SINGLE-USE PLASTICS AND THE CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME

Let's start the conversation

The South Australian government wants your thoughts regarding the impacts of single-use plastic products on the environment and the future of the Container Deposit Scheme

Government of South Australia
Green Industries SA

A message from the Minister

As South Australians, we have a history of leading the nation in waste management. From our Container Deposit Scheme to the Plastic Bag ban, our state has a lot to be proud of.

As the Minister for Environment and Water, I am committed to keeping South Australia at the forefront of recycling and resource recovery while also increasing economic activity and creating jobs.

Much of what we refer to as wastes are in fact resources that we should strive to keep circulating within the economy.

South Australia is well placed to build on the success of existing legislation for beverage containers and single-use plastic bags. A similar approach could be used for a wide range of other single-use plastic products, which, like plastic bags, are largely intended for disposal after a single-use, and for many of these products there remains no feasible recycling pathway.

The Marshall Government is seeking your ideas and feedback on how we as a state can better protect our natural resources and environment from impacts associated with single-use or throwaway plastic products.

Additionally, ten years on from the last change to the popular Container Deposit Scheme (CDS), it is time to consider opportunities to further improve the scheme, including in terms of its contribution to recycling. We are seeking your feedback on the issues and opportunities to be considered in a review of the CDS.

Continuing to find innovative solutions that reduce waste, improve our environment and benefit our community is critical to ensuring South Australia continues to lead the nation in waste management.

I welcome your feedback on these important issues.

David Speirs MP
Minister for Environment and Water

Invitation to comment

This document is a summary of the two papers *Turning the tide on single-use plastic products* and *Improving South Australia's recycling makes cents*. Please refer to the individual papers for further information on what is discussed in this summary document.

The deadline for comments and submissions on both papers is 5pm, Friday, 22 February 2019.

What is being decided?

The government is seeking ideas on measures to better protect our environment from impacts associated with single-use plastic products and to further improve the effectiveness of South Australia's container deposit scheme.

How can your feedback influence the decision?

Your feedback will help inform the development of options to better manage the impacts from single-use plastic products and to improve South Australia's container deposit scheme.

Get involved:

Comments on the single-use plastics discussion paper can be provided in writing or online, including by undertaking a short survey, at yoursay.sa.gov.au

Written submissions must be lodged with Green Industries SA (GISA), at greenindustries@sa.gov.au or GPO Box 1047 Adelaide SA 5001.

Written submissions on the scoping paper to review South Australia's container deposit scheme can be provided in writing or online via epa.sa.gov.au.

Comments on the scoping paper to review South Australia's container deposit scheme can be provided via:

- YourSAy
- Email to epainfo@sa.gov.au
- Mail to GPO Box 2607 Adelaide SA 5001.

Important information about your submission(s)

Submissions will be treated as public documents, unless received in confidence subject to the requirements of the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*, and may be quoted in full or part in subsequent GISA or EPA reports. If you do not want the public to read your answers, please write "confidential" on your submission.

Please comment on the issues and questions posed, and any other matter you consider relevant. Providing reasons and evidence for your comments will assist in their interpretation.

How will your feedback be used?

A summary of feedback received will be prepared and released publicly. The feedback will be used to inform development of specific options for further detailed consultation with business, industry and other parties.

Tips for written submissions

Please keep in mind the following when preparing your submission(s):

- list points so that issues raised are clear and include a summary of your submission
- if possible, refer each point to the appropriate section, chapter or proposal in the document
- if you discuss different sections of the document, keep these distinct and separate, so there is no confusion as to which section you are considering
- attach any factual information you wish to provide and give details of the source.

Please include your name, position, organisation and contact details (telephone number, email and postal address) with your submission.

Further Information:

Single-use plastic products: Ian Harvey, Director Strategy and Policy, GISA – 08 8204 2051.

Container deposit scheme: Tobias Hills, Manager Legislation and Policy, EPA – 08 8204 2036.

Introduction: Single-use plastic products

Single-use plastics are attracting considerable local, national and international interest and the South Australian community has increasingly been calling for action on items such as plastic bags, coffee cups and polystyrene.

The *Turning the tide on single-use plastic products* discussion paper seeks to further the public conversation around a range of single-use plastic products that are impacting our environment.

Your feedback will help to inform the government's continued efforts to maintain South Australia's national leadership in recycling and our transition to a circular economy.

Questions we would like you to consider

1. Do you consider single-use plastic products are causing environmental problems?
2. What do you consider to be the most important problem associated with single-use plastic products that needs to be addressed?

Plastic bags

3. What are your views on extending South Australia's ban on lightweight single-use shopping bags to include thicker plastic bags? What would be the consequences of such action for community, businesses and the environment?
4. Should all checkout bags and produce bags (i.e. for grocery items) be made from compostable (Australian Standard 4736-2006) material? What would the impacts be for retailers, consumers and industry? Would there be demand and flow-on benefits in establishing new industry to produce compostable bags here in SA?
5. What do you do with biodegradable, degradable or compostable bags once you have finished using them? What do you think about the idea of banning lightweight single-use shopping bags even those made from biodegradable, degradable or compostable substances, as has been proposed in other Australian jurisdictions?

Straws, coffee cups and other items

6. Do you think South Australia should introduce measures to address items such as single-use plastic straws and plastic-lined takeaway coffee cups? What other single-use plastic items or problematic products would you like to be considered for possible government intervention?

Excluded items

7. What are your views on the list of items excluded (see page 30 of the discussion paper) and do you think there are others that do not require additional action or should be exempt from possible government intervention, and why? Are there exclusions that should be included? Why?

Labelling

8. Do you think that labelling describing how to recycle or dispose of a product, or parts of the product is helpful to consumers? For which products would better product labelling enable better disposal?

Business, retailers, manufacturers and importers

9. If you are a South Australian based manufacturer or importer of any of the single-use plastic products mentioned in this summary, what are your views on this topic? Do you have access to alternatives? Are there cost impacts that need to be considered as part of this discussion?
10. If you are a retailer or business that sells, offers or provides single-use plastic products mentioned in this summary, what are your views on this topic?

Community

11. As a consumer of single-use plastic products mentioned in this summary, what are your concerns? What would you like to see done to address the problem(s) or concern(s)?
12. Do you think government intervention is required in relation to single-use plastic products or other problematic single-use items? If so, what type and in what timeframe?
13. Do you think that restricting the sale or supply of some single-use plastic or other problematic products for which there are more sustainable alternatives available is a good idea?

What is the problem?

Plastics play an important role in our economy and daily lives. When used in packaging, plastics help ensure food safety and reduce food waste. But too often, the way plastics are produced, used and discarded harms our environment.

Globally, single-use plastic products are being consumed at an increasing rate, with significant environmental, social and economic impacts.

Plastic production has risen from 15 million tonnes in 1964 to 311 million tonnes in 2014. This is almost the same weight as the entire human population and is expected to double over the next 20 years.

The majority of plastics are produced from fossil fuels, representing around 6% of global oil consumption. This is equivalent to the global aviation sector.

At least 8 million tonnes of plastics end up in the ocean each year. This is equivalent to dumping the contents of a garbage truck each minute and if current trends continue, by 2050 there will be more plastics in the ocean than fish.

In South Australia, around 84% of all waste generated is diverted from landfill. There are strong local markets for construction waste and organic materials, but mixed plastics present challenges for recycling, and the majority of those that are recycled are aggregated for export to international markets. Stringent restrictions have been applied on recyclable materials in these markets and local solutions are required.

Items designed and produced for single-use and disposal waste the resources that have been invested in their production. There are considerable environmental and economic benefits in ensuring materials are recirculated through the economy instead of being used once and disposed.

Some of the commonly littered single-use plastic items in South Australia and overseas includes things such as:

1. Snack bags & confectionery wrappers
2. Take away drinks cups and cup lids
3. Straws
4. Drink stirrers
5. Drink bottles, caps and lids
6. Cotton bud sticks
7. Food containers including fast food packaging
8. Cigarette butts
9. Plastic bags

What can we do?

Single-use plastics are attracting considerable worldwide interest. A significant amount of information has been compiled by the European Union (EU) and other organisations on the impact of single-use plastics. In October 2018, the EU announced its intention to ban a range of single-use plastic items.

At a national level, Australian Environment Ministers have agreed on a New National Waste Policy to reduce the amount of waste generated and improve the recyclability of waste, increase domestic recycling capacity and increase demand for recycled products.

South Australia is committed to working with interstate and national colleagues on these measures including to develop the circular economy. In addition, we can look at taking immediate local action on a range of items designed for disposal after only a single-use, are prone to being littered and are unlikely to be recycled.

The community also has a role in addressing unnecessary plastics and their impacts. The government can help consumers by reducing the availability of single-use items and by providing information on the correct disposal of alternatives.

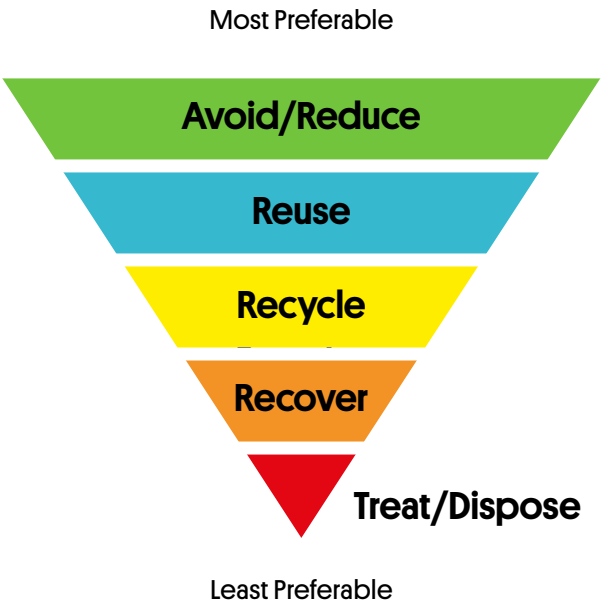
There are a range of policy options that could be adopted to tackle problematic single-use plastic products, ranging from voluntary industry-led approaches through to bans via legislation.

It may be appropriate to restrict market access for some single-use plastic products where suitable, lower impact alternatives exist. Legislation has been used successfully in South Australia for the container deposit scheme and ban on light-weight plastic bags. Similar legislation could be developed to provide a flexible and long-term framework that enables bans on various single-use plastic products, with varying timeframes and impact assessments.

Should South Australia act?

There are a number of considerations that need to be balanced when the community seeks leadership from government and industry.

- **Community interest** – wasteful consumption habits are not sustainable because of global limits to the availability and accessibility of the earth's natural resources. There are limits to the amount of man-made waste and pollution that the earth can absorb or contain. The ABC's *War on Waste* and documentaries such as *Blue Planet II* have captured the attention of the community by highlighting the impact of plastics on the environment.
- **Recycling creates jobs** – an estimated 9.2 jobs are created for every 10,000 tonnes recycled compared with 2.8 jobs for every 10,000 tonnes landfilled. In South Australia, the recycling and waste industry has a turnover of about $1 billion and employs approximately 4,800 people directly and indirectly.



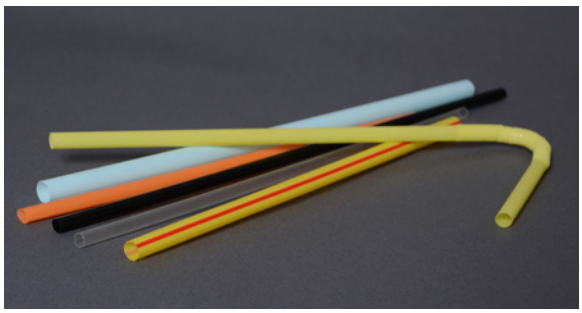
- **The circular economy** – it's important that we move away from the "take, make, dispose" linear consumption pathway to one which continues to return materials back into the economy. Some plastics, and in particular single-use plastic items, are entering the environment rather than being returned to the economy for further use.
- **Waste management hierarchy** – the waste management hierarchy is an internationally recognised aspirational framework for sustainability. However, it does not recognise waste that escapes as litter ends up as marine debris.
- **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** – Sustainable Development Goal 12 is focused on responsible consumption and production patterns. Sustainable Development Goal 14 is focused on life below water and includes a target to prevent by 2025 and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution. The United Nations has announced a major global Clean Seas campaign aimed at ending plastic marine litter, particularly from single-use plastics.
- **Australian Government Environment and Communications Senate Committee** – the June 2018 Inquiry report, *Never waste a crisis: the waste and recycling industry in Australia* recommended that the Australian and state and territory governments agree to phase out petroleum-based single-use plastics by 2023.

What items could be considered?

The government is seeking your feedback on what you consider the most important problem associated with single-use plastic products, what items you consider need addressing, and what the impacts may be to businesses, consumers and industry.

Some single-use plastic items used in health-related applications and procedures are designed to be used once and disposed. These items are excluded from this discussion.

Several local and national initiatives are underway to address other plastic products. These include container deposit schemes, increasing recyclability of (and recycled content used in) packaging, and phase-out of microbeads. There are also items which may require a more tailored approach, such as lost and discarded fishing gear and absorbent hygiene products. These items are also excluded from this discussion.



Single-use plastic straws and cutlery

Australians use an estimated 10 million straws a day.

South Australia represents about 7% of the population of Australia meaning our state's usage might be around 700,000 straws per day or 255,500,000 million straws per year.

20 minutes is the average time a straw is used before being discarded.

Single-use plastic straws and cutlery are represented in the top 10 items littering the marine environment.

There are more sustainable alternatives to plastic straws, including reusable metal straws for consumption in venues, as well as cardboard and paper takeaway varieties.

There are also more sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic cutlery, including compostable varieties.

Plastic-lined takeaway cups (coffee cups)

Estimates of Australians annual use of disposable coffee cups vary with Choice (a leading consumer advocacy group in Australia) estimating that this figure could be as high as 3 billion coffee cups disposed each year.

Based on a simple analysis our state's usage could be around 191,000 to 575,000 per day or 70 million to 210 million disposable coffee cups used each year.

The plastic waterproof lining of many paper coffee cups means these can't be recycled with collections of paper and cardboard and may actually contaminate a load, causing the whole lot to be sent to landfill.

There are a number of alternatives to plastic-lined take-away cups, including re-usable 'keep cups', as well as compostable varieties.

Plastic bags

South Australia's ban on lightweight checkout style plastic bags came into effect in May 2009.

It has effectively removed from circulation around 400 million single-use plastic bags each year in South Australia, while reducing related environmental impacts and stimulating reuse and alternative product development (such as multiple-use bags).

A decade on, it's timely to consider further reforms to plastic bags and address deficiencies identified in the current legislation, as well as consider the measures being implemented in other Australian jurisdictions in relation to plastic bags. This may include options to expand the ban to all lightweight shopping bags, including those labelled as biodegradable, as well as thicker plastic bags.

There are more sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic bags and South Australians have demonstrated their support and commitment in this regard since 2009.

Beverage containers

South Australia's container deposit scheme (CDS) was established in 1977 to reduce littering of beverage containers. It continues to have a high level of community support and has a strong impact on the recycling of beverage containers covered under the scheme.

In 2017–18, almost 603 million containers were recovered by collection depots for recycling. For more information on the container deposit scheme, see page 16.

Are there impacts?

Further work will be undertaken to evaluate how many South Australian-based manufacturers or importers of single-use plastic products would be impacted by potential intervention measures from government. Impact assessments will also be undertaken for retailers and consumers.

Negative impacts on state-based businesses that support South Australian jobs should be avoided or minimised where possible. Similarly, increased cost pressures facing the community are to be avoided or minimised.

It is also preferable for voluntary approaches or collaborative measures or policies over regulatory measures where business and industry have the foresight and willingness to act in a timely manner and where the alternative measures or policies achieve a tangible reduction in the impact of single-use plastics on the economy, environment, and society.

The state government's consultation on this issue is the starting point for discussion with business and the community. Opportunities identified through the consultation process will be subject to further analysis to identify impacts on the community, businesses and councils.

Where to from here?

Views and thoughts expressed in submissions on this challenging and important issue will help inform government policy to **turn the tide** on single-use plastic products.

Subject to the outcomes of this discussion paper consultation process, further detailed consultation with business, industry and other interested parties will be undertaken.

See page 5 for information on how you can contribute to the discussion on this important issue.

yoursay.sa.gov.au

greenindustries.sa.gov.au

Purpose: Improving South Australia's container deposit scheme

The scoping paper to review South Australia's container deposit scheme is the start of a conversation on how we can build on our success and improve the effectiveness of the container deposit scheme in recycling and litter reduction.

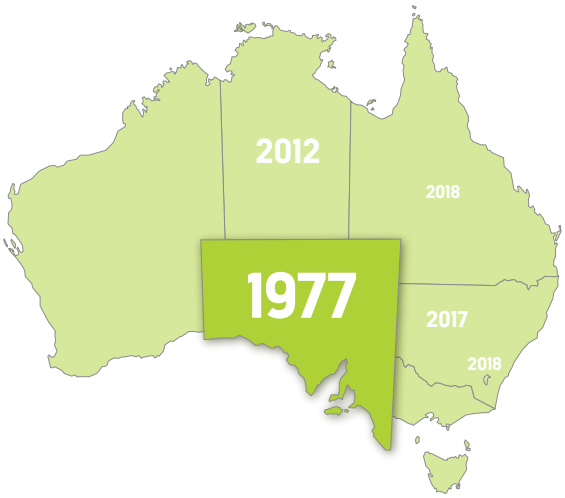
Your views and feedback will help inform the scope of the issues to be considered in the review and the research required to inform the review.

These initial discussions will inform a CDS review discussion paper for stakeholder and community consultation in mid-2019.

Overview

South Australia has led the way in Australia in container recycling for over 40 years.

Container deposit legislation was first introduced in South Australia in 1977 as a litter control measure and now also supports resource recovery and recycling.



The container deposit scheme (CDS) was introduced to address significant volumes of beverage containers in the litter stream and broadly coincided with the introduction of non-refillable beverage containers such as cans and then later, plastic soft drink bottles. Prior to this, refillable glass bottles for beer and soft drinks were collected via voluntary schemes established by the manufacturers of those beverages.

In 2003 the scope of containers covered by CDS was expanded to include additional beverage containers such as flavoured milk, juice and waters prevalent in the litter stream at the time. In 2008 the refund amount was increased to 10-cents.

South Australia's CDS continues to be a highly successful environmental program aimed at recycling and litter reduction.

In 2017–18, almost 603 million containers were recovered by collection depots for recycling, representing a return rate of almost 77% and diverting about 42,913 tonnes from landfill or litter in that year. At its height the CDS return rate was 81% (in 2011 – 12) and is currently 76.9%.

To build on this success and improve the effectiveness of the scheme in promoting recycling and further reducing litter, the government is keen to hear from anyone involved in the scheme, from the manufacturers of beverage containers, to the person returning their empty containers to the local recycling depot, about their ideas to make the CDS work even better.

We are inviting your thoughts on what issues should be the focus of the CDS review.

Questions we would like you to consider

In making your comments you may like to consider and respond to the following questions that are issues commonly raised in discussions about CDS. These are offered to help generate discussion and are not meant to be a comprehensive list of potential issues and opportunities.

Objectives

1. What should be the objectives of the CDS?

Currently the objects of the CDS are reflected in the *Beverage containers division of the Environment Protection Act 1993*.

2. How well do you think the CDS is currently achieving these objectives?
3. Are there other aims that the scheme could achieve that should be reflected in the legislation, e.g. resource recovery and recycling?

Opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the South Australian CDS

Your views are sought on what opportunities the review should consider to improve the operation of the CDS. In commenting on what you think could be working better you may have a view on the following components of the scheme:

4. Containers included – should more types of containers be included in the CDS and are there containers currently receiving a 10-cent refund that should be removed from the scheme?
5. Banning of containers – should the scheme ban the sale of beverage containers that present challenges for recycling?
6. Governance arrangements – should the review consider how collection depots and supercollectors operate?
7. Marking of containers – is there a need to modernise how containers are marked to display the 10-cent refund?
8. Payment of deposit – is there another way that you would like refunds to be paid?
9. Ease of returning containers – how difficult is it to return your containers for a refund? Are current recycling depots adequate in terms of how many there are and where they are?
10. Dispute resolution – should the review consider options to improve the process of dispute resolution between industry parties in the scheme?
11. Compliance – are there opportunities for improvements in the administration and enforcement of the scheme?
12. Monitoring and information – is there sufficient and transparent information in the current scheme for example audit needs?

Refund amount

13. Should the refund amount be revised?

Supporting research

14. What research do you think is required to inform the CDS review?

Out of scope

15. Are there parts of the scheme that are working really well and you think should not be considered for change as part of the review?

Engagement options

16. How would you like to be part of the CDS review conversation in the future?

Where to from here?

How will your feedback be used?

A summary of feedback will be prepared and released publicly. Based on the outcomes of this consultation process, further detailed consultation with the community, business, industry and other parties will be undertaken.

The results of the consultation process will be used to inform decisions by government on options to improve the CDS, including any legislative change.

Contact

Green Industries SA for more information on single use plastics

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www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au

The Environment Protection Authority for more information on the Container Deposit Scheme

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