

Sunday 5 June 2005

SA FIRST IN PLASTIC BAGS BAN

Single-use plastic shopping bags will be banned in South Australia in three years with the State Government introducing a deadline to rid the state of the environmental scourge.

The State Government will push for consumers to embrace reusable green bags as a replacement.

Speaking on World Environment Day, Premier Mike Rann says the State Government is taking the lead nationally with a decision to phase out plastic bags by the end of 2008.

“This is a brave and progressive step for this state, no other state has so far gone this far. But this is a decision that this Government fervently believes is necessary to stop the damage plastic bags are doing to our environment and to protect our wildlife,” he said.

“And we believe South Australians will support this move. Already up to 39 councils across the state have moved towards being plastic bag free, with \$700,000 in funding provided by the State Government to help their initiatives.”

Environment Minister John Hill said up to 6.9 billion plastic bags were used in Australia last year, including 8 per cent in South Australia – with the majority ending up in landfill. Up to 6.01 billion of those are the single-use bags which would be banned in SA.

“Plastic bags take a very long time to break down in landfill,” he said.

“But not only are they ending up in landfill, they’re also finding their way into stormwater, rivers and streams and floating out to sea, where they are killing our marine creatures and birds.

“South Australia has traditionally led the way in environmental reform, with our progressive container deposit legislation lauded nationally. This Government is determined to uphold this tradition – and we are leading the way again with a ban on single-use plastic bags.”

In 2002 South Australia put the issue of plastic bags on the national agenda and has since secured an agreement from the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, which is made up of federal and state environment ministers, to phase out plastic bags by the end of 2008.

“Now we want the environment ministers to agree this year to an Australia-wide ban at the end of 2008,” Minister Hill said.

“At the next meeting of the EPHC in Perth at the end of June, South Australia will be calling for a vote for a national ban.

“If this fails, then SA will introduce our own regulations for a state-wide ban.”

Minister Hill said a new Clean Up Australia survey showed that an overwhelming 81 per cent of Australians surveyed favoured the banning of single-use plastic bags.

“South Australians have really embraced reusable bags when shopping,” he said.

“They are highly visible in supermarkets, and more and more people are doing the right thing.”

The State Government will set up the Plastic Bags Phase Out Taskforce to help the transition over the next three years for retailers. That taskforce, led by the State Government’s recycling body, Zero Waste SA, will in particular provide assistance to small businesses in dealing with the ban. The Small Business Development Council and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association will be represented on the taskforce.

It is proposed that ‘barrier bags’, small plastic bags used for carrying meat and fruit and vegetables, will be exempt from the ban. Low density polyethylene bags, for example the thicker bags used in department stores and clothes shops, will also be exempt in the short-term.

The Australian Retailers Association has already been working with the EPHC in phasing out single-use plastic bags.

Under an existing voluntary Code of Practice for reducing supply of bags, major supermarkets have already made significant reductions, with a 26 per cent drop in supply achieved during 2004. The target is for a 50% reduction by end of 2005.

MEDIA: Minister Hill will be available today (Sunday, 5 June) at 11.30am for comment at Coles Supermarket, Grote St, City.