

New Zealand to ban single-use plastic bags

August 10 2018



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said New Zealand uses "hundreds of millions" of single-use plastic bags each year, many of which end up harming marine life

New Zealand became the latest country Friday to outlaw single-use plastic shopping bags, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern saying they will be phased out over the next year as a "meaningful step" towards reducing pollution.

New Zealand uses "hundreds of millions" of single-use [plastic](#) bags each year, many of which end up harming marine life, Ardern said.

"We need to be far smarter in the way we manage waste and this is a good start," she said.

"We're phasing-out [single-use plastic bags](#) so we can better look after our environment and safeguard New Zealand's clean, green reputation."

Ardern said her coalition government, which includes the Green Party, was facing up to environmental challenges and "just like climate change, we're taking meaningful steps to reduce plastics pollution so we don't pass this problem to future generations."

Single-use plastic bags are among the most common items found in coastal litter in New Zealand and the environmental group Greenpeace welcomed the decision to outlaw them.

"This could be a major leap forward in turning the tide on ocean plastic pollution and an important first step in protecting marine life such as sea turtles and whales, from the growing plastic waste epidemic," Greenpeace Oceans Campaigner Emily Hunter said.

A United Nations report in June said up to five trillion grocery bags are used globally each year, which is nearly 10 million plastic bags per minute.

"If tied together, all these plastic bags could be wrapped around the world seven times every hour" and like most plastic garbage barely any is recycled, said Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment.

The UN said more than 60 countries had introduced bans and levies on single-use plastic items like bags.

But better waste management, financial incentives to change consumers' buying habits and research into alternative materials were needed to make any real change, it added.

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Citation: New Zealand to ban single-use plastic bags (2018, August 10) retrieved 22 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-08-zealand-single-use-plastic-bags.html>

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