

2nd June 2003

RE: Plastic Bag Levy (Assessment and Collection) Bill 2002 and
Plastic Bag (Minimisation of Usage) Education Fund Bill 2002

To the Committee,

I write to support the Plastic Bag Levy and Education Fund bills presently before federal parliament.

I have actively tried to avoid the use of plastic bags for years, using hessian and cloth bags, back-packs or boxes for shopping where possible. Despite these efforts however, we continue to accumulate much plastic in our home in the form of bread bags and others, and so I am aware that even with great environmental concern, it is difficult for people to change their habits. Although any reduction of waste is good, meaningful social change will only come with structural initiatives such as those outlined in the proposed bills.

I am heartened to hear of the recent introduction of a similar levy in Ireland which saw a 90% reduction in plastic bag use in the scheme's first 5 months. It was also encouraging to hear Dr David Kemp's challenge to retailers to help reduce use of lightweight plastic bags by 50% by the end of 2004. Meeting these targets would take about 4.5 billion bags out of circulation, and reduce considerably the 6.9 billion plastic bags that Australians use each year (10,000 a minute).

Three additional points:

1. If the government is serious about reducing environmental damage, then a 25c levy is not much of a disincentive. \$1 up to \$2 is more realistic. Then we'd all be likely to remember to take our own bag along. The general principle of high taxes upon environmentally damaging products (eg. cars, pollution) and the subsidising of commendable practices which help curb waste is not only necessary but economically prudent.
2. It would be useful to have Australian made hessian/canvas bags available for purchase at all places where plastic bags have been available, allowing for consumers to have choice and be encouraged to actively make positive change.
3. Alternative bio-degradable plastics. I encourage the investigation of possibly restricting plastic bag production to those made from non-petrochemical sources, ie. plant polymers which will breakdown within 6 months. Contact the Alternative Technology Association for more information www.ata.org.au/. (The present plastic bags, made from high density polyethylene - HDPE, are non-biodegradable and so end up in our landfill; polyethylene is made from propane and butane - LPG).

I am encouraged by these bills, not only because they will reduce plastic bag use and boost funding work to minimise the environmental damage caused, but also because they have the potential to bring about a change in consumer habits which will increase everyday awareness of our impact on the environment. Everyday people affect the

world by the choices they make at the checkout. Here we can see that we are not simply passive consumers but can empower positive change through our buying choices.

Sincerely,

Kate Eve