bans.

Each jurisdiction has a unique timeline and plan for their single-use plastics ban. There is opportunity to learn from the experience of our counterparts in other jurisdictions through continual collaboration and sharing of knowledge. One of the avenues for doing this is through the Interjurisdictional Single-use Plastics Working Group, which is chaired by the ACT and is made up of representatives of states and territories, as well as New Zealand. As a small jurisdiction, the ACT Government aims to harmonise its laws with other jurisdictions where possible, which will assist businesses operating at a national scale in making a successful transition.

	ACT	NSW ⁴	NT ⁵	QLD ⁶	SA ⁷	TAS ⁸	VIC ⁹	WA ¹⁰
Lightweight shopping bags	Banned	To be banned from 1 June 2022	Banned	Banned	Banned	Banned	Banned	Banned
Straws	To be banned mid 2022	To be banned from 1 November 2022		Banned	Banned		To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2021
Drink stirrers	Banned	To be banned from 1 November 2022		Banned	Banned		To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2021
Cutlery	Banned	To be banned from 1 November 2022		Banned	Banned		To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2021
Expanded polystyrene food and drink containers	Banned	To be banned from 1 November 2022		Banned	To be banned March 2022		To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2021
Plates and bowls		To be banned from 1 November 2022		Banned			To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2021
Cotton bud sticks with plastic sticks	To be banned mid 2022	To be banned from 1 November 2022					To be banned early 2023	To be banned by the end of 2022
Fruit and vegetable barrier bags	To be banned mid 2022							To be banned by the end of 2022
Heavyweight plastic bags								To be banned by the end of 2021



	ACT	NSW ⁴	NT ⁵	QLD ⁶	SA ⁷	TAS ⁸	VIC ⁹	WA ¹⁰
Microbeads	To be banned mid 2023	To be banned from 1 November 2022						To be banned by the end of 2022
Plastic cups and lids								To be banned by the end of 2021
Plastic-lined coffee cups and lids								To be banned by the end of 2022
Plastic takeaway containers and lids	To be banned mid 2023							
Oxo-degradable plastics	To be banned mid 2022				To be banned March 2022			To be banned by the end of 2022
Helium Balloon releases				Banned		Banned	Banned	To be banned by the end of 2021
Expanded polystyrene products and packaging	To be banned mid 2023							To be banned by the end of 2022

(Note: the exact names and characterisation of items varies between jurisdictions. The above list compares similar types of items for the purpose of a general comparison. The exact items being banned in each jurisdiction may not be exactly the same as the general categories used in this table.)

⁴ <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/environment-energy-and-science/plastics-action-plan/phasing-out-single-use-plastics-in-nsw>

⁵ <https://nt.gov.au/environment/environment-protection-recycling-waste/plastic-bag-ban>

⁶ <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/pollution/management/waste/recovery/reduction/plastic-pollution/single-use-plastic-products-ban>

⁷ <https://www.replacethewaste.sa.gov.au/>

⁸ <https://epa.tas.gov.au/about-the-epa/policy-legislation-cooperative-arrangements/acts-regulations/plastic-bag-act>

⁹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/single-use-plastics>

¹⁰ <https://www.wa.gov.au/service/environment/business-and-community-assistance/western-australias-plan-plastics>

The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation and single-use plastics

The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) is an organisation that works with governments, businesses and other organisations to encourage more sustainable approaches to packaging by improving design, collection and recovery of valuable packaging resources.

Under the National Waste Policy Action Plan, APCO have been tasked with identifying problematic and unnecessary plastic packaging and working towards 100% of all Australia's packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025. APCO has developed an Action Plan for problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging¹¹ which identifies a number of plastic products that may be suitable for phase out, including:

- Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) loose fill packaging
- Moulded EPS packaging for white/brown goods and electronics
- Rigid polyvinyl chloride (PVC) packaging
- Rigid polystyrene (PS) packaging
- Opaque polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles
- Rigid plastic packaging with carbon black
- Problematic multi-material laminate soft plastics
- Pumps and trigger packs
- Small caps and closures
- Coloured PET.

The ACT Government is engaging with APCO on a range of sustainable plastic packaging and product issues, and will continue to stay up-to-date with progress in understanding the suitability of these items for potential phase out in the future.

Consultation

The ACT Government is undertaking a public notice period from 14 October 2021 to 12 January 2022 on the Tranche 2 items to be banned, seeking public submissions on the phase out and the development of the regulation. In addition to the extensive consultation undertaken in 2019, and ongoing consultation on Tranche 2 items through the Plastic Reduction Taskforce, this period will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to highlight considerations to inform government decisions on the Tranche 2 items including how they are banned and possible exemptions.

The ACT Government will continue to work closely with selected industry stakeholders such as ACT businesses, industry peak bodies and representative organisations, community organisations and institutions to develop strategies to reduce negative impacts of the ban, particularly in relation to access to plastic straws for people that need them.

¹¹ Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation 2020, Action Plan for problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging, <https://documents.packagingcovenant.org.au/public-documents/Action%20Plan%20for%20Problematic%20and%20Unnecessary%20Single-Use%20Plastic%20Packaging>

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