



Australian states seek federal ban on plastic bags

By Kate Tilley

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PLASTICS NEWS CORRESPONDENT

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA (July 26, 7 a.m. ET) -- Although some Australian cities, local councils and three states and territories have banned single-use plastic bags, Sydney-based Planet Ark Environmental Foundation Ltd. says other states are waiting for Australia's Federal Government to act.

Planet Ark recycling campaigns manager Janet Sparrow said many Australian councils have been working for years to help communities go "plastic bag-free" by banning single-use, non-compostable bags. However, many states are disinclined to introduce material-specific waste regulations without a federal framework.

"Some states are reluctant to take action on something they see as having national implications or that may be better managed and regulated at a federal level," Sparrow said.

Her comments follow a Western Australian city becoming Australia's first local government area to legislate a plastic bag ban.

Fremantle, a coastal port city 12 miles south of Western Australia's capital, Perth, has drafted a law to ban bags less than 60 microns thick.

A City of Fremantle spokesman told Plastics News the law likely will be enacted by the end of 2012.

Fremantle first adopted a strategy to promote plastic bag alternatives in 2004, and several retailers stopped using plastic bags. "This was a non-regulatory approach, so it was never going to reach 100 percent of businesses. The purpose of creating a local law is to complement this approach with regulation that bans the worst plastic bags," the spokesman said.

Several Australian towns, such as Tasmania's Coles Bay and Mogo, in southern New South Wales, have gone plastic bag-free since 2003, but Sparrow said the City of Fremantle will be the first council to enforce the policy with a law.

The law draws on existing legislation already passed in the state of South Australia, and the Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Like those governments' laws, Fremantle's bans plastic bags below a specified thickness and sets a minimum cost for plastic shopping bags.

In May 2009, South Australia became Australia's first state to ban HDPE bags. It passed a law prohibiting retailers from selling or giving away carry bags less than 35 microns thick, although "barrier" film bags, used for holding fruit and vegetables, meat or other perishables, are still permitted.

The NT banned lightweight single-use plastic bags Sept. 1, 2011, in a move similar to South Australia's. The legislation also gives NT residents a \$A0.10 rebate incentive to recycle eligible plastic, aluminum and glass beverage containers.

The ACT was the third Australian state or territory to ban plastic bags. It took effect on Nov. 1, 2011. Shoppers must take their own reusable bags to retail outlets or buy them at checkouts. The ban does not apply to barrier bags or compostable bags.

Sparrow said there has been serious discussion in Tasmania and in Western Australia about the possibility of adopting state-wide bans.

In 2010, the island state of Tasmania's Greens Party introduced a motion to ban non-biodegradable HDPE bags; it was supported by both Tasmania's other political parties, the Labor Party and the National Liberal Party. The government in May said it has set aside \$A780,000 (\$US812,000) to develop legislation over the next three years.

A bill banning plastic shopping bags was introduced into West Australia's parliament in Mar. 2012 by the Labor Party opposition environment minister Sally Talbot. It sought to ban all plastic bags, with penalties of up to \$A20,000 (\$US21,000) for supplying them. However, the WA Government rejected the bill.

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