

## WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING BUSINESS TO ACT ON PLASTICS WASTE (2019)

Plastic long believed to be a miracle material that has solved and continues to solve several needs of mankind while making lives easier is now emerging as a most environmentally damaging issue the world is facing especially from cheap “single use” plastics that are not reusable and recyclable. British Columbia, one of the most beautiful places of earth, need to take action to minimize, seek alternatives and eventually eliminate the use of “single use plastics” from day to day living.

### Background

Thanks to plastics, countless lives have been saved in the health sector, the growth of clean energy from wind turbines and solar panels has been greatly facilitated, and safe food storage has been revolutionized. But what makes plastic so convenient in our day-to-day lives – it’s cheap – also makes it ubiquitous, resulting in one of our planet’s greatest environmental challenges.

Since the 1950s, the production of plastic has outpaced that of almost every other material. Much of the plastic we produce is designed to be thrown away after being used only once. As a result, plastic packaging accounts for about half of the plastic waste in the world. Most of this waste is generated in Asia, while America, Japan and the European Union are the world’s largest producers of plastic packaging waste per capita.

Our ability to cope with plastic waste is already overwhelmed. Only nine per cent of the nine billion tonnes of plastic the world has ever produced has been recycled. Most ends up in landfills, dumps or in the environment. If current consumption patterns and waste management practices continue, then by 2050 there will be around 12 billion tonnes of plastic litter in landfills and the environment.<sup>1</sup> By this time, if the growth in plastic production continues at its current rate, then the plastics industry may account for 20 per cent of the world’s total oil consumption.

When discarded in landfills or in the environment, single use plastic can take up to a thousand years or longer to decompose. Most plastics do not biodegrade. Instead, they slowly break down into smaller fragments known as microplastics which can enter food chains.

The provincial government, under the CleanBC plan<sup>2</sup>, can play a major role in reducing unnecessary plastic waste through targeted investment and industry engagement.

However, in determining which applications are necessary and which can be made redundant it is industry itself which should play the primary role. The business community ought to be fully engaged by government in the effort of determining which sectors, processes and products can be targeted for plastics reduction initiatives. This will maximize the benefit of plastic reduction efforts by focusing actions on the areas with the most potential change, and limit any unintended consequences of removing plastics where they are actually necessary, or alternatives would be untenable.

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<sup>1</sup> 2018, Single Use Item Reduction Strategy (2018-2025) – A priority Action in Zero Waste 2040, City of Vancouver

<sup>2</sup> CleanBC is a provincial plan developed as a pathway to achieve the Province’s legislated climate targets of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40% by the year 2030, based on 2007 levels. The plan describes and quantifies measures that will eliminate 18.9 megatonnes (Mt) of its 2030 target.

Where alternatives do not already exist, the provincial government can still play a role in funding efforts to develop such alternatives. In Budget 2019, the provincial government set aside \$299 million in funding for yet to be announced initiatives under the CleanBC banner. Some of that already allocated money could be focused on implementing new and enhancing existing programs to support research efforts targeted specifically at improving plastics recycling or developing plastics alternatives.

In addition, while there may already be plastics alternatives available in some cases, these are often difficult for businesses to adopt because they are untested in the marketplace or are uneconomical compared to current plastic products. The provincial government should consider funding demonstration projects and incentive programs specifically for implementing plastics alternatives in businesses. By helping businesses overcome the economic and logistic barriers of implementing plastics alternatives, it will create test cases that will show the viability of plastics alternatives and will encourage other businesses to adopt similar changes.

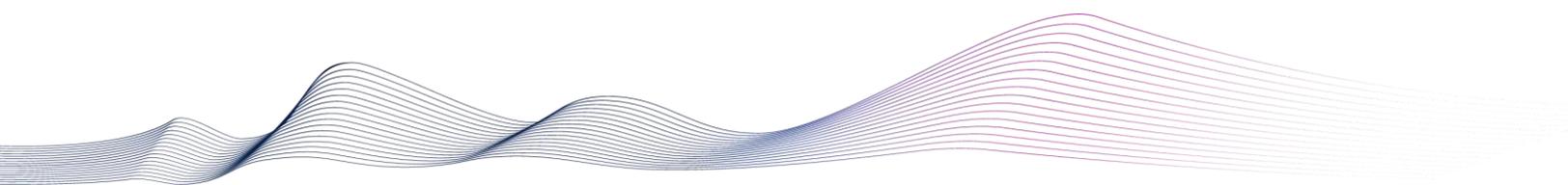
However, beyond simply finding and implementing plastic alternatives (which still generate waste through their creation, use and disposal) circular economy models could also be supported, developed and promoted. A circular economy business model focuses on keeping materials in use for as long as possible, planning for disassembly, re-use, or recapture of resources in an effort to make the supply chain a closed-loop. As this is a major shift from traditional production and consumption patterns, government supports for businesses implementing circular economy model should be a priority.

In consultation with local businesses, it was learned that occasionally government requirements or regulations mandate the use of plastics in manufacturing, packaging, and other processes. In many cases these requirements will be necessary and warranted to protect consumers, increase efficiency, and reduce overall waste. However, in some instances, particularly in the food sector, there may be redundant or excessive requirements. A review by government of these types of regulations may uncover opportunities to reduce the demand for and use of plastics in certain instances.

#### THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Engage with industry and the business community directly to identify those sectors, processes, and products which should be first targeted for plastics reduction initiatives and efforts;
2. Through CleanBC's unspecified \$299 million in funding announced in Budget 2019, invest in
  - a. research efforts focused on improving plastics recycling and developing plastics alternatives;
  - b. demonstration projects and incentive programs aimed at helping industry implement plastics replacements and plastic reductions initiatives;
  - c. supports, research, and incentives for the implementation of circular economy models that reduce source consumption of materials; and
3. Review the requirements of government agencies such as regional health authorities to ensure plastic packaging requirements are updated to reflect current needs and are not excessive.



4. Commission a one-year study over one year through industry, businesses, educational institutions to research alternatives to “single use” plastic and commit to a timeframe for complete removal of such material from the waste stream in BC;
5. Work with the food and beverage industry that would see the elimination of the production of dirty Styrofoam. This would be done through education and through incentives to industries out there to produce recyclable products and or bio degradable (quick enough to be acceptable buy Bio Fuel plants); and,
6. Implement an awareness campaign to help consumers understand that plastic overwrap and other flexible plastics can be taken to Recycle Depots.

