

Victoria Bans the Bag

Sixteen years has passed since Coles Bay (Tasmania) became the Australian first location to formally ban plastic bags. Well over a decade has passed since South Australia led the way to become the first Australian state to ban single-use plastic bags at the checkout. Now, from the 1st of November 2019, Victoria will finally ban all lightweight, single-use plastic shopping bags.

The Victorian ban will apply to **all lightweight plastic shopping bags which have a thickness of 35 microns or less at any part of the bag, including degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags.**

With under a month to go, many Victorian retailers who trade across Australia still appear to unaware that the criteria for thicker reusable plastic bags in Victoria will be different to the regulatory requirements in many other parts of the Federation. Some states and territories allow plastic bags of 35 microns and compostable bags certified to Australian Standard AS4736 (*Biodegradable plastics—Biodegradable plastics suitable for composting and other microbial treatment*). From the 1st of November, Victoria will be different. Those retailers who have already moved to 35 micron bags and compostable bags, due to interstate regulations, will not be able to use these bags in Victoria. A short term exemption from the ban may be possible through negotiation with the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Recently the Victorian EPA granted a large bakery chain, which had purchased around 1.6 million 35 micron plastic bags in 2018, a grace period till March 2020 to use up their excess stock.

Under the Victorian legislation (the *Environment Protection Amendment Act 2019*) there will be two new offences:

- **Supply offence:** Penalties will apply to retailers providing or selling a banned plastic bag (new or reused) to another person to use to carry or transport goods the retailer sells or provides from the retailer's premises.
- **Information offence:** Penalties will apply to a person who supplies (retailer or wholesaler) or manufactures plastic bags who gives information that the person knows, or reasonably ought to know, is false or misleading (or withholds information) about the composition of a banned bag, or whether or not a bag is a banned or exempt plastic bag.

The ban applies to **any person or business that sells goods in trade or commerce**; including, but not limited to: supermarkets, greengrocers, bakeries, pharmacies, clothes stores, electronic retailers, hardware stores, clothing retailers, restaurants, cafes, corner stores, markets, food outlets, online stores, community organisations and charity stores.

Significant financial penalties will apply for noncompliance.

The penalties are similar for both of the supply and information offences:

- In the case of a natural person, 60 penalty units (approximately \$9,900 per offence)
- In the case of a body corporate, 300 penalty units (approximately \$49,500 per offence)

The ban will NOT apply to the following bags:

- Barrier bags used for unpackaged food (example fruit, meat or seafood);
- A bag that is an integral part of the packaging in which goods are sealed or provided for sale;
- Garbage bags & bin-liners; or
- Dog waste or nappy bags

At no time, can retailers use these exempt bags as substitutes for the banned bags.

The ban will also NOT apply to the following bag types:

- Paper or cardboard bags;
- Cloth, jute or hessian bags;
- Non-woven reusable bags; or
- Heavyweight reusable plastic bags

More is yet to come. The Victorian State Government has revealed it will look into banning plastic bags of all thicknesses if plastic bag use doesn't decline. A recent Federal senate inquiry recommended all governments phase out single-use plastics (including bags, takeaway containers, coffee cups, chip packets and straws) by the year 2023.

The logo for 'Karza' is displayed in a white, stylized, hand-drawn font against a dark purple rectangular background. The letters are thick and have a slightly irregular, artistic feel. Below the main text, there are several horizontal white brushstrokes of varying lengths, giving the impression of a signature or a dynamic underline.