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Manager, Plastic Bag Ban
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
168 St George's Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

plasticbagban@dwer.wa.gov.au

Dear Madam/Sir

Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia

The Quinns Rocks Environmental Group is a local community organisation promoting conservation and sustainability. We offer these comments on the ban that the State Government proposes to introduce on light-weight, single use plastic bags – in response to the discussion paper on the topic.

We support the intention of reducing plastic pollution to reduce environmental impacts. There is growing awareness of the ubiquity of plastic in the environment and the effects plastic can have on, especially in our marine environment. Single use plastic bags, commonly used to carry shopping home, are part of plastic litter that poses a threat to marine wildlife in particular.

Single use plastic shopping bags are also symbolic of throwaway practices that raise broader concerns about resource consumption and sustainability. A ban on light-weight, single use plastic bags should be a stepping stone to greater changes in industry and community practices around resource use and waste management.

Key points we want to make on the proposed plastic bag ban:

- The plastic bag ban is supported. We consider a ban more likely to be effective than an education campaign or voluntary code with industry. A levy may have merit, however banning a product that poses serious environmental impacts is the better approach – sending a clear signal of community concern and policy intent.
- The scope of the ban is too narrow and should be broadened. Single use bags of 35 microns or less and with handles addresses commonly used shopping bags for groceries but does not address many other single use bags. Also, it may mean that retailers simply offer single use bags above the threshold set in regulations. The policy intent and rationale for a 35 micron threshold should be reviewed in developing the regulations.
- Biodegradable and compostable bags should be included under the ban. We understand that biodegradable bags may simply mean that plastic fragments into small pieces more rapidly. Also, bags marketed as compostable may only breakdown as intended under high temperatures attained in industrial composting facilities – not in home compost bins

or in landfill. These bags would pose a risk of environmental harm and fail to support the behavioural shift we should foster in the community.

- Community and industry engagement is important to support a change in attitudes and practice toward plastics and waste management generally. The positive approach to consultation for the plastic bag ban (including the community workshops and partnership with the Boomerang Alliance) should be continued into a long-term engagement and education effort. Light-weight, single use bags are one part of the plastic pollution problem. Greater awareness of the issue of plastics in the environment and support for cultural change and practical alternatives are essential to move towards a lower waste and more sustainable community.
- Monitoring should be undertaken to enable evaluation and improvement of policy implementation and community and industry behaviour.

As a local community environment group we welcome the intent of the plastic bag ban and urge consideration of the issues raised here in drafting the regulations and developing the education and engagement campaign to support implementation. Local groups like ours can play a role in building awareness and support to tackle plastic pollution and promote zero waste practices. We look forward to supporting progress with this initiative.

Yours sincerely,

David Wake

For the Quinns Rocks Environmental Group Inc

Email [REDACTED]