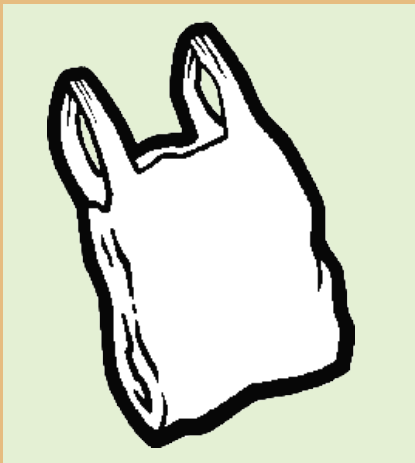


# Plastic Bag Ban

PLASTIC PAIN FOR NO GAIN





## Did you know?

As reported in *The Independent Weekly* on 12 February 2010 independent tests of 'biodegradable bags' found that thousands of 'disposable' bags have failed the biodegradable test. Goody bags, handed out in shops and cafes, were one of the bags to fail the test despite the bio-compostable plastic claim written on the bag.

Most Australians are of the opinion that 'every little bit helps' and generously we are happy to be inconvenienced if we believe what we do will help make the world a cleaner, safer and better place.

But there is a problem with the system when the government preys stealthily upon the good nature of most Australians to 'do the right thing.'

On 4 May 2009 South Australia became the first state in Australia to ban the use of plastic shopping bags in supermarkets.

Not all bags - only lightweight plastic or degradable bags. Heavy retail bags used in department stores and 'barrier bags' used for fruit and vegetables haven't been banned.

There is no ban on the copious amounts of plastic packaging containers and bags that most of our grocery products come in.

The question that must be asked is, if South Australia's plastic bag ban will achieve anything worthwhile, why aren't all plastic bags banned throughout the State?

If bans will benefit as the Government promises, then why did Premiers in other states, and the federal Environment Minister, refuse to follow suit in their states and across the nation?

Plastic bags make up two per cent of Australia's litter. Of plastic bags used, a small one per cent end up as litter.

Even the State Government's website, used to promote the plastic bag ban, mentions only three specific examples of animals affected by plastic bags.

While any harm to animals should not be accepted, why aren't we banning anything that causes litter or harms animals?

Non-alcoholic beverage containers make up 21.4 per cent of branded litter across Australia. In South Australia take-away food and drink containers make up the largest proportion of litter items with 23.3 per cent. Yet there is no ban on any of these items.

Plastic bags are criticised by the Government as 'single-use'. But they're not. We're plastic-bag savvy with 93 per cent of shoppers reusing or recycling their plastic bags. What ever happened to reduce, reuse and recycle?

In South Australia we have been forced to move to paper bags or 'green' bags - we don't get a choice. But how 'green' are these alternatives when making them consumes more energy and releases more greenhouse gas?

The Australian Retailers Association outlined their concern about cross contamination as the same green bags are used for meats, fish and vegetables. Yet there is no education campaign to tell people what they should and shouldn't put in green bags.

That's not to say that we should never have bans or restrictions imposed by law.

But they should be the very last resort, not headline-grabbing camouflage for inaction. It's a matter of balance – a balance which governments are increasingly getting out of kilter.

## Did you know?

The Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) has ruled out a nation-wide plastic bag ban with the Department admitting that...

*"Environment Ministers have considered the matter in greater detail and their views on the direction have evolved since that time."*

Not only is there no national legislative ban today, more than two years after the Minister promised to "get cracking" but there will be no ban in the future because the EPHC has ruled that the cost to ban plastic bags "far outweighed the benefits."

So given the EPHC, of which the Hon Jay Weatherill is a member, decided against a national ban bag, why did the South Australian Government press ahead?

