

# Australia supermarket bagged after plastic backflip

August 2 2018



After reversing its plan to phase out free plastic bags in July, Coles now says it will stop supplying free bags at the end of August

A leading Australian supermarket was Thursday forced into a backflip after facing a barrage of criticism for renegeing on plans to phase out free

plastic bags.

The nation's two major grocery chains, Coles and Woolworths, banned lightweight single-use plastic bags from their stores nationally last month in response to mounting community calls for change.

Instead, they began offering more environmentally-friendly reusable bags for 15 Aus cents (11 US cents) each, with Coles supplying them without charge until August 1 to help people adjust to the new regime.

But on Wednesday Coles said the change in habit had proven to be "big and difficult" for customers and it intended to hand out its thick, reusable plastic bags for free indefinitely.

The decision sparked claims the company was "making a mockery of their stated commitment to reduce plastic waste".

"It is a betrayal of the millions of their customers who want the supermarket to do the right thing in favour of a vocal minority," Greenpeace Australia Pacific campaigner Zoe Deans said.

Social media also lit up, with many accusing Coles of buckling under pressure from recalcitrant shoppers.

"This is insane @Coles. The only good part of this was the 15c charge, which would change people's behaviour over time. Without it you have ONLY brought in thicker plastic bags," Craig Reucassel said in Twitter.

Another, John Wren, said: "Dear @Coles, I will be shopping exclusively at @woolworths & @ALDIAustralia until you enforce your [plastic-bags](#) ban."

With a PR disaster looming and calls for a boycott mounting, Coles on

Thursday backflipped again, saying the 15 cent bags would only be free until August 29.

"Offering complimentary bags was always an interim measure to help our customers adjust their shopping habits and Coles will no longer be providing Better Bags free of charge from 29 August," it said.

Woolworths said it had no plans to change its original decision to charge for the reusable bags.

"We've found the majority of our customers across Australia have embraced the move to a more sustainable way of shopping," it said, adding that it would take 3.2 billion single-use bags out of circulation each year.

According to US journal *Science*, eight million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the Earth's oceans and seas each year, with toxic particles ingested by fish and, through the food chain, by humans.

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