

The NSW Plastics Action Plan

New South Wales is transitioning to a circular economy over the next 20 years. This means we will end up with less waste, less emissions, less harm to our environment and more jobs.

The NSW Plastics Action Plan forms a key part of the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 – 2021–2027. The Plastics Action Plan focuses on the management of plastic from production and consumption to disposal and recycling. The plan sets out clear actions that not only deal with downstream activities like recycling and litter prevention, but also focus attention on the points of production and supply, stopping plastic waste before it becomes a problem.

This document answers frequently asked questions about the [NSW Plastics Action Plan](#).

When will the phase out of single use plastic items start?

The NSW Government will introduce legislation to phase out of some of the most highly littered single-use plastic items in NSW. Single-use plastic items will be phased out 6 to 12 months after the legislation is passed as detailed in the table below

Phase out period (from passage of legislation)	Plastic item
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lightweight plastic shopping bags
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plastic straws• Plastic stirrers• Plastic cutlery• Expanded polystyrene food service items• Cotton buds with plastic sticks• Microbeads in rinse-off personal care and cosmetic products
Review in 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plastic bowls (including lids) and plates• Plastic cups (including lids)• Oxo-degradable plastics• Fruit stickers• Heavyweight plastic shopping bags• Barrier/produce bags

What consultation was undertaken?

In March 2020 the NSW Government released the discussion paper, [Cleaning Up Our Act: Redirecting the Future of Plastics in NSW](#) for public consultation.

We received more than 16,000 submissions from the public and key stakeholders including retailers, peak bodies, councils and community groups. There was generally strong support for the outcomes set out in the discussion paper, particularly for plans to phase out single-use plastics, with 98% of respondents supporting the move.

You can find a report of the feedback received on [our website](#).

Why is the NSW Government phasing out these specific single-use plastic items?

All Australian states and territories, including NSW, have agreed to phase out some single-use plastic items as part of the National Waste Policy Action Plan.

Our list of items is consistent with that agreement. The items were selected for phase out because of their impact on the environment and the availability of sustainable alternatives.

Are there exemptions for people with a disability or those with special needs?

We will ensure exemptions are in place for people with a disability or those with special needs who may need to use particular items such as single-use plastic straws.

We will develop the exemptions and how they will work in consultation with the disability sector and NSW retailers.

What's changing and will I notice?

Many businesses, such as cafes, take-away restaurants and supermarkets have already started to make the shift away from single-use plastics. This may take the form of substituting plastic cutlery with wooden cutlery or plastic bags being replaced with paper bags.

Under the NSW Plastics Action Plan, we will legislate to phase out of some of the most littered items in NSW. Selected single-use plastic items will be phased out 6 to 12 months after the passage of legislation.

What is single-use plastic and why is it being targeted?

Single-use plastic items are designed or intended to be used once and then thrown away.

Plastic packaging and single-use plastic items make up 60% of all litter in NSW and pose a threat to wildlife and our environment. Approximately 575 million plastic items were littered in NSW in 2018–19.

Do special exemptions apply for people with a disability?

Yes, we will develop further detail on any exemptions in consultation with the disability sector and NSW retailers.

How is the government managing plastic waste and its impact?

We know plastics is an essential component to many of the items we rely upon every day. However, single-use plastic is increasingly damaging our natural environment. It contributes to climate change and has been identified as a potential risk to human health. The NSW Government recognises we need to change the way we use plastic.

With up to 60% of all litter in NSW being single-use plastic items and plastic packaging, we believe we need to phase out some single-use plastic items. The items we propose to immediately phase out will stop almost 2.7 billion items of plastic litter from entering our natural environment and waterways over 20 years.

With only 8% of all plastic consumed in NSW (in 2019-20) recovered for reuse, there is considerable scope for improvement. Therefore, we have adopted a target to triple the plastics recycling rate by 2030 and to significantly increase the use of recycled content by government and industry.

We also intend to improve our understanding of plastic, including its impact on the environment and human health and how to best dispose of, reuse and recycle it. The NSW Plastics Action Plan will commit \$2 million for a new Plastics Research Partnership to drive research within NSW universities and research institutions.

What actions and targets are in the NSW Plastics Action Plan and the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 - 2021-2027

The NSW Plastics Action Plan is our plan for managing plastic and its impact on human health and the environment. The plan sets out 4 long-term outcomes the NSW Government is working towards.

- Outcome 1 - Reduce plastic waste generation
- Outcome 2 - Make the most of our plastic resources
- Outcome 3 - Reduce plastic leakage
- Outcome 4 - Improve our understanding of the future of plastics

To achieve these outcomes the NSW Government will take action to:

- introduce new legislation to reduce harmful plastics
- accelerate the transition to better plastic products
- support innovation
- tackle cigarette butt litter

- reduce the risk of nurdles (small pellets used to manufacture plastic products) entering the environment
- support plastics research.

Under the [NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 - 2021-2027](#), NSW has adopted several other relevant targets, including to:

- phase out problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2025
- reduce the total waste generated by 10% per person by 2030
- achieve an average 80% recovery rate of resources from all waste streams by 2030
- significantly increase the use of recycled content by government and industry
- reduce plastic litter items by 30% by 2025
- reduce the overall litter by 60% by 2030
- triple the plastics recycling rate by 2030.

What is a circular economy, why is it important and what does the NSW Plastics Action Plan have to do with it?

A circular economy is all about valuing our resources and getting as much use out of products and materials as possible by reusing, repairing and recycling. This allows us to reduce the amount of waste we generate.

A circular economy approach changes the way we produce, manufacture, sell and use products to minimise waste and to reduce our environmental impact. The circular economy can be great for business because it maximises the use of valuable resources and contributes to innovation, growth and job creation.

The actions and targets within the NSW Plastics Action Plan and the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 - 2021-2027 will increase the reuse and recycling of plastic and help to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy in NSW.

How will the NSW Government report on the progress of the actions in the plan?

To ensure the NSW Plastics Action Plan is delivering results, we will capture, record and publish our progress towards the outcomes and targets detailed in this plan. We will participate in key state and national surveys to ensure we have the right data to monitor progress and refine our approach where required.

Studies such as the Australian Plastics Recycling Survey, Australian Microplastic Assessment Project (AUSMAP), Australian Litter Measure Index and the NSW Key Littered Items Study will allow us to see if our actions have been effective and guide decision-making about future actions.

How will the NSW Government support business and industry to implement the plan?

The NSW Government will deliver an education and engagement program targeted at relevant stakeholders prior to the phase out taking effect. The program will provide information and advice on the new regulations as well as advice on suitable alternatives to single-use plastic products.

What is an ‘extended producer responsibility scheme’?

Extended producer responsibility schemes involve producers taking more responsibility for managing the environmental impact of their products throughout their life cycle.

As part of the plan, the NSW Government will investigate a new extended producer responsibility scheme that will make tobacco companies take responsibility for the litter impacts of their products. For example, we may set mandatory litter reduction targets that those companies must meet through a range of approved activities.

This aligns with the Australian Government’s recently announced taskforce on cigarette butt litter.

What are ‘design standards’ and how will they limit the impact of harmful plastics?

A product design standard prohibits the supply in NSW of any product that doesn’t meet certain requirements. This may include how a plastic product or plastic packaging is designed and manufactured. A design standard may also mandate clear labelling on plastic products or packaging to inform the consumer how to safely and effectively dispose or recycle the packaging.

We will lead the nation in setting design standards to ensure that the phase out of microbeads in cosmetic and personal care items is completed within 12 months of the passage of legislation. Any future design standards would be subject to analysis of the environmental and economic impacts, consideration of any technical or performance requirements and extensive consultation with stakeholders.

We will also continue to work with the federal and state and territory governments to make sure there is a uniform approach where possible.