

# Western Australia's **Plan** for **Plastics**

## Single-use plastics ban Stage 1 Frequently asked questions January 2022

### ► What are single-use plastics?

A 'single-use' disposable plastic product is an item that is designed or intended to be used only once or a few times before being thrown away (disposed of). These products are made wholly or partly from plastic: a material made from or comprising of organic polymers of plant or fossil fuel origin. Items made from expanded polystyrene are included in this definition.



### ► What is WA's Plan for Plastics?

[Western Australia's Plan for Plastics](#) was released in November 2020 and fast-tracked in June 2021. The plan provides a policy roadmap to reduce the impact and prevalence of single-use disposable plastic items.

The plan provides short-term and medium-term actions for change, including engagement and education programs, research and innovation and regulatory bans on the supply and distribution of specified single-use plastic disposable items. Actions to address single-use plastics will be supported by engaging with the community and key stakeholders.

Advice has been provided by the Single-Use Plastic Working Group incorporating membership from the following sectors: State and local government, environment, retail, grocers, hospitality, catering, packaging, disability, medical and health (including Aboriginal health), carers, pharmacies and aged care.



Regulations will be introduced to ban specified single-use plastic items across two stages:

- Stage 1: commencing 1 January 2022
- Stage 2: commencing 1 January 2023.

A Plastic Free Places program will complement the plan.

### ► Why are we banning certain single-use plastics?

Single-use plastics are used in high quantities, and have become a part of everyday life. Western Australians use millions of single-use plastics every year. Single-use plastics are commonly used outside the home, where they frequently end up as litter. In addition, single-use disposable plastic items are not recycled, contaminate recycling waste streams and most end up in landfill.





In the environment plastic waste breaks up into smaller fragments (if at all) and these fragments are called microplastics. Microplastics are now ubiquitous and pollute the oceans, and have been found in the Alps and Antarctica.

Plastic waste poses a significant threat to the health of marine, freshwater and land-based wildlife and ecosystems, and impacts the amenity of our environment and coastlines. Microplastics are known to enter the food chain, posing a risk to public health.

In 2019 the State Government consulted the public to gauge their support for actions to address single-use plastics and their preferred policy approaches. Nearly 9,500 submissions were received, with over 98 per cent of those supporting action. Preferred policy approaches included banning items, improving the sustainable design of products, and community education.



## ► What is being banned in Stage 1?

The Environmental Protection (Prohibited Plastics and Balloons) Regulations 2018 provide the regulatory framework for the bans. The Regulations will commence on 1 January 2022 with enforcement of the bans commencing from 1 July 2022 (for most items). Under Stage 1, the Regulations will ban the following single-use plastic items (click on each item for more information):

- cutlery
- stirrers
- straws<sup>1</sup>



- plates
- bowls
- cups<sup>2</sup>
- takeaway food containers made from expanded polystyrene (includes trays aside from those used for meat and seafood packaging)
- thick plastic bags
- helium balloon releases
- unlidded containers.

1 Subject to provisions to ensure people who require plastic straws retain access to this item to maintain their quality of life.

2 Regulations for cups will be enforced from 1 October 2022 – providing additional time for stakeholders to adapt.

## ► Who do the bans apply to?

The ban on the sale and supply of 'prescribed plastic bags' and 'prescribed plastic items' will apply to all businesses, retailers, wholesalers and distributors in Western Australia. Community organisations and institutions may also be affected by the ban.

The ban on the release of balloons into the air will apply to every person in Western Australia.







## ► Can single-use items be recycled?

Single-use plastic and other plastic products are designed to be disposed after limited use. Some single-use plastics can be recycled, however many either cannot be recycled (such as straws) or all of these have very low recycling rates.

## ► Which plastic bags are banned?

The ban applies to all carry bags with handles, made wholly or partly from plastic. This includes bags made from plastic that are marketed as degradable, biodegradable, oxo-degradable or compostable. Bags made from plastic-laminated paper or plastic-laminated cardboard are also banned.

Note: The ban on 'thick' plastic bags is an extension of the existing lightweight plastic bag ban, which focused on plastic bags 35 microns or less. Now, no thickness or weight limit is prescribed for plastic bags, meaning all bags with handles are banned.

## ► Which plastic bags are **not** banned?

Plastic bags that are not part of the ban include:

- barrier bags (a plastic bag without a handle used to carry unpackaged perishable food)
- a bag that is an integral part of the packaging in which goods are sealed for sale
- shopping bags made from one or more of the fabrics which include plastic:
  - non-woven polypropylene
    - minimum weight of 90 grams per square metre (gsm) measured as a single layer of fabric
    - must be sewn and not heat-sealed
  - woven polypropylene (whether or not it is insulated for the purpose of keeping items cold)
  - nylon
  - recycled polyethylene terephthalate (rPET).

## ► Can I still use my plastic bags for shopping?

Yes you can still use your plastic bags for shopping. It will only be prohibited for a retailer to sell or supply a plastic bag after 1 July 2022.

## ► What single-use plastic items are **not** banned?

The Stage 1 single-use plastic bans do not include:

- plastic lids for bowls and cups (in Stage 2)
- cups made from expanded polystyrene (in Stage 2)
- plastic food containers with a lid (unless made from expanded polystyrene)
- plastic cutlery attached or incorporated into packaging (e.g. a spoon inside the container or a prepacked yoghurt)
- single-use plastics that are pre-packaged off-site to the point of sale, and are not designed to be removed from the container before being supplied to the customer





- reusable cooler boxes made from expanded polystyrene
- the supply of plastic straws in specific circumstances (see below)
- cups used for hot beverages, such as a coffee cup (in Stage 2)
- thick reusable plastic items designed for repeated use (e.g. camping gear)
- trays made solely from expanded polystyrene used to package raw meat or seafood
- paperboard bowls or cups that are lined (with or without plastic) and certified as biodegradable.

### ► What does 'certified biodegradable' mean?

'Certified biodegradable' means a product that has been issued with a certificate from an authorising body verifying that the item complies with the Australian Standard 4736-2006 or 5810-2010, and that the certificate's period of validity has not expired.

### ► Are compostable, degradable and biodegradable single-use plastics included in the ban?

Yes. It is common for single-use plastics to be labelled as degradable, oxo-degradable, biodegradable or compostable. When littered these plastic types have the same environmental impact as conventional plastic. Products that are made from these plastics or have these labels are included in the ban.

Exemptions are only provided for compostable (certified biodegradable) bowls, food containers and cups.



### ► Where can I access a plastic straw (for a personal or medical need)?

The State Government acknowledges that some people require a drinking straw to meet their individual life needs (because of a disability, medical or other reason). The Plan for Plastics provides a balance between reducing general consumption of plastic straws via a ban, and maintaining appropriate access to plastic straws for people who require them.

Exemptions to maintain appropriate supply of plastic straws were developed in consultation with the [Single-Use Plastic Working Group](#) which has broad representation from the following sectors: health (including Aboriginal health needs), disability, aged care, carer, medical practitioners, pharmacies, retail, hospitality, catering, packaging, environment, local and State Government:

- Individual plastic straws can be requested at a venue serving food or drink (e.g. cafes, restaurants, bars, takeaway food stores or schools); however, the venue is not mandated to supply a straw. Plastic straws will be out of sight and a person requesting a straw is not required to provide evidence of a need.
- Packs of plastic straws will be available from authorised businesses and organisations including: pharmacies, medical and dental care places, local government customer service centres, charities, nursing homes, aged care homes, palliative, respite and rehabilitation service locations. These places are not mandated to stock packs of straws and will have the straws out of general view. Again, no evidence of a need is required to purchase these products for personal use.
- Wholesalers of plastic straws can continue to provide to the places exempt above.

If you require a plastic straw you can choose to access straws as above, or you may choose to purchase directly from a supplier or online store and bring with you.





### ► Does the ban apply to online sales?

Yes. The ban applies to all single-use plastic items, including those supplied online in Western Australia.

### ► Can I continue to use single-use plastic items that I have stored at home after 1 January 2022?

Yes you can still use your single-use plastic items at home. Prohibited use only applies to a retailer or business selling or supplying single-use plastic items.

### ► Can I still use bin liners?

Yes you can still purchase and use bin liners. However, you can choose to reduce your use of plastic by lining your bin with newspaper (or nothing at all) and washing your bin after emptying it. You can also wrap your organic waste in newspaper and put it in the freezer until bin collection day.



### ► Can I still use 'dog waste' bags?

Yes you can still continue to use dog waste bags. However, plastic waste can be reduced by using pooch paper, newspaper or reusable dog waste bags. Dog waste bags made from oxo-degradable plastics will be banned in Stage 2, from 1 January 2023.

### ► What else can I use instead of single-use plastic items?

There are many alternatives that can be used instead of single-use plastic items, these include:

- **Party decorations** – Non-plastic and reusable party and event decorations are available as alternatives to balloon releases.
- **Celebrations** – bubbles, flags, kites and flowers. Memorials could include planting trees, floating flowers, candles and music as alternatives to balloon releases.
- **Dinnerware** – reusable plates and bowls made from stainless steel, ceramics, silicone, bamboo or heavier plastics. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) paper, cardboard, sugarcane, bagasse, aluminium foil and bamboo.
- **Cutlery and stirrers** – reusable cutlery made from stainless steel, bamboo, silicone and heavier plastics. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) paper, wood and bamboo.
- **Cups and bowls** – washable and reusable cups that are made from glass, stainless steel, ceramics, silicone, bamboo or heavier plastics. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) lined paperboard certified as biodegradable.
- **Straws** – reusable drinking straws made from stainless steel, bamboo, silicone, glass and heavier reusable plastics. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) wheat and bamboo.
- **Carry bags** – Bags made from poly-fabric, cottons, jute, bamboo, hessian, bamboo and nylon. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) paper bags. Bags can also be replaced with boxes and trolleys, or goods can be carried in hand.
- **Food and beverage containers** – washable and reusable food containers made from glass, stainless steel, ceramic and silicone. Single-use disposable options such as (but not limited to) paper, cardboard, sugarcane, bagasse, aluminium foil and bamboo.

## ► How can I remember to bring my reusable items and ensure my actions are beneficial for the environment?

There are a number of actions you can take to reduce the use of single-use plastics:

- Keep reusable bags in the back of the car or in your bag. Pop a note on your door or steering wheel.
- Carry a reusable coffee cup, cutlery, containers and straws with you.
- Reward yourself when you make an environmentally friendly decision.
- Talk with your family, friends and peers about options to avoid plastic.
- When takeaway food containers are required, use alternatives such as paper, sugarcane, or bamboo that are certified as compostable to the Australian Standard 4736-2006, or store your reusable containers with your shopping bags.
- Ensure that at an event or gathering, balloons are not released into the environment. Supervise children at all times to prevent accidental balloon releases.

## ► Where can I go to for support?

Retailers, suppliers and businesses impacted by the Stage 1 bans can visit the National Retail Association's website for materials, or call the hotline 1800 817 723.

Individuals and organisations interested in the Plastic Free Places program can contact the Boomerang Alliance.

Other organisations that have been involved in development of the Regulations, and may be relevant to your area of interest, include:

- Australian Food and Grocery Council
- Australian Hotels Association
- Australian Medical Association
- Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation
- Australian Retailers Association



- Brightwater
- Carers Advisory Council WA
- Council on the Ageing WA
- Department of Communities
- Department of Health
- Developmental Disability WA
- Master Grocers Association
- National Disability Services
- National Retail Association
- People with Disabilities (WA) Inc
- Pharmacy Guild of Australia;
- Plastic Free Foundation
- Restaurant and Catering Industry Association of Australia;
- South West Aboriginal Medical Service
- WA Local Government Association (or your relevant local government)
- WWF Australia.

All other enquiries can be directed to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (the department) at:

- Website: [Western Australia's Plan for Plastics | Western Australian Government \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/our-policies/western-australias-plan-for-plastics)
- Telephone Number: 08 6364 7000
- Email: [plastic-action@dwer.wa.gov.au](mailto:plastic-action@dwer.wa.gov.au)
- Act and Regulations: [www.legislation.wa.gov.au](https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au)



## ► What are the fines/penalties relating to banned single-use plastic items?

There are penalties relating to the sale and supply of banned single-use plastic items. These include:

- **Single-use plastic items must not be supplied by a business or undertaking** – \$5,000.
- **Plastic bags are not to be supplied by a business or undertaking** – \$5,000.
- **Suppliers and manufacturers of plastic bags must not give any false or misleading information** – \$5,000.
- **Plastic straws are not to be supplied by a business or undertaking** – \$5,000 (exemptions apply).
- **Release of gas-filled balloons by an adult or child** – \$5,000.

Enforcement of penalties will be in accordance with the department's enforcement policy.

## ► How can I report a business or an organisation suspected of non-compliance?

If you suspect a prohibited plastic item is being supplied or sold you can make an enquiry or report to the department's Pollution Watch hotline number (1300 784 782) or via email to [pollutionwatch@dwer.wa.gov.au](mailto:pollutionwatch@dwer.wa.gov.au).

## ► What happens if a manufacturer sells me a single-use plastic prohibited item without my knowledge?

It is an offence for a person conducting a business or undertaking to supply a prohibited plastic item. After 1 July 2022 these instances should be reported to the department.

## ► Can I continue to use my current excess stock after 1 January 2022?

The bans come into place on 1 January 2022. Businesses and organisations will have a period of six months to run down their existing stock. Penalties will be enforced from 1 July 2022, except for cups which will commence on 1 October 2022.

## ► What is being banned in Stage 2?

Stage 2 of WA's Plan for Plastics will start on 1 January 2023. The Regulations will ban the following single-use plastic items:

- barrier/produce bags
- microbeads
- polystyrene packaging
- polystyrene cups
- coffee cups and lids
- cotton buds with plastic shafts
- oxo-degradable plastics (plastics designed to break up more rapidly into fragments under certain conditions)
- bowl and cup lids.

Opportunities to discuss the scope and impact of the Stage 2 bans will be provided in 2022.

## ► Where can I go for further information?

Further information can be found at:

- The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation: 08 6364 7000
- Email: [plastic-action@dwer.wa.gov.au](mailto:plastic-action@dwer.wa.gov.au)
- Website: [Western Australia's Plan for Plastics | Western Australian Government \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/australias-plan-for-plastics)

