



**ACT**  
Government

# Phasing out single-use plastics

Next Steps Policy

Transport Canberra and  
City Services Directorate

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# Contents

Foreword – Minister Steel	5
Single-use plastics: we have a problem	6
<i>Phasing out single-use plastics: what we heard through the consultation</i>	7
The ACT is acting to phase out single-use plastics	8
The phase out approach	8
Immediate phase out	8
Phase out after 12 months	9
Longer term consideration	9
Current Government Initiatives	10
ACT Government swap and go reusable coffee cup scheme	10
Complementary measures	11
Continued engagement	11
ACT Government events and plastic-free precincts	11
Events ACT	11
Actsmart ‘plastic busters’ and education campaigns	12
Championing sustainable consumption models within the ACT	12
Government investing in waste infrastructure	12
Timeline	13
References	14



# FOREWORD MINISTER STEEL

Single-use plastic can be a highly problematic material. It's hard to avoid and it is not designed to be reused - the antithesis of our aim to reduce, reuse and recycle. Plastic either litters our waterways and landscapes for hundreds of years or otherwise ends up in landfill because it is not easily recycled.

The Canberra community are some of the best recyclers in the country and they've had enough of single-use plastic.

During consultation earlier this year on the ACT Government's discussion paper *Phasing out single-use plastics*, there was strong support for phasing out certain unnecessary and problematic single-use plastics with a transition to readily available alternatives.

The majority of the community also supported strong government regulatory action to ban problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics, rather than just non-regulatory responses.

The Government has listened to the community and is taking action to phase out single-use plastics in the ACT. This document outlines our responsible approach to phasing out certain products by introducing legislation and other complementary measures.

In doing so we have considered the impact phasing out or banning products could have on certain groups of the community, such as people with a disability, and we will consult with these groups during the implementation of this policy.

Further consideration is also being given to some products where there are not yet clear alternatives that are better for the environment.

This document outlines a decisive but staged approach to manage plastic waste - minimising the impact of regulatory reform to industry, business and the community.



**Chris Steel**  
Minister for Recycling and  
Waste Reduction

# SINGLE-USE PLASTICS: WE HAVE A PROBLEM

The global use of plastic has exploded since it was commercialised in the 1950s. Plastic has become ubiquitous in modern society due to its key qualities of strength, adaptability, stability, light weight and low cost, which can be applied to a wide range of products and packaging.

However, plastic has serious downsides, including:

- 1. Persistence in the environment** - commonly used plastics do not readily break down and can persist in the environment in some shape or form for hundreds or even thousands of years.<sup>1</sup> Plastic pollution is compromising the safety of food supplies, soils, waterways and wildlife. In the ACT, the Keep Australia Beautiful 2017/18 litter survey found that although there had been an 11.3% reduction in litter levels over the preceding 12 months, there has been a 21.3% increase in the level of plastic. This means that a greater proportion of litter in our community is plastic.<sup>2</sup>
- 2. Plastic is made from non-renewable resources** - more than 99% of plastics are made from chemicals derived from oil, natural gas and coal, that once depleted, cannot be replaced. The UN estimates that by 2050 the plastic industry could account for a fifth of the world's oil consumption.<sup>3</sup>

- 3. True cost of plastic** - upstream and downstream costs and perverse outcomes of the consumption of plastic to the economy, environment and society are borne by the environment, waste management and health sectors. Changing the way single-use plastics are consumed in the ACT supports the delivery of the ACT Government's commitment to tackling climate change.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the plastic consumed in the ACT is designed to be thrown away after a single use. Many of the single-use plastic products used are difficult to recycle, and as a result, these products end up in landfills or the natural environment.

For these reasons, our Government wants to take action, including introducing policies and legislation that support the avoidance of the consumption of these products, including banning certain types of plastic products.

Action should be taken on products that have readily available alternatives. Addressing these products in the first instance provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the impacts of problematic single-use plastic, while minimising the risk of unintended environmental, social and economic outcomes associated with some types of single-use plastic products.



# PHASING OUT SINGLE-USE PLASTICS: WHAT WE HEARD THROUGH THE CONSULTATION

The ACT community is progressive and environmentally conscious. Canberrans love the 'bush capital' mantra of our city, and the growing proportion of single-use plastics in landfill and littering our Territory puts community concern about plastic waste at an all-time high.

Internationally, as well as across Australia and in the ACT, there is community support and a growing expectation that governments and companies do more to address the issues and challenges associated with single-use plastic.

Through the *Phasing out single-use plastics discussion paper*, the ACT Government sought to consult broadly with industry, business and the community about ways to avoid and reduce the consumption of single-use plastics. This included considering whether certain categories of single-use plastics should be phased out or banned in the ACT.

Feedback from the community, business and industry has shown people support, and expect, the ACT Government to lead action on this important issue. The ACT also has an opportunity to remain at the forefront of environmental action and responsible waste management.

There is broad support for regulatory government action from community, industry, and other organisations. 75% of community survey respondents said a regulatory approach would be most effective to reduce their consumption of single-use plastic products and 20% think a voluntary approach would be most effective. 78% of business survey respondents would prefer a regulatory approach to phasing out single-use plastic products and 17% prefer a voluntary approach.

The consultation received over 3,300 responses. In comparison, South Australia, with a population four

times larger than the ACT, received 3,630 interactions during similar consultation demonstrating the huge interest this issue has amongst the ACT community. Through the feedback received from industry, business, and community members, there were high levels of support to phase out the following single-use plastic products in the ACT. For example, the community survey revealed that:

- a) 94% support a phase out of polystyrene
- b) 93% support a phase out of plastic stirrers and straws
- c) 92% support a phase out of plastic lined coffee cups or lids
- d) 91% support a phase out of plastic cutlery
- e) 91% support a phase out of plastic plates and cups
- f) 87% support a phase out of takeaway food containers
- g) 85% support a phase out of lightweight fruit and vegetable barrier bags.

In addition to the consultation community survey, a survey of the general community was undertaken by the ACT Government which found definite or probable support for:

- a) banning single-use plastic straws (77%)
- b) banning plastic-lined takeaway coffee cups (71%)
- c) banning single-use plastic takeaway containers (68%)
- d) banning thicker plastic bags (58%).

The outcomes of the consultation are outlined in more detail in the Consultation Engagement Report available at: [www.yoursay.act.gov.au](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au).



# THE ACT IS ACTING TO PHASE OUT SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

The ACT Government will implement a phase out of targeted single-use plastic products by introducing a regulatory ban. We have earmarked products that will be phased out over time but have also identified products that can be banned immediately in line with community support and the existence of readily available alternatives.

## THE PHASE OUT APPROACH

A phase out approach will give certainty to businesses and the community. We will do this through regulation by introducing new legislation, the *Plastic Reduction Bill 2020*, to phase out certain single-use plastic products within the ACT.

Noting this phase out will impact businesses and consumers (albeit in different ways), we are taking a deliberately staged approach.

### IMMEDIATE PHASE OUT

- > Single-use plastic cutlery
- > Single-use plastic stirrers
- > Single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food and beverage containers (polystyrene containers) (e.g. 'clam shell' containers and cups).

The consultation revealed strong support for the phase out of single-use plastic products. **Single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers and polystyrene containers** are symbolic of single-use plastic consumption and were widely supported for phase out. These products have existing and readily available alternatives and have been identified for immediate ban once the legislation commences.

### EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOAM

Expanded polystyrene foam containers (e.g. plates, cups, bowls, takeaway clamshells) will be phased out immediately. Community consultation identified the phase out of polystyrene foam containers as the very highest priority, with 94% of the surveyed community supporting a phase out. This material fragments and disperses in the natural environment when littered – creating smaller pieces of plastic. Expanded polystyrene foam containers cannot be recycled through ACT recycling bins and must be sent to landfill.

### PHASE OUT AFTER 12 MONTHS

- > Single-use plastic fruit and vegetable 'barrier bags'
- > Oxo-degradable\* plastic products
- > Single-use plastic straws will be phased out after 12 months except for people who need them.

The consultation also indicated strong support for the phase-out of single-use plastic straws and fruit and vegetable barrier bags, along with oxo-degradable plastic products. The ACT Government will move to phase these out 12 months after the regulatory ban of single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers and polystyrene containers. This will ensure that businesses have time to respond and determine which alternatives (if any) are best suited to their needs and allow for consultation on the implementation of the ban on single-use plastic straws and exemptions.



\*Oxo-degradable plastic products are conventional plastics which include additives to accelerate the fragmentation of the material into very small pieces, triggered by UV radiation or heat exposure. Due to these additives, the plastic fragments over time into plastic particles, and finally microplastics, with similar properties to microplastics originating from the fragmentation of conventional plastics (European Commission 2018).

## LONGER TERM CONSIDERATION

- > Plastic-lined single-use coffee cups and lids
- > Single-use plastic dinnerware (e.g. plates, cups and bowls)
- > Other single-use plastic products including boutique/heavyweight plastic bags greater than 35 microns thick
- > Cotton ear buds (with plastic sticks).

The consultation indicated high levels of support for phase out of some of these items such as single-use plastic dinnerware (e.g. plates, cups and bowls) and coffee cups and lids. Some of these plastic types are accepted for recycling in the ACT but can be difficult to sort effectively and may be mistaken for paper or cardboard.

Traditional paper and cardboard dinnerware and coffee cups are recyclable, as long as food residue has been removed first. Other alternatives to single-use plastic are often made from plant-based materials, such as bamboo or corn starch. They look and feel like plastic, paper or cardboard but are not currently recyclable at ACT facilities. When single-use plastic items or their plant-based alternatives end up in our paper and cardboard recycling, they contaminate this valuable resource. Often, the only appropriate recycling pathway for alternatives to single-use plastic is industrial organics processing.

The ACT Government is currently planning for household food organic waste collection, commencing in 2023. This is considering processing alternatives to single-use plastic to ensure these valuable resources are kept in circulation.

## STRAWS

A huge majority of the community support banning single-use plastic straws. However, alternative straws do not offer the same utility as plastic straws

for those that require their use, because of a disability or a medical reason.

Plastic straws will be banned 12 months after the commencement of legislation except for people who need them. The implementation of the ban and exemptions will be the subject of further consultation so that it works for people with a disability and the environment.



The *Phasing out single-use plastics discussion paper* consultation process resulted in significant feedback on all kinds of single-use plastic products, many of which require further consideration. We will continue to evaluate the merits of expanding the phase out approach to other single-use plastic items, particularly as suitable alternatives become more widely available. Feedback indicated the ACT community is also concerned about plastic more generally, including packaging. The ACT Government is supporting the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation's (APCO) National Packaging Target that 100% of Australian packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025. We are also supporting APCO in its industry-led target to phase out problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative delivery methods.

This work is looking at problematic packaging such as polystyrene meat trays and packaging from products such as white goods and electronics – these persist in our environment and cannot be recycled. As part of education efforts surrounding banned single-use plastic items in the ACT, we will also look to educate our local community and businesses on other items, such as meat trays, to help them shift to suitable alternatives wherever possible.

## CURRENT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The ACT Government is supporting a reusable coffee cup scheme, trialing a 'swap and go' model before determining a regulatory approach on these items.

There is lower support for phasing out thicker shopping bags in the community. Thicker bags are technically not single-use products and are designed to be reused. Appropriate alternatives to thicker plastic bags (e.g. 'compostable' or 'biodegradable') are not clear at this time. They can present similar environmental risks as plastic and have been banned in several states. The ACT Government anticipates further innovation in the design of plastic bags, including reusable bags, by the packaging industry.



### ACT GOVERNMENT SWAP AND GO REUSABLE COFFEE CUP SCHEME

The reusable coffee cup scheme, formally launched on 11 December 2019, will allow customers to participate in a 'swap and go' model at participating cafes.

Reusable coffee cup provider Green Caffein has been chosen to deliver the scheme following a successful tender process.

Using a swap and go system, customers can return their used cup to the same cafe or another participating café. This keeps these resources in circulation and reduces consumption of single-use coffee cups.

The ACT Government is encouraging cafes to get involved in the reusable coffee cup scheme trial which will be free for both cafes and consumers.

The scheme will be free to both cafes and customers. Organisations interested in signing up to the scheme can find more details at:

[actsmart.act.gov.au](https://actsmart.act.gov.au)

## MICROBEADS

Microbeads are small solid, manufactured plastic particles that don't degrade or dissolve in water. If washed down drains after use, these minuscule pieces of plastic can end up in rivers, lakes and oceans. Microbeads are commonly found in rinse-off cosmetics and personal care products, and business and Australian Governments are working together to phase out 100% of microbeads from these products by 2020.

## COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES

The ACT Government acknowledges that a legislative ban alone won't work to curb consumption of single-use plastic products across the board. A number of complementary measures could be supported over time, to help empower businesses and consumers to ditch the disposable and move towards more sustainable models of consumption.

Specific initiatives will be developed in addition to the regulatory ban including:

### CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

We will collaborate with our community, local businesses and other organisations to ensure that legislation we design is fit for purpose. We also look forward to continued collaboration with our partners in other jurisdictions, such as South Australia, who are working to reduce single-use plastic consumption. This ensures a consistent and, where possible, harmonised approach across the country.

### ACT GOVERNMENT EVENTS AND PLASTIC-FREE PRECINCTS

In addition to the regulatory ban on single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers and polystyrene containers, the ACT Government will also move to mandate that Government events are single-use plastic free. The ACT Government is also exploring options to trial single-use plastic free precincts, building on existing initiatives such as the reusable coffee cup scheme.

## EVENTS ACT

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, Floriade NightFest, the Enlighten Festival, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, Reconciliation Day, FYI Canberra, Windows to the World, the Canberra Nara Candle Festival and celebrations held in conjunction with Australia Day, Canberra Day and New Year's Eve.

Events ACT is taking leadership on tackling single-use plastics in the festivals and events sector through:

- > engaging of a company to deliver sustainable solutions to waste management collection
- > introducing additional waste streams for event attendees – including general waste, recycling, compost, bio-plastics and a container deposit scheme. Additional streams are also being provided for back-of-house event operations
- > successfully piloting the use of a fully compostable cup at Floriade's bar facilities in 2019, including the processing of bio-plastic waste with a local hot compost provider
- > offering discounts for patrons with reusable coffee cups at Floriade 2019, while also providing reusable cups for sale at vendor outlets and the Floriade shop
- > increasing drinking fountains and water refill stations at event sites to encourage the refilling of reusable bottles and to reduce waste generated by single-use plastic bottles
- > a commitment to deliver a new winter event, FYI Canberra, as single-use plastic free.

## ACTSMART 'PLASTIC BUSTERS' AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS

The ACT Government already provides education and behaviour change programs that assists Canberrans to be more sustainable.

Actsmart is helping households, businesses, schools and the community through sustainability programs. These include opportunities to reduce single-use plastic – for example, helping Canberrans rethink their use of single-use plastic straws.

Actsmart will provide information and support to small businesses, to help them avoid and reduce single-use plastic to meet the timelines of the Plastic Reduction legislation and find appropriate alternatives where necessary.

The ACT Government also has the user-friendly online tool, Recyclopaedia, which provides a comprehensive A-Z on how to recycle. We continue to raise the profile of reducing single-use plastic consumption by supporting innovative events such as the Design Out Waste event at the 2019 Design Canberra Festival.

The ban will be supported by a transition period so people can use items they already have, ensuring these don't go to waste. We will also preference education over compliance, ensuring that Canberrans are aware of the ban and how it will affect them – this is how we already approach the existing plastic bag ban. In response to consultation feedback, we will support our community to make decisions on suitable alternatives, including appropriate disposal pathways.

## CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION MODELS WITHIN THE ACT GOVERNMENT

Whilst some single-use plastics are required for good reason, like sterile products used in ACT hospitals, the ACT Government will work across Directorates to encourage the reduction of single-use plastic. For example, Canberra Health Services is looking at ways of cutting down on the amount of single-use plastic used at The Canberra Hospital, such as:

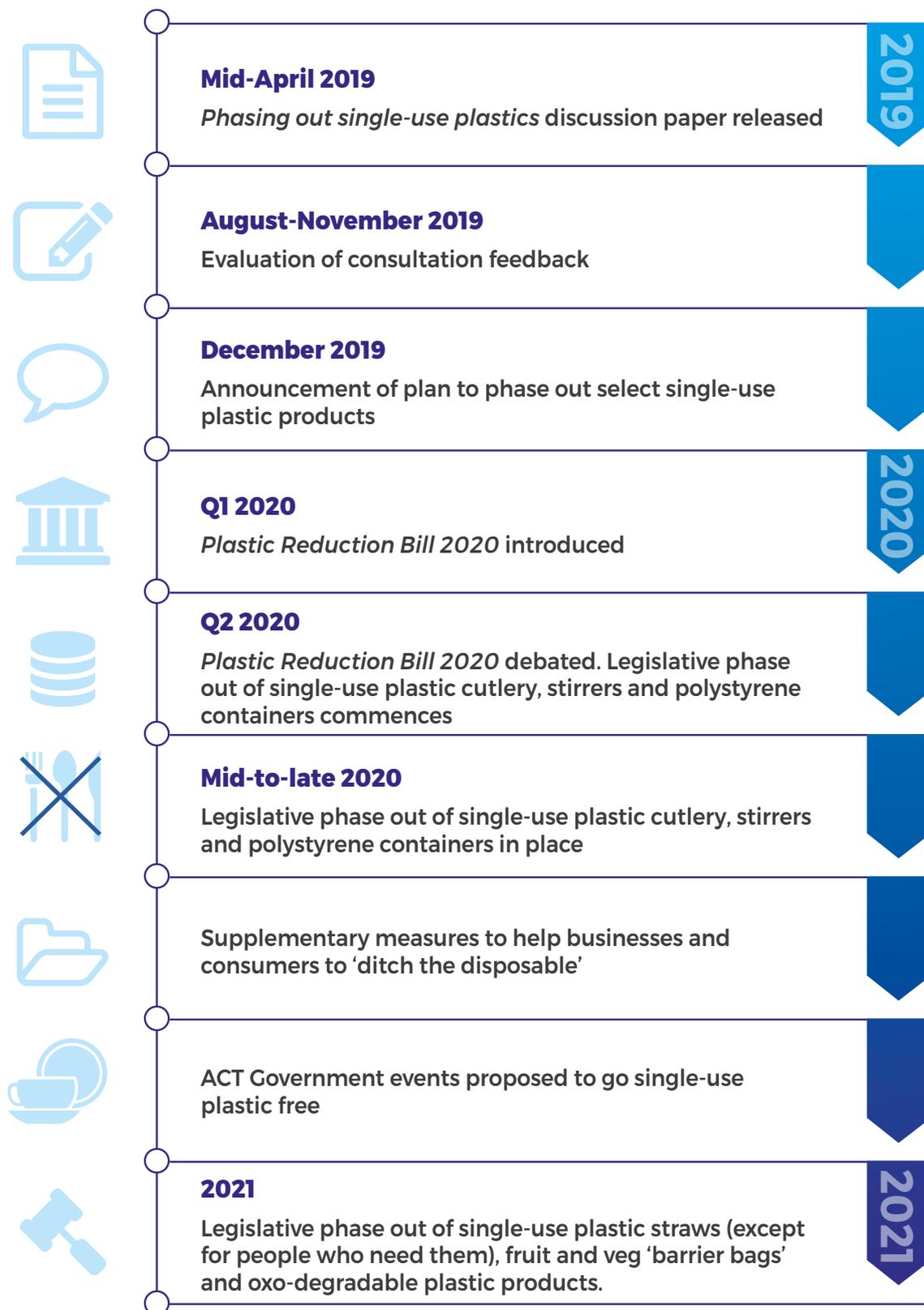
- > trialing reusable alternatives to single-use plastic dinnerware
- > eliminating expanded polystyrene cups by exhausting existing stock, replacing these with recyclable cups
- > trialing the use of alternatives to single-use plastic in the staff cafeteria
- > replacing plastic straws with paper straws, while keeping a small stock of plastic straws on hand for patients with specific needs.

## INVESTING IN WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE

The ACT Government is working on a Strategic Waste Infrastructure Plan. Part of this Plan will examine the infrastructure required to deal with food organic waste in the ACT. This includes exploring appropriate infrastructure to process food organics and, potentially, Australian certified 'compostable' products. This may provide a place for single-use plastic alternatives which can act as an organic feedstock and be turned into compost or other products – keeping these valuable resources in circulation.

The ACT Government is also rolling out more recycling bins throughout the city in highly frequented areas like shopping centres to ensure that recyclable products can be conveniently recycled.

# Timeline



# REFERENCES

1 United Nations Environment Programme (2018), *Single-use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability*, available at: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic\\_sustainability.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic_sustainability.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1) accessed on 7 October 2019, p12.

2 Keep Australia Beautiful National Association (2018), *National Litter Index 2017 – 2018: Australian Capital Territory Results*, Canberra, p 6.

3 United Nations Environment Programme (2018), *Single-use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability*, available at: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic\\_sustainability.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25496/singleUsePlastic_sustainability.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1) accessed on 7 October 2019, p2.

4 ACT Government (2019), *Phasing out single-use plastics discussion paper*, Transport Canberra and City Services, Canberra.

European Commission (2018), Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/oxo-plastics.pdf> accessed on 18 October 2019, p. 2.



