

Thursday, 17 April 2008

SOUTH AUSTRALIA LEADING NATION WITH OUTRIGHT BAN ON BAGS

South Australia will lead the nation when it pushes ahead with an outright ban of single-use plastic bags from January after Environment Ministers today failed to reach national consensus on an Australia-wide ban.

SA Minister for Environment and Conservation Gail Gago says the Rann Government has been long pursuing a bag ban by the end of this year.

“Since States, Territories and the Commonwealth couldn’t agree on a single approach today – whether it be an outright ban, retailer charge or Federal levy – South Australia will be pioneering another important environmental step for our nation, as we did with container deposits 31 years ago,” says Minister Gago.

“South Australians have demonstrated strong community support for CDL and surveys show 83 per cent of respondents in our State are also happy to use re-usable bags in place of conventional plastic bags.

“We were prepared to be flexible in the interests of national consistency, but we are not prepared to delay such a vital step in meeting the world’s responsibility to act more sustainably.

“If jurisdictions can miraculously agree on a nationally consistent approach that will meet SA’s expectation to substantially eradicate harmful plastic bags within an achievable time frame for our January deadline then SA will be open to considering it.

“Today Ministers have undertaken to examine further options surrounding other means of phasing out single-use plastic bags which are being investigated.

“I am extremely disappointed that after six years of discussions the jurisdictions still haven’t agreed on a nationally consistent option.

“SA’s ban alone could see almost 400 million less plastic bags entering the SA waste and litter streams every year.

“That’s an astonishing 1,600 tonnes of plastic that contribute to greenhouse gases, clog up landfill, litter our streets and streams as well as kill sea life.”

The Government has already started to prepare legislation and anticipates releasing a draft bill in the next month.

In the meantime the Government will continue to work with retailers and unions in promoting a smooth phase out of the bags at the end of the year and ensure risks for shop assistants are minimised.

An education campaign targeting the community, retail sector and workers will be underway during the second half of this year.

Minister Gago also raised the urgency for a comprehensive solution to the recycling of e-waste during today's meeting of the nation's Environment Ministers.

Options for collection and recycling of computers, printers and televisions including take back programs will be raised at the next meeting in November.

South Australia's pursuit of an industry solution to the collection and safe recycling of fluorescent tubes is also undergoing further consideration after a report was sought on the matter.

This is becoming an increasingly pressing issue as more people are encouraged to turn to the environmentally friendlier compact fluoro 'globes'.

For further information contact Nicole Thomas on 8463 3460 or 0488 588 710