

The Western Australian Government implemented a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags on 1 July 2018.

Over 670 million plastic bags are used in Western Australia every year, with approximately 7 million ending up in the environment as litter.

The WA bag ban affects ALL retailers that currently use some form of lightweight plastic shopping bag – including grocery stores, fashion boutiques, fast food outlets, mine canteens, even markets.

The National Retail Association (NRA) has partnered with the Western Australian (WA) Government to help retailers navigate the new compliance issues, find alternative bag solutions and manage customer sentiment to ultimately minimise negative impacts on your business.

THE BAG BAN EXPLAINED FOR BUSINESS

WHEN DOES THE BAN COME INTO EFFECT?

The WA plastic bag ban came into effect on 1 July 2018. From 1 July 2018 it is illegal for any person (such as a supplier or manufacturer) to provide false or misleading information about a banned bag.

Retailers should cease buying banned bags from 1 July 2018 and deplete existing stock. Retailers face substantial fines if they supply banned bags to customers after 31 December 2018.

WHICH BAGS ARE BANNED?

The ban applies to all lightweight plastic bags with a thickness of 35 microns or less, including degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags.

Retailers will not be allowed to provide banned bags to customers, whether they are new or reused.

WHICH BAGS ARE ALLOWED?

The ban does NOT apply to the following bags:

- barrier bags used for unpackaged foodstuffs
- heavyweight reusable plastic bags
- bags that are integral to a product's packaging
- fabric or hessian bags
- paper or cardboard bags

Bin-liners, nappy bags, dog poo bags are not included in the ban when used for their intended purpose but cannot be used as a substitute for a shopping bag. Sealed product packaging is also excluded from the ban. Bags provided by a medical care provider (excluding pharmacies or optometrists) are allowed.

WHO DOES THE BAN APPLY TO?

The ban applies to all retailers – defined as any person who sells goods in trade or commerce - including online stores. The legislation also prohibits any person (such as a supplier or manufacturer) from providing false or misleading information about whether a bag is compliant.

WHAT IF WE DON'T COMPLY?

To ensure that all retailers are on an even playing field, and that real change is accomplished, fines will apply.

Suppliers/Manufacturers: Any person who supplies or manufacturers plastic bags must not provide false or misleading information about the composition of a banned bag or whether a bag is banned. Fines of \$5000 per offence apply from 1 July 2018.

Retailers: A retailer must not supply a banned bag to customers to carry goods. Fines of \$5000 per offence apply from 1 January 2019.

In addition, retailers who ignore the bag ban may suffer consumer boycotts or media criticism.

HOW WILL THE BAN BE ENFORCED?

There will be both government enforcement and community-led feedback mechanisms in place. Both consumers and retailers will be able to report a business suspected of using banned bags.

WHAT SHOULD RETAILERS DO NOW

1. THINK ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

Each business has unique needs and costs, and you should weigh up the **best long-term option** for your business, such as:

- not offering a bag at all
- paper or cardboard bags
- woven or fabric bags
- heavyweight reusable plastic bags
- a combination of above.

You may decide to charge a small fee for your alternative bags. This is not compulsory but retailers should consider the long-term benefits such as reducing business costs and encouraging customers to use fewer bags.

The NRA does NOT recommend that retailers use plastic shopping bags that are **just above the minimum thickness** because your business could be exposed to substantial risk and disadvantages:

- inconsistent thickness which could mean non-compliance,
- future adaptations of the ban may increase the minimum thickness,
- [95% of WA households](#) are concerned about plastic pollution so consumer perceptions of these bags are negative,
- higher long-term costs as consumers are less willing to pay for these bags,
- some bags labelled as “compliant” or “bag ban approved” may not actually be compliant.

If you decide you need to use heavyweight reusable plastic bags, ask your bag supplier to provide evidence of the **minimum thickness** (microns or ‘um’) of these bags. Suppliers face substantial fines for providing false or misleading information about banned bags from 1 July 2018.

2. PHASE OUT EXISTING STOCK

Retailers should cease buying banned bags from 1 July 2018 and deplete existing stock. Retailers face substantial fines if they supply banned bags to customers after 31 December 2018.

If you are left with unused stock at the ban deadline, you can recycle soft plastics at a local recycler. Contact your local government to find out more about recycling facilities near you.

3. TRAIN YOUR TEAM

A critical element of managing the ban in your business will be to prepare and train your team, particularly those who have regular contact with customers, such as checkout operators and customer service staff. [Access the free training kits >](#)

4. INFORM YOUR CUSTOMERS

The Western Australian Government will run an educational campaign from June 2018 to educate and prepare customers for the ban, however retailers will need to be prepared to handle customer questions and objections.

One of the best ways to start informing your customers is to display official signage in your store. [Download signage here>](#)



HELP FOR RETAILERS

The NRA has created a dedicated website of resources to assist retailers during the transition including:

- official signage to display in your store
- training kits for your team
- case studies of what other retailers are doing

Go to the website: www.bagbanwa.com.au

The NRA is also currently visiting over 150 locations across WA to offer information and advice to retailers. [See dates and locations >](#)