
CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY Sunday, 2 March 2008

SA PUSHES AHEAD WITH BAG BAN BY END OF YEAR

Free single-use plastic bags will be banned in South Australia at the end of the year.

Premier Mike Rann and Environment Minister Gail Gago made the announcement today on Clean Up Australia Day that legislation is now being drafted to introduce to State Parliament next month.

“South Australia is leading the push for a national ban to rid our State of this environmental scourge,” Mr Rann said.

“We started the anti-plastic bag fight and we’re pushing ahead regardless of whether a nationally consistent approach is agreed to in the meantime.

“The time has come to lead by example and I am urging all States to follow this important step in ridding our environment of these bags that contribute to greenhouse gases, clog up landfill, litter our streets and streams as well as kill sea life.

“A ban in our State 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.

“National consistency remains the ultimate goal and the State’s have agreed to pursue that option, but it has to happen in a timely fashion.

“To that end, our bill will be easily adaptable to any developments that occur on the national stage for the sake of consistency.

“Failing that, if South Australia is forced to go it alone, then we will pursue a ban,” said Mr Rann.

Minister Gago wrote to all States last year restating that SA’s preferred option is a complete ban.

“We’ve been trying to get all States to the negotiation table on this within the 2008 timeframe and time is fast running out,” says Minister Gago.

“Mid last year all states reaffirmed their commitment to continue working towards a nationally consistent regulatory option and I look forward to all States considering options to be presented by a working group when environment Minister’s next meet in April.

“A national approach will be better for consumers and better for retailers but if it can’t be delivered in time South Australia will go it alone.

“In the meantime the Government is working with retailers and unions to ascertain Occupational Health Safety and Welfare implications to minimise any risks.

“A community education campaign will also be implemented before the ban,” says Minister Gago.

The ban on free bags also supports South Australia’s Strategic Plan target to attain sustainability - particularly the goal of reducing waste to landfill by 25 per cent.

By substituting non-reusable products with reusable items we also reduce demand on resources overall, reduce our environmental footprint and remove a potential hazard to the environment.

Plastic Bags Fast Facts

- Approximately 4.24 billion single use bags were distributed across Australia in 2007 – almost 40 per cent fewer than 6 years ago.
- Australians use over 10 million plastic bags a day.
- Australians throw away about 7,150 recyclable plastic bags a minute, with 429,000 recyclable plastic supermarket bags dumped in landfill every hour.
- Plastic bags can take between 15 and 1,000 years to break down in the environment.
- Planet Ark estimates that plastic bags kill at least 100,000 birds, whales, seals and turtles every year.
- In many council areas, plastic bags are the single main contaminant of kerbside recycling.
- Only 5% of Australia’s plastic bags are currently being recycled, despite recycling facilities being available at major supermarkets.
- While plastic bags are considered a 'free' commodity - the estimated cost to households of \$10 to \$15 per year is believed to be added to the price of goods that they purchase.
- Over 10 million reusable bags have now been sold by Coles, Woolworths and Safeway stores. At only \$1 each, they're a cheap way to save Australia's wildlife!
- Most lightweight plastic bags used in Australia are imported.

For further information contact Jill Bottrall on 0419 990 160 or Nicole Thomas on 0488 588 710
--