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*KPPM: organisational strategists*

*ZWSA Plastic Bags Phase Out Market Research Project*

*Final Report*

*14/7/06*

## *Executive Summary*

On 1 July, 2005 the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, a Council of all of Australia's environment ministers, agreed to a phase out of lightweight (single use) plastic shopping bags by the end of 2008. In South Australia, legislation will be introduced to ensure that the phase out occurs by that date. All shoppers and retailers are expected to have alternatives in place by December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008.

Previous 2005 research by Harrison Market Research and Planet Ark Environmental Foundation established a general level of support for reduction in use of plastic shopping bags, but identified specific demographic groups that were less likely to own reusable shopping bags or who owned reusable bags but forgot to take them when shopping. KPPM Organisational Strategists were commissioned to undertake qualitative research that identified education and communication strategies to support the plastic bag phase out in South Australia. A total of 19 focus groups were held with 119 participants, representing city and rural, old, young, non English speaking, traders and consumers.

The key findings from this research were:

- There was a high level of awareness, across all groups, of why plastic bags were being phased out. Fewer people were aware of the proposed date of the phase out, but most were aware that there were plans to ban plastic bags in South Australia. Both consumers and retailers wanted information on which bags were to be phased out, which were not, and the reasons why. Retailers will need a sufficient lead time to use existing stocks of single use plastic bags and to place orders for alternatives.
- The research found that the main support required by small retailers is widespread, uniform information to the public about the impending phase out. This will ensure that the phase out is seen as a public good, rather than as changing service standards by individual retailers. Information on the timeframe for the phase out was seen as the most important information required by both consumers and retailers.
- Finding alternatives to single use plastic bags for bin liners was a persistent problem and participants wanted information on environmentally safe alternatives to reusing plastic shopping bags.
- Opportunities for new shopping bag materials and designs were seen as a positive element of the phase out. This was a frequent topic of discussion by both consumers and retailers, with a particular focus of discussion about the opportunities to personalise reusable bags or to use a range of bags for different purposes. This indicates a high level of acceptance of the bags and a reason why some consumers (women, young people and random shoppers) don't currently use their reusable bags every time they shop.
- The discussion in focus groups predominantly focussed on practicalities. This indicates that the community is prepared for the change and has shifted from asking 'why do we have to do it' to 'how will we do it' and 'when will it be done'. There was evidence of a high level of enthusiasm and a sense of state pride in the initiative that could be leveraged for a positive, good news campaign.

Based on a seven step model of behaviour change, the research confirmed that South Australians know about the need to phase out single use plastic bags, want to participate in a phase out, feel that they are able to find alternatives for single use plastic bags and that their efforts will be worthwhile. These factors do not need reinforcing in communications leading up to the phase out. The education and information campaign therefore needs to focus on making the transition easy (plenty of notice, alternatives to plastic bin liners), stimulating awareness of the deadline and that all South Australians are involved. Reinforcement of success will be important and should continue beyond the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 deadline. Finally, it is important that there is a penalty for non-compliance, in order to ensure a level playing field for all retail businesses.

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## Background

On 1 July, 2005 the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, a Council of all of Australia's environment ministers, agreed to a phase out of lightweight (single use) plastic shopping bags by the end of 2008. In South Australia, legislation will be introduced to ensure that the phase out occurs by that date.

All shoppers and retailers are expected to have alternatives in place by December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008. Whilst major retailers are gearing up for the change, and many have already run successful campaigns to reduce the use of plastic bags, there remains a number of challenges to ensure that shoppers and small retailers are aware of the impending phase out and will understand what will be expected of them after 2008. Possible constraints to a smooth transition of the phase out include:

- A diverse and widespread retail sector composed of large and small outlets throughout South Australia.
- A timeframe imposed by national bodies as well as locally.
- The need to retain some single use plastic bags to wrap foods such as meat and fish (barrier bags).

Zero Waste SA identified education as the key issue in supporting the new legislation, to ensure that shoppers understood details of the phase out (particularly the timeframe and identification of the bags that will no longer be used) and to bring non-supermarket and small retail outlets on board to 'migrate' the success of the major retailers to the non-supermarket retail sector (N-SR Sector).

To establish the educational messages needed to support the phase out, KPPM Organisational Strategists were commissioned by Zero Waste SA to undertake developmental communications research with shoppers and small to medium sized retail businesses. The aim of the research was to collect qualitative data that will inform the development of effective information and education campaigns in support of the phase out.

The research undertaken for the *ZWSA Plastic Bags Phase Out Market Research Project* builds on two earlier research projects:

1. *Plastic Check-out Bag Use in Non-supermarket Retail outlets*, Planet Ark Environmental Foundation, March 2005. Research commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage.

This project included a nation-wide survey of the N-SR Sector to assess take-up of the Australian Retailers Association's Code of Practice for the Management of Plastic Bags and develop strategies to increase commitment to the code by the N-SR Sector.

2. *Working with the Community*, Harrison Market Research, October 2005. Research commissioned by Zero Waste SA.

This project included quantitative and qualitative research on the waste management and recycling behaviours of the South Australian public to provide benchmarks against which South Australia's *Waste Strategy 2005-2010* and ZWSA's performance could be measured.

Based on this research, KPPM Organisational Strategists were commissioned to undertake focus groups to obtain qualitative data to indicate the communication and education strategies needed to support the phase out of single use plastic bags. The findings and recommendations in this report are based on 19 focus groups with 119 participants.

## *Context for Change*

Previous research by Harrison and Planet Ark revealed an existing community understanding that single use plastic bags are not environmentally sustainable, and a degree of willingness to change to re-usable bags. KPPM's research was structured within this context.

### *a) Acknowledging the Parameters*

A key outcome of this research was to devise a series of education and communication strategies to facilitate the phase out of single use plastic bags in South Australia by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008.

The aim of Zero Waste's education and communication strategies is to effect a reasonably seamless phase out of single use plastic bags by facilitating changes to habits and behaviours identified in previous research, with particular attention paid to consumers and small to medium sized retailers.

There are a number of external parameters that impact on the extent and timing of the strategies to be developed, and the changed behaviour to be achieved. These are:

1. The change will be mandated and will affect the whole South Australian community to some extent;
2. There is a set timeframe for the change to be introduced, and
3. A range of campaigns, initiatives and evaluations have already been introduced resulting in significant levels of voluntary behaviour change.

The two earlier research projects looked at the differences in attitude (towards recycling) across segments of the South Australian population (Harrison 2005) or considered strategies for encouraging the nationwide N-SR Sector to adopt a voluntary code of practice (Planet Ark 2005). The focus of both these research projects was on the individual (person or business) and the changes they had made, or should make.

The current research had a different purpose and a different set of parameters. The outcome is a set of recommendations about communication and education strategies that will assist in facilitating the whole population of South Australia to make a specific behavioural change at a pre-defined point in time, building on the growing level of behaviour change already occurring in South Australia in relation to single use plastic bags. Within this context, the following findings frame the recommendations of this research.

### *b) Community Awareness*

KPPM found a high level of social cohesion across the identified target groups. Individual participants discussed their own behaviour within the perspective of 'our community' or 'our state'. They saw their individual actions as part of a communal effort to achieve a common goal and accepted the individual costs (purchasing reusable bags, making an extra effort) that this entailed. Participants saw the role of Government as one of supporting them to achieve a positive change that they already 'owned' to some extent. There was surprisingly little resistance to the idea of legislating for the change and the research identified homogeneous responses across the target groups in regard to the information and communication strategies required.

The high level of agreement that the next step should be a total ban on single use plastic bags is not surprising. South Australians have a proud history of taking the lead in implementing environmentally friendly policies (the deposits on cans and bottles was mentioned by a number of participants) and the community is increasingly receptive to the prohibition of activities identified as environmentally and socially damaging (smoking, incinerators and dumping rubbish were cited as examples).

The extent of behaviour change already achieved in South Australia underpins this acceptance, 'the South Australian public are conscientious about recycling, and are carrying out recycling behaviours which fit in with their lifestyle' (Harrison 2005 p66). Reusable bags have become part of the South Australian lifestyle. Like the personal shopping trolleys widely used at the Central Market, they have become a local icon that differentiates us from other states.

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Participants wanted a simple, positive information and promotion campaign that focused on the impending legislation, underpinned by a clear and precise message that appealed to all. While they endorsed the use of various communication media so that 'everyone got the message', they did not think it was necessary to target different demographic groups within the community.

### c) Behavioural Change Model

In order to develop a framework for making recommendations, a behavioural change model was used to assess the research findings and identify any information or communication gaps where resources should be directed.

The model used for the assessment was the *7 Doors Model*<sup>1</sup>. This particular model was chosen for the following reasons:

- It is a multi-purpose model based on 'change logic' that can be used for designing, implementing, evaluating or assessing individual or social behavioural change.
- The model has been designed to recognise more than one pathway to successful behavioural change because some of the elements of the 'change logic' will already be present in any given situation.
- The model is an affirmative one. The research findings showed that participants viewed the proposed change as positive; in this model the doors represent barriers when they are closed and pathways to accepting and implementing social change when they are open. The model is therefore suitable to affirm the positive actions already taken within the community.

The following diagram shows the seven elements (or doors) that make up the model and the progression from the original awareness or knowledge of the need for change to the successful achievement and reinforcement of the changed behaviour.



## Findings

The research findings have been presented in two ways.

1. Key themes identified from the research are matched to the research objectives as set out in the project brief.
2. An in-depth analysis and assessment of the research findings using the 7 Doors Behavioural Change Model.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Les Robinson, Social Marketing Consultant with Social Change Media © 2006 Les Robinson  
<http://media.socialchange.net.au/>

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## *1. Key Themes from the Research Objectives*

*Raise awareness of the reasons why plastic shopping bags are being phased out.*

- There was a high level of awareness, across all groups, of 'why' plastic bags were being phased out. Due to the release of the Productivity Commission Report shortly after the commencement of the focus groups, there was also some awareness of 'when' the phase out would take place.

*Support mechanisms for the small and medium retail business sector to prepare for change*

- The research found that the main support required by small retailers is widespread, uniform information to the public about the impending phase out. This will ensure that the phase out is seen as a public good, rather than as changing service standards by individual retailers.

*Information/education required in response to attitudes and behaviours of the target groups*

- Information on the timeframe for the phase out was seen as the most important information required by both consumers and retailers.
- Both consumers and retailers wanted information on which bags were to be phased out, which were not, and the reasons why.
- Finding alternatives to single use plastic bags for bin liners was raised at every focus group. Participants wanted information on environmentally safe alternatives to plastic bags that they could use once the bags were no longer available.

*How quickly could the required changes be implemented by businesses?*

- The timing of notifications about the phase out was important to all groups, with both consumers and retailers wanting to see it introduced as soon as possible.
- While some traders wanted a quicker timeframe, most retailers will need a sufficient lead time to use the single use plastic bags that they have already purchased and to place orders for alternatives.

*Appropriate messages to stimulate behavioural change*

- The responses from the groups were predominantly focussed on practicalities. This indicates that the community is prepared for the change and has shifted from asking 'why do we have to do it' to 'how will we do it' and 'when will it be done'.
- There were a number of responses that indicated a high level of enthusiasm and a sense of state pride in the initiative that could be leveraged for a positive, good news campaign.
- Opportunities for new shopping bag materials, and designs were seen as a positive element of the phase out. This was a frequent topic of discussion by both consumers and retailers, with a particular focus on discussion about the opportunities to personalise reusable bags or to use a range of bags for different purposes. This indicates a high level of acceptance of the bags and a reason why some consumers (women, young people and random shoppers) don't currently use their reusable bags every time they shop.

## *2. Assessment of the Findings using the 7 Doors Model*

Prior to making an assessment of the findings against the chosen behavioural change model it is important to clarify exactly what behaviour change is required.

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Early discussions with the project steering committee had focused on the incidence of ownership and use of reusable bags and the habitual behaviours that may need to be supported to ensure that people took their bag with them every time they shopped. While participants were happy to discuss the reusable bags and the difficulties they encountered in using them, this was of minor interest.

More important to participants was the proposed action by the government to legislate against the provision of single use plastic bags at retail outlets. This was true of both consumers and traders. At all of the focus groups far less interest was shown in reusable bags, memory aids, making checkout modifications or cost, than the timing of the complete phase out; what new styles, sizes and shapes of reusable bag would come onto the market once everyone had to use them; and what could be used for bin-liners when shops no longer provided plastic bags.

The research findings tell us that the core behaviour change required from the South Australian community is to 'give up using single use plastic bags'. The habitual behaviours around reusable bags are secondary behaviours once an initial commitment to 'give up plastic bags' has been made. This was recognised by participants (both consumers and retailers) who were willing to take personal responsibility for these secondary behaviours, but saw a role for government in supporting the community as a whole to achieve the core behavioural change.

The single most effective support, identified by both groups to help them succeed in fully adopting the core behavioural change, was to remove any options for retailers and consumers, and to ensure that single use plastic bags are taken out of circulation altogether.

The following assessment of the findings against the 7 Doors Model focuses on the core behaviour change and identifies the education and communications strategies needed for each element of the model, noting that some stages have already been achieved.

### *1. Knowledge – I know I should*

A 2004 study by Roy Morgan showed that 93% of Australians were concerned about the impact that plastic bags have on the environment (Planet Ark 2005 p6).

In the KPPM focus groups, participants exhibited a wide ranging knowledge of the effects that plastic bags were having on the environment. They spoke of seeing them on the beach and in the street and understood that these bags did not break down in landfill.

Participants were also highly aware of the campaigns by Councils and supermarket chains to discourage the use of plastic bags and encourage the use of reusable bags.

The adoption of the voluntary code by the Australian Retailers Association, the introduction of plastic bag reduction campaigns by the major supermarket chains, and the practices introduced by some retailers in the non-supermarket sector, eg Bunnings, IKEA, Nando and Country Road (Planet Ark 2005 pp 12-18), demonstrate that acceptance of the need to phase out plastic bags is also widely spread across the retail sector.

While plastic bag reduction practices were not as widespread amongst the small retailers that participated in the focus groups, the willingness to adopt different practices 'once they had to' by even the least enthusiastic, indicates that they are also aware that plastic bags are undesirable and should be replaced.

*The widespread awareness of the environmental impact of continuing to use plastic bags indicates that the first door of the model (KNOWLEDGE) is open and that a future campaign does not need to focus on informing the community about the reasons why action is needed to prohibit plastic bags.*

### *2. Desire – I want to*

The Harrison survey showed that 84% of respondents owned a reusable bag (Harrison 2005 p14). A similarly high level of ownership was identified at the consumer focus groups. Participants also identified a number of different strategies they used to obtain reusable bags, including purchase, trading in plastic bags or making their own. The high level of reusable bag ownership and the range of innovative ways used to obtain reusable bags indicates a widespread desire to give up plastic bags.



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The desire not to use plastic bags was also reinforced by the many participants who said that they owned more reusable bags than they required, a 'collection' in a number of cases. This shows a preference for purchasing additional reusable bags, rather than accepting the free plastic bags available at the store. That some participants (impulse shoppers group) always said 'no' when offered a plastic bag, even if it meant dropping their purchases in the car park while they got their car keys out of their pocket, also testifies to a strong desire not to use plastic bags.

The Planet Ark survey of non-supermarket retailers showed that 73% of those surveyed offered plastic bag alternatives at the checkout and a third of those that did not were thinking about offering reusable bags. While the desire to give up plastic bags was not as strong at the traders' focus groups, they are influenced by their customers and take notice of how many people refuse bags, and are prepared to accommodate their customers by supplying or accommodating alternatives. Traders were aware of the campaigns by the big retailers and a number had adopted these practices because of a personal commitment to reducing plastic bag use.

Participants at both consumer and trader focus groups talked about the positive things that might eventuate as a result of the phase out. They considered a range of issues such as how reusable bags would evolve to meet lifestyle choices, the styles, colours and different materials used for bags, how the increase in demand for paper bags would bring down the price, how proud they would be (adults and school children) if South Australia did it first, and how they had previously gone without plastic bags and could do it again (NESB and older people).

One trader said 'we are looking forward to it, it is exciting and challenging', and a number of consumers queried why it was going to take so long and suggested other things, such as disposable nappies, that could also be banned. The capacity to imagine a different (and better) future is seen as a strong indicator of the desire for behavioural or social change.

*The level of personal responsibility for the change, demonstrated by the incidence of refusing plastic bags, the activities undertaken to provide or obtain suitable alternatives and a capacity to imagine a future without plastic bags, shows that the second door of the model (DESIRE) is also open and that a communication and education campaign does not need to focus on persuading the community to give up plastic bags.*

### 3. Skills – I can

Consumer participants at the focus groups were confident that they could completely give up single use plastic bags. Many had already made a significant behavioural change, knew what they had to do and felt it was just a matter of getting used to it.

Discussions at the focus groups showed that a range of new skills are emerging to make giving up plastic bags easier. These include the capacity to estimate how many reusable bags are needed, learning different ways to pack and stack the weekly shop, observing behaviours that delay supermarket queues and adapting personal behaviour accordingly and choosing (or making) the right reusable bag for particular needs.

Mastering the skill of remembering to take their own bags to the shops was the subject of much good-natured banter at the focus groups, often the point at which participants spoke directly to each other about their shared experiences. This tendency for consumers to joke about their own poor memory was also noted at the focus group run during the Harrison research project (Harrison 2005 p88). This attitude indicates that the task of remembering is considered a minor one and improving skills in this area a matter of personal responsibility.

A 'can do' attitude was also shown by the majority of traders who participated at the focus groups. While some potential problems were identified, traders generally expressed the view that they could give up plastic bags without too much trouble, as long as their customers were happy, it was compulsory (so no-one enjoyed a competitive advantage) and any additional costs could be absorbed into prices.

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*The confidence of consumers that they can personally adapt to the phase out is demonstrated by the set of skills they are now voluntarily developing to eliminate plastic bags use. The willingness of traders to meet customer expectations and individually address issues of costs and price shows that the third door (SKILLS) is open and that a future campaign does not need to educate the community on these secondary behaviours.*

### 4. Optimism – It's worthwhile

This element relates to the belief that success is probable or inevitable. Strong political or community leadership is considered an important ingredient of optimism.

Most participants expressed the view that the introduction of legislation was a good thing. They saw it as a recognition and validation of the efforts they had already made to give up plastic bag use. People were positive about the decision to ban the use of plastic bags because it enabled wide-spread acceptance of reusable bags, and regulation would mitigate the tendency for behaviour to revert to old habits by making sure that everyone changed their behaviour at the same time.

As one trader said 'it needs to be compulsory, it has to be, it won't work if it doesn't apply to everybody', the rural men's group said 'they should just cut it off soon and have zero tolerance, otherwise change never happens'. For a number of the groups, particularly men and younger people, the proposed legislation would be the best memory aid, if they had to remember then they would, because they 'had got the message to the point of buying bags, but hadn't graduated to remembering to take them' so making it compulsory was a good idea 'otherwise its too easy just to not bother'.

This optimism was reflected by the number of people who expressed the view that while they expected some to complain, everyone would soon get used to it: 'once the date is known it will be OK', and 'it will benefit everyday life so we should all be chipping in and making an effort'.

The example set by the major supermarket chains or other stores such as Bunnings was also reason for optimism. Bunnings' success in completely giving up the use of plastic bags was referred to many times as an example of what could be achieved if single use plastic bags were not available.

*The level of enthusiasm and support for the community leadership shown by major retailers to reduce the use of plastic bags and the State Government proposal to implement legislation to ban single use plastic bags shows that the fourth door (OPTIMISM) has been opened and that a future campaign can build on this level of optimism to take the next step to achieving successful behavioural change.*

### 5. Facilitation – It's easy

The instruments designed for the consumer and trader focus groups sought to test a number of premises about the type of support that will be needed to facilitate the complete phase out of single use plastic bags; in particular what education, information and communication strategies would be most appropriate for the identified target groups.

While there was a general acceptance of the broad categories used to recruit focus groups (consumers and traders, rural and city), the general feeling was that of 'we're all in it together' and that specific information for different demographic groups is not needed.

Where differences in message were identified, they related more to the methods that should be used to provide key messages. Traders felt that local councils, letter drops and (if members of associations) association newsletters and e-mail notices were the best ways of getting information to them about the phase out. NESB groups suggested local councils (traders), TV, local language newspapers and pay TV channels broadcast from their country of origin. Young people identified rock music channels and 'wicked' TV advertisements.

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Overall the general view was that the mass media: newspapers, radio stations and particularly TV was the best way to get information to everybody.

Participants at the focus groups were also quite clear about the content of key messages and information:

- *Details of the date at which the bags were to be completely phased out.* This information should be advertised and promoted widely and early in any information or advertising campaign. Early confirmation of the date would enable traders to make adequate preparation for using their existing stock of plastic bags and ordering replacements such as paper bags or reusable bags for sale.

Early notification to consumers was also seen as important so that people who had not already 'got the message' would have time to change their habits. This was considered important by both consumers and traders as it meant that those who were not going to be pleased by the change would have less cause to complain because they had been told about it well in advance.

- *Details of which bags were in and which bags were out.* This was important for traders so that they clearly understand which bags they could supply, and for consumers so that they knew what to expect when shopping at different stores.

There was confusion about which bags were biodegradable and could still be used, and which were not. This needs to be clarified for both traders and consumers. The Planet Ark report refers to the need to establish Australian standards for 'truly bio-degradable starch-based bags' (Planet Ark 2005 p4) that could be used in situations, such as transporting takeaway food with a high liquid content. Information on any standards relating to biodegradable bags should be made available as part of the information and promotion campaign for the phase out.

Another area which needs clarification is the use of barrier bags, for example there was confusion about whether barrier bags should be used for bread or bakery products.

- *Ideas or suggestions about what could replace the plastic bags currently recycled for use as bin liners or for other household tasks.* The Harrison report shows that 88% of those surveyed currently recycle at least some of their single-use plastic bags and the issue was raised at all of the focus groups.

This is one of the aspects of giving up plastic bags that the community is still struggling with. Having adopted the habit as part of the successful push to 'avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle' they are reluctant to purchase plastic bin liners to replace the recycled plastic bags they currently use. Cost is not the main issue here, unless people are convinced that bin liners are fully bio-degradable they see purchasing them as a re-emergence of the initial problem of plastic bags in the waste system.

Participants at the focus groups did not see cost as a barrier. Consumers thought the cost of reusable bags was insignificant and traders felt that any variation in the price of goods resulting from the introduction of the legislation would be determined by the market.

While participants were prepared to discuss the issue of memory aids to remind them to take their reusable bags when they went shopping, the general consensus was that it was their responsibility to remember. While items such as the fridge magnets provided by Zero Waste might be useful they were not essential. Once plastic bags were not available consumers would devise their own memory aids to suit their own requirements. The cost of repeatedly having to purchase reusable bags if shoppers forgot to take them, and the introduction of legislation to ban single use bags were seen as the most effective ways to improve people's memories.

None of the groups thought that changes were needed to retailer's counters or check outs to facilitate the use of reusable bags. Many people already used these bags with few problems; any problems that did arise after the phase out would be addressed by traders as part of their normal customer service activities.

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*These findings show that the fifth door (FACILITATION) is partly open. The introduction of the proposed legislation was seen by participants as a good and logical step to totally eradicating plastic bags. Introducing the legislation will make this next step 'easy' as will a campaign that focuses on the date of the phase-out and details about which plastic bags can be used. All of the research findings have found an attachment to the plastic bags for use as bin liners, informing the community about suitable (environmentally sustainable) alternatives will remove a perceived barrier, making an 'easy' transition to the next step.*

### 6. Stimulation – I'm Joining In

The tone of the phase out information campaign is important in stimulating people to join in and adopt new habits and behaviours. For a number of participants at the focus groups, the tone of the message was more important than the medium used. Consumers in particular did not want negative or boring ads. The research revealed a high level of awareness of the negative impact that plastic bags have on the environment, and those who care have already changed their behaviour. Those who need extra encouragement, particularly young people, are unlikely to be swayed by a sense of guilt.

As the Harrison report states in relation to communication for people in the 15-24 age group 'the potential for using social responsibility as a tool needs to be carefully explored to determine its relevance to this particular segment and the potential for this type of message to engender either positive (buy-in) or negative (defiant) responses' (Harrison 2005 p 18). While social responsibility is an important element of the message, it needs to be a general, positive message that can influence all segments of the community, relayed through different media. Suggestions from the focus groups were; music radio stations for young people and ethnic newspaper radio and TV for NESB groups.

Participants identified a number of campaigns that influenced behaviour, but felt that a catchy (or irritating) tune was most effective because children would pick it up and repeat it to influence the behaviour of their parents. The message needs to emphasise the date of the phase out, and many participants cited the campaign to introduce decimal currency on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1966, which still resonates with those old enough to have experienced it. Putting an emphasis on the date was important to a number of focus groups because it would remind people of when the change was occurring and put the emphasis on action rather than encouraging debate about the pros and cons of whether the phase out should occur.

Other messages for reaching a large segment of the public were state pride, sporting celebrities (Australian cricketer Glen McGrath launched the National Plastic Bags Reduction Awards during the study and this received a lot of press coverage), and humour.

*The sixth door (STIMULATION) is also partially open. While a number of different segments of the community have joined in (major retailers, the converted communities and many individuals), the promotional campaign for the implementation of the legislation will play an important part in fully opening this door and inviting the whole South Australian population to join in.*

### 7. Reinforcement – That was a success

It will be important once the phase out date has passed that the efforts made by the community to change their behaviour and give up plastic bags are recognised and rewarded.

Good news stories will be needed to counter the inevitable negative media attention on those who are unhappy with the change. Local television programs will be an effective way of telling the stories of individuals and communities that have wholeheartedly embraced the change. Support for community celebrations at 'converted' towns would be beneficial, particularly if there was associated promotion of successful strategies. Awards to schools would be a good way of leveraging behaviour change in families.

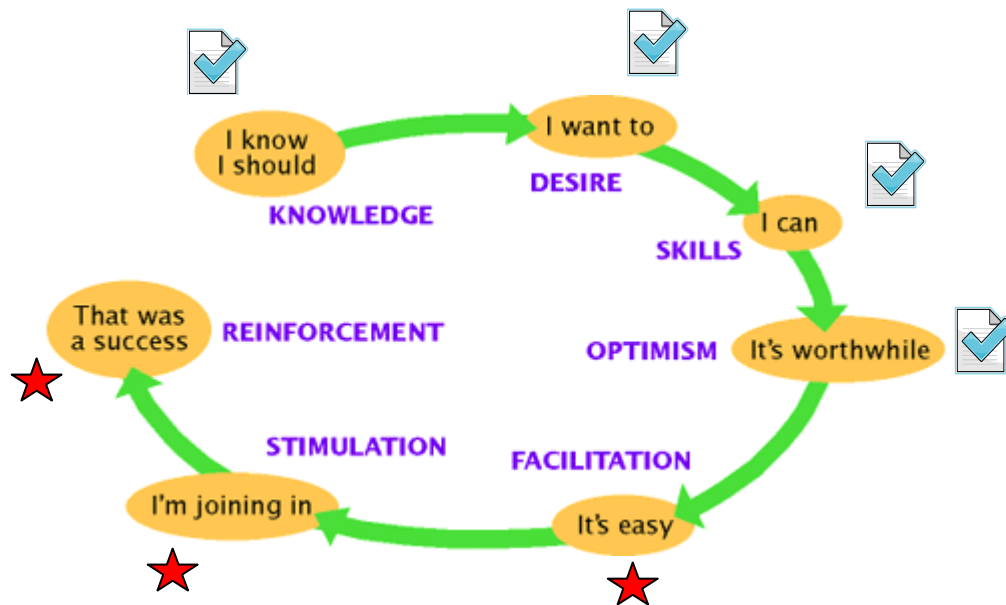
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The communication strategy needs to continue to highlight the positive aspects of the change and illustrating ways in which people and communities have overcome the challenges, particularly of remembering to take the right bag(s) and replacing plastic bin liners. The emphasis of post phase out promotions should be on reinforcing the success and acceptance of the change within the community.

*The seventh door (REINFORCEMENT) can only be fully opened once the change has been fully implemented. The success of groups that have already adopted the change can be reinforced and promoted to help open this door for everyone.*

Our analysis of the research findings against the 7 Door Model of social changes indicates that the first four doors are open for the majority of participants in the focus groups. The number of participants, and inclusion of sub groups in the study – specifically those identified as being the least inclined to adopt the required behaviour change – indicates that the views expressed at the focus groups are expected to have a high level congruence with the views of the wider South Australian community.

The diagram below shows where the focus of the communication and education strategy should lie (refer stars).



The last three doors in the model are still to be fully opened, however the research indicates the barriers and information gaps that should be addressed to complete the process of behaviour change.

The following recommendations set out information and communication strategies that will assist in opening the remaining doors and achieving the core behaviour change required: giving up single use plastic bags.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the focus group research.

1. A generic, positive, advertisement campaign that identifies the phase out date should be implemented at regular intervals during 2007 and 2008.

The catch-phrase: *'South Australia's ready, get set, and go'* is a suggested starting point for development of the message, because it emphasises the positive community response to plastic bag phase out, warns of the need to get ready, and creates an expectation of a specific end point.

The ads would need to be modified over time, with the 2007 ads focusing on letting consumers and retailers know about the phase out and suggesting that they start planning for the use of different types of bags. The 2008 ads would emphasise the amount of time for the phase out and suggest retailer and consumer strategies for shopping without single use plastic bags.

2. During 2007, retailers will need information about the types of bags that are to be phased out and those that will remain in use. Information should be disseminated through local councils, ads in newspapers and business association newsletters, and direct mail. Information should be provided in languages used by recent arrivals (Indochina, Africa, Central Europe), but the older migration groups (Italian, Greek, German) do not generally require information in their own language.
3. The emphasis of the communication should be on state pride: *'we led the way with deposits on cans and we're still leading the way'*; and use sporting and other celebrities to reinforce the message *'we're all in it together'*. It is important that all communications have an element of humour to capture the attention of a diverse audience.
4. Details about *'which bags and why'* should be placed on the Zero Waste website, and made available to other influential websites such as business associations and local councils.
5. PR should focus on getting good news stories into the media, with an emphasis on showing how people are successfully (and happily) managing the transition, and providing information about alternatives to plastic bin liners.
6. Close to the phase out date, uniform signs and posters should be placed in shopping centres to increase awareness of the phase out date.
7. A strategy for policing and penalising non-compliance with the legislation is an essential element of the phase out. Many retailers were happy with proposed phase out because none would be disadvantaged. However, if some retailers were not complying and not penalised, retailer and customer support for the phase out would diminish. For this reason, it is important that communication strategies clearly identify which bags are to be phased out and which are not, and how to tell the two groups/uses apart.

### *Appendix 1 Methodology*

The ZWSA Plastic Bags Phase-Out Market Research Project commenced on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2006. The methodology used for the project reflected the existing research conducted by Harrison Market Research (consumer attitudes to recycling in South Australia) and Planet Ark (non-supermarket Group 2 retailers) that provided important information about the attitudes of consumers and small retailers, and the barriers they face in changing behaviours relating to single-use plastic bags.

KPPM developed a focus group approach that provided rich data through qualitative research. This approach entailed an evolving series of focus groups, covering both consumer and Group 2 retailer audiences (smaller retailers and supermarkets), targeting specific sub-groups identified in the Harrison and Planet Ark research. KPPM used this approach for the following reasons:

1. Sufficient quantitative research has been conducted and further surveys will not capture the rich data required for developing behaviour change strategies.
2. People's responses to messages, information and education are subjective and subconscious, and the research needs to go deeper than the 'top of mind' responses typical of survey formats.
3. Ideas can be discussed, debated and tested, and the number and timing of the focus groups allows for evolution of the content to evaluate ideas and issues that emerge from the early focus groups
4. Provision of information is not necessarily a good trigger for behaviour change. The focus group format allowed exploration and testing of strategies that will trigger behaviour change in the target audiences and can be implemented within the available resources and timelines.

The aim of the research is to identify strategies that would result in behaviour change, specifically to:

- Identify techniques or other initiatives that will assist consumers to get into the habit of using reusable plastic bags, and
- Develop a strategy for a grass-roots campaign comprising education and training that identifies: target audiences within the small retailer sector; the most appropriate key messages for these audiences; and methods to enable small retailers to adopt new practices or cultural change.

### *Interview instruments*

Interview instruments were developed for consumer and retailer groups. The instruments were based on earlier reports and documents and discussions with ZWSA. The consumer group instrument was tested at the first focus group on May 18<sup>th</sup> with the Southern Carer's Men's Group.

Refinements after the first focus group included: preparation of a project summary to send to community groups, taking a range of plastic bags for 'show and tell' to make sure that everyone understood which bags were being phased out, taking copies of Planet Ark's Plastic Bags '15 Things You Need to Know' for participants who wanted further information on why bags were being phased out (this was translated into Vietnamese for the NESB shoppers focus group and provided to some of the NESB retailers).

At the initial ZWSA project briefing it was decided that the Zero Waste fridge magnet prototypes would be taken to the consumer focus groups to get feedback on how effective it might be as a memory aid. Copies of the instruments are provided in Attachment 1 below.

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### *Arranging the focus groups*

Where possible the consultants arranged focus groups with existing community groups, trader groups and work groups and scheduled them to fit in with regular meeting cycles. The formality of the focus groups was adapted for some audiences so that individuals who would not normally take part in focus group sessions were engaged. This approach included interviewing people at take-away restaurants, their place of business or meeting groups at cafes, hotels and after hours at shopping centres.

### *Adapting the focus groups*

Three of the focus groups: take away food shoppers, supermarket shoppers (metro) and supermarket shoppers (rural) were organised so that people could be engaged at the shop where they were purchasing. In the case of the take away food shop, it was found that people did not wait long enough to form groups so they were interviewed individually.

The supermarket shoppers' focus group in the country was held at the local primary school as it was more convenient for people to meet before they shopped. In the city the supermarket shoppers group was held at a café in a local shopping centre and conducted in smaller groups of two, three or four so that people did not have to wait for a group to form.

The methodology was also adapted for the NESB traders. Originally it had been planned to hold two NESB groups, one Asian and one Italian. Feedback from retailer associations was that Italian retailers were well integrated into associations and the community in general and did not need special attention. Asian retailers were considered to be least connected and it was decided to run two focus groups for these retailers, one for shopkeepers and one for restaurants that provided take away food.

As these groups did not have regular meetings and were extremely busy, the methodology was adapted to interview the traders at their business premises, using the questions from the retailers' focus group instrument to provide consistency.

For the NESB retailer groups the consultants were fortunate enough to obtain the services of a translator fluent in Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian who was also a member of the local community. This meant that the interviews could be conducted with people in their own language and through someone with whom retailers were familiar. These interviews were very productive and a number of the traders commented favourably on being consulted and provided with early information on the phase-out.

An additional focus group was run with primary school children from the Mt Burr Primary school following a request from the local community. Permission was formally sought from the school to talk with the children about the plastic bag phase-out.

A total of nineteen focus groups were run, thirteen in metropolitan Adelaide and six in rural areas between May 17<sup>th</sup> and June 22<sup>nd</sup>. This included twelve consumer groups, including the potential shoppers in the primary school group, and seven retail groups.

Altogether 119 shoppers, 17 schoolchildren and 54 retailers attended the focus groups. The age of participants ranged from six to ninety-four years old.

The following tables provide details of each focus group and the number of participants at each group.



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Focus Grp #	Consumer Groups	Focus Group	Date	Attendance
1	Supermarket shoppers - Metro	Port Mall shoppers invited for coffee/cake at local café	June 20 <sup>th</sup>	11
2	Supermarket shoppers - Rural	Mount Burr Primary School Parents Group	June 8 <sup>th</sup>	9
3	NESB Supermarket shoppers	SA SE Asian Women's Group weekly meeting.	May 29 <sup>th</sup>	13
4	Males - Metro	Southern Carer's Male Carer's Group monthly meeting	May 18 <sup>th</sup>	14
5	Males - Rural	Mt Burr Football Club regular dinner meeting	June 6 <sup>th</sup>	10
6	Females Metro	Trinity College, Parents & Friends Group, Gawler River	June 15 <sup>th</sup>	10
7	Females - Rural	Millicent Lioness Association monthly business meeting	June 7 <sup>th</sup>	13
8	Young People - Metro	Business In-Training Team, 16-19 year old from Henley High School, Gepps Cross Special School, Regency Park Special School and Golden Grove High School	June 19 <sup>th</sup>	11
9	Take Away Food - Metro	The Green Corner Take-away, Gawler	June 14 <sup>th</sup>	17
10	Impulse - Metro	Europcar work group fortnightly schnitzel night, Glenelg	June 13 <sup>th</sup>	6
11	Converted - Rural	Robe morning tea advertised in Council newsletter	June 15 <sup>th</sup>	6
12	Primary school children	Mt Burr Primary School Grades 3, 4, & 5	June 22 <sup>nd</sup>	16

Focus Grp #	Retailers	Focus Group	Date	Attendance
13	NESB – Metro (1)	Asian traders, Hanson Rd – interviews.	June 19 <sup>th</sup>	5
14	NESB – Metro (2)	Asian take away restaurants, Hanson Road – interviews	June 19 <sup>th</sup>	4
15	Groups/Associations Rural	Millicent Business & Community Association monthly meeting	June 14 <sup>th</sup>	13
16	Groups/Associations Metro (1)	Norwood Parade Traders Association, regular meeting	June 20 <sup>th</sup>	10
17	Groups/Associations Metro (2)	Hutt Street Traders association, regular meeting	June 13 <sup>th</sup>	13
18	Non-members - Metro	Port Canal Retailers after work meeting	June 19 <sup>th</sup>	2
19	Local/General Stores Rural	Beachport Traders Association, regular meeting	June 1 <sup>st</sup>	7

## *Appendix 2 Summary of research outcomes*

The following summary of the research outcomes is grouped under the key questions asked at the consumer and retailers focus groups.

### *Consumer Focus Groups*

The consumer focus groups were asked four questions with additional prompts. The first two questions focused on ownership and use of reusable bags. The second two questions focused on the level of awareness of the proposed phase-out and ideas on effective ways to provide consumers with information on the details of the phase-out.

#### *Q1: Do you currently own any reusable shopping bags?*

At all but three of the focus groups, everyone owned a reusable bag. In those that didn't the following reasons were given: at the rural supermarket shoppers group one person didn't own one and said this was because they were personally lazy and the bags weren't attractive enough; two take-away shoppers didn't own a reusable bag; and in the youth group, only half of the young people owned reusable bags.

Many participants had lots of bags. Some said they had a collection, one person owned between 20-30 bags. Not everyone used the green bags; some rural females from the Lioness Association used alternatives such as calico bags, and children in the primary school focus group had made and decorated bags for use by their parents and were proud to see them used.

One participant at the males' rural group expressed concern that we were replacing a build up of plastic bags with a build up of reusable green bags.

At the focus group held at the 'converted town' of Robe, everyone owned and used a green bag. The town had received a grant from ZWSA that they used to purchase and distribute bags (with the council logo) to everyone in the town. They had also distributed bags to tourism outlets to provide to visitors, and constructed a Green Bag sign at the entrance to the town. This group felt that the distribution of the bags, together with a well-timed advertising campaign, had contributed to their success in becoming a plastic bag free community.

#### *1.1 If yes, do you use them all the time or some of the time?*

Approximately fifteen (18%) of adult participants said that they used their reusable bags all of the time, three of the schoolchildren knew that their parents always used reusable bags.

A number of participants said they used the bags for other activities such as carrying library books or for school activities. The rural men's' group used them for football gear and camping.

Comments from habitual reusable bag users were generally that they did so because they were convenient, easy to carry or because they had got into the habit and never left without them. Two people reused plastic bags all the time and would need to modify their habits in future; one kept his reused plastic bags under the front car seat and considered the green bags too bulky for this location.

Some people said that it wasn't convenient to use the bags all of the time because they didn't fit easily into pockets or handbags. The younger men from the metro males' group said they 'had got the message to the point of buying bags, but hadn't graduated to remembering to take them.' Some participants from the impulse shoppers group (males) said they always said no if the shop assistant asked them if they wanted a plastic bag but then 'dropped all their stuff in the car park' getting their keys out.

Even participants from the converted community admitted to occasional lapses when impulse shopping. They too thought the usual green bags were too bulky to carry on their person, and for this reason were pleased to receive a ZWSA purse bag. Leaving the bags in the car was a common reason for not always using the bags. One participant had heard that a supermarket in NSW was packing items straight into trolleys if a customer left their bags in the car. The customer could then

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pack the items straight from the trolley into boxes or bags when they returned to their car. This was considered a good idea as it saved carrying a lot of reusable bags with you, it would also mean that if you had underestimated the number of bags you needed you wouldn't have to accept plastic bags but could pack into bags or boxes at the car or even when you got home.

One participant from the youth group did not own a reusable bag because he never did enough shopping to need one.

### *Q2 do you have any problems with using reusable bags?*

Participants were asked to respond to this question in general terms and were then prompted for a response to a number of specific problems identified in earlier research.

While respondents identifies a range of issues with using reusable bags, these issues were not put forward as major problems but used to illustrate improvements to make life easier when single use plastic bags were phased out.

### *General responses*

Most of the general responses related to the commonly used green bags, square in shape and with a flat reinforced base. These are summarised below:

- A lot of participants (both consumers and retailers) felt there needed to be different shapes and sizes to accommodate different purchases. The bags were too short for bottles and it would be better if there was a lined version for carrying meat, frozen foods and other 'wet' items. This would prevent leakage and allow the bag to be wiped clean if necessary.
- The green bags were unattractive. This was seen as a particular problem for young people, both by the young people themselves and their parents: 'make them funky, they are really ugly'. Participants at metro focus groups identified a number of stores, such as Cotton On, Supre and General Trader that had identified this market gap and were selling alternative reusable bags. These included cotton shoulder bags or backpacks and very lightweight bags that could be poked into a small pocket-sized cylinder that were more acceptable to the youth market.
- While on one hand the green bags were seen as better for packing and stacking on big supermarket shopping trips, they weren't suitable for little items and were too bulky to carry around 'just in case'.
- At a number of the focus groups people raised the issue of having reusable bags with zip tops. The issue was a problem for some older women who wanted to conceal 'sensitive' personal hygiene products, to stop things from falling out when you lifted the bags, to protect items, such as dairy or cakes from direct sunlight and for security reasons. One woman had heard of goods being taken from open top bags and felt that it would be 'safer' if they could be zipped up.

For a number of people, the main problem rested not with using reusable bags but in not having the plastic bags to reuse for other purposes. A majority of people used them for bin liners and some for other purposes such as cat litter or propagating plants.

The issue of what to use for these purposes when there were no plastic bags was mentioned at all of the focus groups. A number of solutions were identified; one woman saved the plastic from loaves of bread for plants, another reused barrier bags for bin-liners although this was only possible for small bins.

While these concerns were generally overshadowed by support for phasing-out the single use plastic bags it should be remembered that plastic bags are still available for these purposes. When they are no longer available this issue may take on bigger proportions and other alternatives should be identified and promoted as part of an education campaign.

One person said they were uncomfortable putting additional items on top of those already purchased when going from one shop to another. They felt that this might attract the attention of security

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staff and lead to some shop assistants 'double checking' purchases. One person did not like mixing all their items in one bag; they didn't want to 'put underwear on top of chicken'.

Half of the rural men's group felt that the purpose of taking a reusable bag was defeated when you filled it up with lots of little bags.

A retailer, at the 'converted community' focus group, said that if reusable bags were going to be part of everyday life they needed to reflect people's personalities and purpose. She was trying to have a bag designed for her store that could double as a beach bag: 'the colours available at present are limited, you can't get stripes yet. It is getting better though.'

The idea that once bags were used all the time they would need to be more personalised was mentioned by a number of groups. It was of particular interest to the random shoppers' focus group who were all in their mid-twenties and they warmed to this theme. They thought bags should not just be used to promote environmental causes or shops but could advertise a range of products that people identified with. One example they gave was beer which 'help blokes overcome the embarrassment of carrying a bag'. They wanted to see a variety of colours; football colours to take to the footy (they thought mums and grandmas would love them in Crows or Port colours) and gay-friendly rainbow coloured bags. They had heard that some Canadian supermarkets held single nights for people to 'hook up' and this led to the idea that bags could be coloured to identify your relationship status: 'traffic light colours, green for available, yellow for looking and red for taken'. They felt that once everyone had to use the bags there would be a new market, similar to that for T-shirts, and there would be lots of bags for sale with different messages or promote sporting events, rock bands etc.

The following prompts were used to expand on issues around the use of reusable bags:

### *2.1 Forget to take them*

Everybody forgot sometimes. Even those who remembered every time they did their supermarket shopping did not always have them with them for occasional shopping. Some people kept bags at the office as well as in the car to overcome this.

Not having a bag for impulse shopping was seen as the major problem. Most people remembered for the regular supermarket shop. People thought that they would be more likely to remember when there were no plastic bags, 'like when you go to Bunnings'.

Leaving them in the car and not wanting to go back and get them was one of the main reasons for not using the bags every time. Young people and older people were less likely to return to the car if they forgot their bags.

Many people said that it wasn't just a matter of forgetting, but of estimating how many were needed. One man at the metro men's group said 'you think you've got it figured and then when you get there, there's soft music, advertised specials and food smells good, so before you know it you usually have to get a couple of extra bags to cart it all home'.

There was a lot of good natured response to this question, people took personal responsibility for remembering and joked with one another about their own short comings.

The primary school children found this question particularly amusing as they had all witnessed their parents' response to forgetting their bags. The children felt that they had a role to play in reminding their parents. They thought it was important to do this as they had learnt at school about the damage that the bags did to the environment.

Suggestions and ideas about what would help people remember to take their bags are discussed below in response to Q4.

### *2.2 Cost*

The cost of a basic reusable bag was not seen as a major consideration by any of the groups. Many spoke of getting free bags through various promotions or from their local Council in exchange for plastic bags.

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Some people thought the chiller bags used for meat and frozen goods should be cheaper, but others thought that as these bags were especially sturdy, long lasting and could be cleaned, the higher price was justified. A number of participants mentioned that as you now had to pay for plastic bags at Bunnings, you might as well pay a bit more and get a reusable bag.

Some people, who said the price was not a concern, also said they would be prepared to pay more for a better looking bag. The rural men's group worked out that the average family needed six bags for their weekly shop, this amounted to a six dollar expenditure which they felt was 'neither your arse nor your elbow'.

A participant at the random shoppers group summed up the attitude of his group: 'it doesn't matter the first few times, but after several times it gets painful, if you always had to pay it would make you remember to take a bag'.

Some members of rural groups felt that if you had to pay you might as well make your own bags that were easier to wash and clean.

### *2.3 Not enough room on shop counters*

Participants did not see problems with counter space, although some admitted to difficulty with the weekly shop: 'the bags seem to spread out and you need to get them off the counter as soon as they are full'. Queues behind customers with a lot of reusable bags were seen as more of a problem.

One woman, from the rural supermarket shoppers group, said that she had noticed there were delays when people packed their reusable bags as they shopped, they then needed to be unpacked and packed again at the checkout, it was quicker to wait until you paid for the shopping before you packed it.

The above issues mostly related to shopping at the big chain supermarkets for the weekly or fortnightly shop. Comments that relate to both big chains and smaller retailers included:

- The problem is not the size of the counter but that the shop assistant doesn't see you've got your own bag and gives you plastic anyway.
- There are hold-ups when you've already got something in the bag that you purchased elsewhere and the assistant has to check it, this holds up the queue.

The NESB shoppers group thought there was enough counter space in 'western' supermarkets, such as Coles or Woolworths, but was not always the case at the local Vietnamese grocers. These counters were crowded and often they had to put their reusable bag on the ground while the assistant handed over individual items, or put them in a plastic bag to handover.

One participant had previously worked at a checkout and she said that there were problems with using handheld scanners while you packed reusable bags: 'you need three hands to hold the bag open, scan the item and put it in the bag'.

### *2.4 Too heavy to carry when full*

Most people thought the reusable bags could become too heavy, especially for older or disabled people, if they were not packed properly. However they still thought reusable bags were preferable for heavy loads than plastic bags, which cut into your hands.

This was an area where people thought responsibility should be shared by retailers and customers. Retailers and shop assistants should be sensitive to the needs of older customers and not over-pack the bags just because it was quicker. Customers should take responsibility for instructing shop assistant in how they wanted the bags packed, some were happy to do so but others did not want to make a fuss.

Older participants were divided about whether it was better to let the assistant pack the bags or to do it themselves. Two women, at the metro supermarket shopper's focus group (aged 82 and 94), said it was important to spread the load across the bags so that they were manageable when they got home. They also said that if the handles of the bag were too long it was difficult to carry them,

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although they still preferred reusable bags to plastic and saw reusable bags as 'the best things ever invented, the plastic bags are awful'.

An older man, at the same group said he let the assistant pack the bags so he didn't hold up others. He then repacked the bags, in the supermarket trolley, before he put them in the car to make them easier to carry when he got home.

Some people felt that because the bags were bigger, shop assistants automatically filled them to capacity. They should be more sensitive to people's needs and ask how they wanted them packed.

Other older participants praised the helpfulness of some shop assistants who voluntarily put their bags in the trolley and even took them out to the car.

Younger people, at the random shopper's focus group, wanted longer handles on the bags so they could put them over their shoulders, they also wanted to use backpacks but supermarkets were not keen on these for security reasons.

Education in this area would be useful to encourage conversations between shoppers and shop assistants about packing the reusable bags. The big chains could take the lead, as it was evident that the campaigns run by the big stores have an impact on both consumers and smaller retailers.

### *2.50ther*

The rural groups expressed concern about the durability of the commonly used reusable bags and wondered whether materials such as shade cloth (for strength) or calico (easy to wash) would be better. However, they also liked the firm base in the green bags that made them easier to pack and stack.

A number of participants emphasised the need for different size bags and for more appealing bags if they were going to be used for every shopping situation, as well as bags that were easier to carry on your person for unplanned or random purchases.

The primary schoolchildren were excited by the fact that South Australia would lead the way in phasing-out the single use plastic bag. It made them feel special, and they were pleased that people were going to leave the planet in better shape for them when they grew up.

### *Q3 Were you aware of the proposal to phase-out single use plastic bags by 2009?*

The Productivity Commission Report on Waste Management was released just after the focus groups had commenced. This report received a lot of media coverage, particularly in relation to the view expressed in the report that there was no overall benefit to phasing out plastic bags, and this had an effect on the responses to Q3.

A larger than expected majority of participants were aware of the phase out and a number mentioned that they had recently seen it on TV or heard it on the radio.

Only two of the focus groups showed little awareness of the proposed phase-out. These were the youth group where only three participants had heard about it, and the NESB shoppers. When told of the phase-out the NESB shoppers were pleased to hear of the initiative, but the youth group showed little interest, as they did very little shopping.

There was very little resistance to the idea that the State Government might legislate to make and the phase-out compulsory. Comments included:

- An excellent idea, I would like to see it implemented and then move on to banning reusable nappies.
- Not a problem we used paper and boxes before and we can do it again.
- Participants at three of the focus groups, while supporting the decision, expressed some cynicism that it would actually happen, ie 'I'll believe it when I see it'.
- A number of participants queried why it needed to take so long and why it couldn't be brought in earlier.
- Participants at the metro men's focus group recalled the introduction of the deposits on bottles and cans and said that they expected SA to take the lead.

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- Those at the random shoppers' focus group referred to the ban on smoking and said that although people would complain at first they would get used to it.
- A lot of people thought making it compulsory was a good idea, otherwise it's too easy to just not bother.

Overall there was strong support for the State Government's initiative and a general sense of pride that SA was leading the way. This level of support could be leveraged for a promotional campaign.

### *Q4 What do you think the government could do to inform people about the phase-out and encourage them to take their reusable bags every time they shop?*

Participants were asked to respond to this question in general and then prompted for their response to a number of specific suggestions. There were not many general responses to this question.

#### *General responses*

For three of the focus groups, the main issue revolved around whose responsibility it was to make sure that the phase-out happened successfully. One group felt strongly that it was in the best interests of retailers to support their customers to remember their bags, while another group felt that the general public should take responsibility for their own actions.

The converted community focus group thought that the government should provide retailer education and encourage the customer to trust the system, this had been their experience and they believed it could work for the community at large.

#### *4.1 Advertise on TV*

This evoked the strongest response of all the prompts. Many participants held sophisticated views on the type of ads needed for a campaign to reach all South Australians.

A number of participants (across all age and focus groups) felt strongly about the tone of the advertisements and did not want to see (boring) government ads that sent them 'out of the room to make a cup of tea', or a negative campaign. People thought just about everyone already knew plastic bags were bad for the environment, so any advertising campaign should focus on feeling good about the phase-out, rather 'than trying to scare people into it'.

Many of the groups said that radio should be used, as well as the mainstream newspapers, the Messenger press and community newsletters. The NESB shoppers said that TV was the best medium for everyone but adverts should be in a number of languages so everyone got the message. They also thought that the local Vietnamese newspaper with a circulation of between 3-4000 people should be used to reach older members of their community.

The metro male's group thought that a TV campaign would be useful to inform people about the date of the phase-out but that it wouldn't change people's behaviour; reminders closer to home were needed for that.

A number of people emphasised the importance of timing the campaign for the best effect. The rural supermarket shoppers thought that a three month campaign should do it, while the converted community group thought the government should run sporadic advertising over the next two years, coupled with bag drops to the community.

The impulse shoppers thought that 'wicked' comic TV ads would work best and developed some ideas of their own during the focus group that included popular sports stars in comic situations with their reusable bags and catch lines like 'Hey mate, where's your bag...she's in the back'. They also thought young people's radio stations like Radio Fresh should be included in the campaign. Lots of young people listened to these stations while they were driving and it would be a constant reminder.

The primary school children thought radio and TV adverts would be good, but liked the idea of stickers better.

#### *4.2 Put information on a web-site*

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There was very little support for using a website to inform people of the phase out or to remind them to take their own bags. Many older participants did not have access to a computer or only used it for e-mail. None of the NESB shoppers used a computer.

People felt that the issue wasn't a high enough priority or interesting enough to look it up on a website. One said that websites weren't 'mainstream enough' to get the message across to everybody.

Older people thought that a website would be a good way of reaching younger people, but younger participants did not think they would look for information about the phase out on the internet. They said that the information needed to be 'more in your face' and that it 'wasn't what you used the internet for'.

The only group that was enthusiastic about a website were the primary school children. They used the internet regularly at school and thought pop up ads and a screen saver could be used for reminding people to use their green bags.



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### *4.3 Put notices on shops*

While notices and signs were thought to be a 'bit late' to remind people to take their own bags to the shops, they were seen as a good way of advertising the date that plastic bags would be finally phased out. Some thought there should be large notices in supermarkets and car parks with the date in huge letters. One group said that 'notices in shops were a good idea if they were put in near the date and if it was a uniform move by traders'.

### *4.4 Distribute 'memory aids' such as fridge magnets*

Eight of the twelve consumer focus groups were shown the ZWSA fridge magnet shopping list. (Due to the limited number of samples not all groups were shown the fridge magnet.)

The fridge magnet shopping list was generally not well received. While a few people thought it might be handy and said that they would use it, more said that it was too dull and the shopping list component was too small. The metro males' focus group liked the concept but said it needed to be 'bigger, brighter and bolder if it was meant to jog the memory, otherwise it would just be used for the shopping list feature'.

One group felt that fridge magnets in general were ineffectual: 'you don't necessarily look at the fridge before you walk out the door'. Some who thought the shopping list was too small liked the idea of a shopping list with a reminder, but thought it could be bigger and that it didn't have to go on the fridge.

A number of people said that stickers on the car window (like Maccas) or on the sun visor of the car would be more useful as reminders. Another person thought that a reminder hung on the front door 'like the Do Not Disturb signs in hotels', was a good way to remind people to take their bags as they left the house.

Most people recognised that the issue was how they changed their own habits. Younger people and men said the best way to get them to change was to take the plastic bags away 'then we'd have to do it'. Others said that if people hadn't got the message by now they never would, so 'just get rid of them'.

The rural supermarket shoppers said it was better to have a shorter phase out period than to spend money on memory aids: 'people would soon get used to not having plastic bags if they weren't there'.

### *4.5 Other*

Other suggestions for informing people about the phase out and encouraging them to take their reusable bags every time they shopped included:

- Putting adverts on shopping trolleys
- Giving away reusable bags if you spent a certain amount of money eg \$50
- Cash incentives such as issuing discount dockets, like those given for petrol discounts, to people that used their own bags could be successful. One person said that Foodland in Gawler issue a Green Card that they stamp when you use a green bag and when the card is full you get a \$1 off your shopping bill. The cards can be saved and you get \$10 off your bill when you have ten cards.
- A number of participants thought that shopkeepers should be allowed to charge five or ten cents for plastic bags during the last six months of the phase-out so that those still using plastic got the message. This would also help to compensate for any remaining bags they didn't use in time.
- One person thought that the government should give away reusable bags printed with information about the phase-out and timeframe. This would remind people to use the bag and give them information at the same time.
- As the phase-out date drew near, brightly coloured notices should be put inside plastic bags to target those who were still using them.

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- The rural males' group felt strongly that the government shouldn't spend the next two years wasting money on memory aids: 'they should just cut it off soon and have zero tolerance, otherwise change never happens'. Wasting tax-payers money was a concern for a number of groups who thought if it was going to happen it should be implemented quickly and at minimum expense.
- A number of people supported using letter box drops to notify of the date that plastic bags would no longer be available.
- At the converted community focus group they developed the idea of producing a zip up reusable bag to put in every holiday accommodation outlet in Robe so that they could influence visitors to use reusable bags.

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### *Retailer Focus Groups*

While some of the questions discussed with the retailer focus groups were the same as those for the consumers, the retailers were asked a longer series of questions to elicit more focused responses to particular issues raised in the earlier research or in discussions with ZWSA staff at the initial project briefing.

Most of the retailers were aware of the phase out from recent media coverage of the Productivity Commission Waste Management Report. The two NESB retailers groups were the least aware with some participants had heard a little bit on the news, others knew that the use of bags was being 'slowed down', none were aware that a date had been set for a complete phase out.

*Q2 Have you received any information about current campaigns to reduce the use of single plastic bags? If yes, where did you receive the information from?*

Only one person knew of the Planet Ark Campaign, another had received information from their local Council. Others had got information about campaigns from their children or from general discussion with friends or business colleagues.

Most small traders were aware of campaigns by the big supermarket chains to reduce plastic bag use. One mentioned that some big supermarkets did not provide a plastic bag if you bought less than four items.

*Q3 Have you introduced any practices to reduce the use of plastic bags such as training staff to ask whether a bag is required or making reusable bags or cardboard boxes available at point of sale? If yes, how have they been received by your customers and which approach works best?*

All of the metro traders who were members of associations asked people if they wanted bags and some were selling reusable bags. One shop owner said that he always asked customers if they wanted a bag and gave them to approximately 50% of customers. Another asked the question this way: 'you don't need a bag do you?' and gave them to approximately 10% of customers.

None of the NESB traders had introduced any practices to reduce single use plastic bags as until recently they had not been aware it was required of them. The Millicent Traders said that many customers refused bags without being asked. One toy store owner estimated that 80% of this customers refused bags.

The two traders at the Port Canal Shopping Centre both sold food and only used paper bags or cardboard trays for multiple cups of coffee. One said that if a customer asked for a plastic bag they just told them that they didn't have any and this was accepted.

Of the non-association members at Beachport, a third offered reusable bags, a third used recyclable plastic and a third always offered single use plastic bags. Only one of the latter did not think they should have to find an alternative.

*Q4 Do you have any difficulties in serving people who bring their own bags?*

Participants were asked to respond to this question in general and then prompted for their response to a number of specific issues. Traders responded in relation to both current and anticipated difficulties. Most traders did not have any difficulty serving people who brought their own bags.

The Asian take-away food traders said not many people used reusable bags now, although some brought their own containers. They anticipated there might be a problem with phone orders, which needed to be transferred from the kitchen to the counter before the person arrived with their bag. After the phase out they may need to use plastic trays to carry the containers to the counter, or use paper bags although some thought that paper might not be good for hot soup.

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Some take-away traders thought that the usual green bags were not suitable for take-away as the containers moved around inside and could spill. Currently they tie the tops of the plastic bags to stop this happening. Others thought if the containers were sealed properly this would not happen.

Two take-away food traders suggested that different sized reusable bags, with waterproof linings that were closer to the size and shape of the food containers, might be better and they would be prepared to sell them if there was customer demand.

The NESB grocers said that many customers, especially older people, brought their own bags and it was not a problem. One grocer thought that it would be good to have different sized reusable bags as many customers bought just a few items and didn't need a big bag.

A number of traders mentioned the hygiene aspect of reusable bags. The Norwood traders had heard, though not experienced, that some people didn't clean the bags properly so food residue was left behind which could create an OHS&W issue for the staff who packed them. The rural traders also discussed this issue and thought that if the bags became soiled and had to be thrown out that they might not be any better than plastic bags in the long run.

The Norwood traders thought that bigger stores used plastic bags for security reasons, to make it easier to spot shoplifters, but thought this would not be an issue for smaller stores as they had fewer customers and could watch them more closely.

One trader from Beachport said that she had to educate her customers not to fill their reusable bags before they got to the counter. If they did, and she had to go through the other items in the bag, it was time consuming and people often carried personal items which they did not want others to see.

### *4.1 Adequate counter space*

Most traders did not think counter space was an issue, as it did not believe it would influence whether people used reusable bags or not. Only one trader (NESB baker) thought they had inadequate counter space. One of the Beachport traders said that having to leave room for people to use cardboard boxes used too much space that could be used for value adding.

### *4.2 Room to pack and lift heavier bags*

Packing and lifting heavier bags was also not considered to be an issue by the traders. As one trader from Beachport said, 'the bags are not heavy, they can just hold more, it is up to the shopper and the shop attendant to pack the bag to a suitable weight'.

### *4.3 What improvements may be needed to customer service areas to make using reusable bags easier?*

None of the traders thought any improvements to customer service areas would be needed.

### *5. Do you anticipate any problems with customers once you are no longer able to provide single use plastic bags?*

The majority of the traders thought that while some customers might not be happy at first, they would get used to it and change their habits if everyone had to do it. One NESB trader said: 'once the date is known it will be OK, people will go with the flow'. Traders anticipated some problems with customers who reused their plastic bags for other purposes such as bin liners.

Others thought that customers might get annoyed with them if they forgot their bags so they would need to have cardboard boxes, paper bags or other alternatives they could supply to customers at cost price. The Beachport traders focus group said that the community 'would get their heads around it when they had to' but it was something they needed to start working towards now in order to get the best outcome.

### *6. Will there be any noticeable cost benefits for your business in not having to provide single use plastic bags?*

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The traders discussed costs from their own and the customers' perspective. A number saw the shift away from plastic bags as a market opportunity for suppliers and anticipated new products coming onto the market.

Most of the traders already factored the cost of plastic bags into their prices. If they had to supply heavier bags or paper bags this would affect the price. They felt that because everyone had to do it price increases would be minimised and suppliers could bring down the cost of alternatives, such as paper bags, as more were sold.

The NESB traders couldn't estimate what the cost of the shift away from plastic bags might be, but they would supply whatever their customers wanted, including cardboard boxes for free or bags of different size bags at varying prices.

The take-away food traders already charge for plastic containers and if they needed to use paper, or heavier bags, they would add the cost to the price of take-away meals for those that did not bring their own bags. One of the take-away traders said that they currently paid \$50 for a carton of 3,000 bags so the plastic bags were very cheap and had little effect on the current price structure.

A number of traders said that they bought plastic bags in bulk, sometimes by the container load, so they would need plenty of advance warning to use up the bags they had already purchased or ordered.

The NESB baker did not see how he could absorb any additional costs for bags into his pricing. He sold bread at \$1 for six rolls so charging for a bag on top was just not viable.

One of the Beachport traders thought that the larger companies that supported his store would supply him with boutique style bags with a company logo as a positive marketing exercise. Another said that the chain her small supermarket belonged to would install an electronic reusable bag dispenser that she would have to rent.

Overall, traders felt that any cost differences would be determined by changes in the macro market environment following the phase-out of single use plastic bags.

### *7. What is the best way for you to receive information on the timetable and strategies for the phase out of single use plastic bags?*

Participants were asked to respond to this question in general and then prompted for their response to a number of specific strategies.

A number of traders, particularly those on Hanson Road, thought that local Councils were a good way of providing information to traders as they had a lot of interaction with local businesses. A Hutt Street trader also said that the Adelaide City Council web-site, the only one he accessed regularly, would be a good way to provide information. Others thought that mail 'with information you can keep and refer to' was the best way for them to receive information, and that a letter box drop to all households should be considered.

The timing of information was considered important: 'six months before the deadline put up posters and billboards and let everyone know it's coming'. One group said 'there's no point in sending out information now, its too early, begin in about 12 months then keep reminding people until close to the date (of the complete phase-out), then get more active on TV and radio'.

#### *7.1 Through retail associations and peak bodies*

Retailers who belonged to associations thought their associations would be a good source of information, because even though members did not always come to meetings they could be provided with information through email lists. Inserts could also be placed in association magazines or newsletters.

#### *7.2 Advertise on TV*

Advertising on TV was seen as the best way of informing the public, particularly of the date by which the phase-out would be complete, as an informed public would reduce pressure on retailers.

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The cost to taxpayers of an extended TV campaign was of concern to traders. For that reason the timing of a TV advertising campaign was important and many felt it should be in the six months before plastic bags were completely phased out.

A trader from the Port Canal shopping centre thought the TV ads should be 'catchy and irritating' like the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1996 campaign for the changeover to decimal currency. Others mentioned the Life Be In It or Slip Slop Slap campaigns. The trader thought that kids had a lot of influence on their parents' behaviour, particularly when they were shopping, so if it got through to the kids, they would make sure their parents got the message.

One NESB trader said that most of the elderly members of the Asian community sat down at 8pm, after dinner, to watch Chinese programs on a particular pay TV channel and advertising on this channel would be a good way of getting the message to those members of her community who were least exposed to the Australian media.

A number of traders said that campaigns by the big chain stores were the best way to get the message across: 'everyone knows that Bunnings don't have plastic bags because they've seen their adverts'.

The Millicent Business and Community Association felt that 'you could advertise until you were blue in the face but nothing would change until people were forced into it'.

### *7.3 Put information on a web-site*

The traders did not consider that a website would achieve the immediate or broad coverage that this information needed. If it was not in people's minds they wouldn't think to look on a website.

A number also raised the issue of which website. Like the Hutt Street trader mentioned above, they thought it could be useful if linked to a website they regularly accessed. If not, they probably wouldn't search for information.

A few traders thought that a website would be useful for more detailed information such as the composition of reusable bags or why some bags were being phased out and not others. If the website was well enough advertised those who were interested in the detail would then know where to get information.

### *7.4 Put notices in shops*

Traders had mixed views about the efficacy of notices in shops, but generally they did not believe the public took much notice of signs. Some said that it would not be an effective strategy to remind people to take their own bags as it was already too late when they got to the shop.

However, a number felt strongly that for this particular message it would be effective to remind people of the date for the complete phase out, especially if every shop displayed the same sign over the same period.

The NESB traders strongly supported a uniform sign, to be provided by the government, as it would assist their community to understand that it was a government initiative and not one being introduced by the traders. Distributing the signs to all retailers, at the same time, would ensure that no-one was disadvantaged or could take advantage of the situation.

The Beachport Traders also thought a uniform notice would have more effect and that an internal peel off sign, with a distinctive logo, would be best.

### *7.5 Other*

Some other comments made by traders about the issue are summarised below:

- Advertise in the local messenger, community newspapers and the Vietnamese language newspaper.
- It won't be too hard to get used to it, in Cambodia there were no plastic bags, this is the same thing, and many older people already use reusable bags.

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- It's still a long way off and I don't see any major problems, it will benefit everyday life so we should all be chipping in and making an effort.
- It needs to be compulsory, it has to be, it won't work if it doesn't apply to everybody.
- When asked for any other comments, a number of traders again raised the need for different sizes, different designs and different coloured bags.
- We need some suggestions about alternatives – what are suppliers doing to develop options and when will we find out what's going to be available?
- We're looking forward to it, it's exciting and challenging.
- It's important to make people aware. We get enough irritated people as it is.
- It has to be well planned and advertised. Maybe we could charge for plastic bags for the last six months before they were no longer available?
- Signs in the car park would be good as they might catch people's attention before they went into the shop without their bags.

## *Appendix 3 Consumer Focus Groups – Interview instrument*

On 1 July, 2005 the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, a Council of all of Australia's environment ministers, agreed to a phase out of lightweight (single use) plastic shopping bags by the end of 2008. In South Australia legislation may be introduced to ensure that the phase out occurs by that date.

Research into consumer attitudes about reduction in the use of lightweight single-use plastic bags shows that although at least 80% of respondents owned reusable shopping bags, only a third use them every time they shop. In order to make the transition to regular use of reusable bags as smooth as possible Zero Waste SA wants to hear from consumers why they may not use reusable bags all the time and what would encourage them to do so.

### *Key Questions for discussion:*

1. Do you currently own any reusable shopping bags?
  - 1.1. If yes, do you use them all of the time or just some of the time?
2. Do you have any problems with using reusable bags?
  - 2.1. Forget to take them
  - 2.2. Cost
  - 2.3. Not enough room on shop counters
  - 2.4. Too heavy to carry when they're full
  - 2.5. Other
3. Were you aware of the proposal to phase out all single use plastic bags by 2009?
4. What do you think the government could do to inform people about the phase out and encourage them to take their reusable bags every time they shop?
  - 4.1. Advertise on TV
  - 4.2. Put information on a web-site
  - 4.3. Put notices in shops
  - 4.4. Distribute 'memory aids' such as fridge magnets or shopping lists
  - 4.5. Other



## *Appendix 4 Retailers Focus Groups – Interview instrument*

On 1 July, 2005 the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, a Council of all of Australia's environment ministers, agreed to a phase out of lightweight (single use) plastic shopping bags by the end of 2008. In South Australia legislation may be introduced to ensure that the phase out occurs by that date.

In order to make the transition to the phase out of single use plastic bags as smooth as possible Zero Waste SA wants to hear from small to medium sized retailers on how the shift to reusable bags will affect them, any problems they may foresee and what support may be required to assist them in effecting a smooth transition.

### *Key Questions for discussion:*

1. Are you aware of the proposal to phase out all single use plastics bags by 2009?
2. Have you received any information about current campaigns to reduce the use of single use plastic bags? Eg Zero Waste SA, Planet Ark, Clean Up Australia.
  - 2.1. If yes where did you receive information from?
3. Have you introduced any practices to reduce the use of single plastic bags such as training staff to ask whether a bag is required or making reusable bags or cardboard boxes available at point of sale?
  - 3.1. If you have introduced any of these things how have they been received by your customers?
  - 3.2. What approach works best and why?
4. Do you have any difficulties in serving people who bring their own bags?
  - 4.1. Adequate counter space
  - 4.2. Room to pack and lift heavier bags
  - 4.3. What improvements may be needed to customer service areas to make using reusable bags easier?
5. Do you anticipate any problems with customers once you are no longer able to provide single use plastic bags?
6. Will there be any noticeable cost benefits for your business in not having to provide single use plastic bags?
7. What is the best way for you to receive information on the timetable and strategies for the phase out of single use plastic bags?
  - 7.1. Through retailer associations and peak bodies
  - 7.2. Advertise on TV
  - 7.3. Put information on a web-site
  - 7.4. Put notices in shops
  - 7.5. Other