

The Victorian Government implemented a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags on 1 November 2019.

The ban applies to ALL retailers – including supermarkets, greengrocers, bakeries, pharmacies, clothes stores, restaurants, cafes, markets, food outlets, and many more.

The Victorian Government has engaged the **National Retail Association (NRA)** to provide advice and support to retailers to comply with the ban.

THE BAG BAN EXPLAINED FOR BUSINESS

Pictures are examples only

WHY WAS THE BAN INTRODUCED?

Victorians have used over **1 billion plastic shopping bags every year**. The majority of these bags end up in landfill and around 10 million end up as litter, polluting our environment and endangering our wildlife.

The impacts of plastic pollution are a real concern to the Victorian Government and community. Since announcing the ban in October 2017, the Victorian Government has received over 8,000 submissions from the public regarding plastic pollution, with **96% in favour of a ban on lightweight plastic bags**.

This ban is just the **first step** in the Victorian Government's broader agenda to reduce single-use, unnecessary and problematic plastics.

WHO DOES THE BAN APPLY TO?

The ban applies to any person or business that sells goods in trade or commerce - including online stores and markets.

The legislation also prohibits a retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer from providing false/misleading information about whether a bag is compliant.

WHEN DID IT COME INTO EFFECT?

Since 1 November 2019, retailers are not allowed to supply lightweight plastic shopping bags in Victoria.

It is illegal for:

- a retailer to supply a banned plastic bag
- a retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer of plastic bags to provide information that is false or misleading about banned or exempt bags

HOW IS IT ENFORCED?

As the ban is now in effect, any person can report a suspected banned bag to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria. Random spot checks are also being undertaken.

Call: 1300 372 842

Email: contact@epa.vic.gov.au

Website: <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-business/how-to/plastic-bag-ban>

WHICH BAGS ARE BANNED?

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

Retailers are not allowed to provide banned bags to customers, whether new or reused.



WHICH PLASTIC BAGS ARE ALLOWED?

The ban does NOT apply to the following bags:

- Produce bags used for unpackaged foodstuffs
- Garbage bags & bin-liners
- Dog waste or nappy bags
- Essential product packaging (eg. bread bag)



Retailers cannot use these bags as substitutes for banned bags.

WHICH ALTERNATIVE BAGS ARE ALLOWED?

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



WHAT IF WE DON'T COMPLY?

Under the legislation there are two offences that can attract fines for non-compliance:

Supply offence: Penalties apply to retailers providing a banned plastic bag to another person to use to carry goods the retailer sells from the retailer's premises.

Information offence: Penalties apply to a retailer or wholesaler, or a manufacturer of plastic bags, must not, whether by act or omission, provide to any other person information that the retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer knows, or should reasonably know, is false or misleading about the composition of a banned plastic bag, or whether or not a bag is a banned or exempt plastic bag.

Significant financial penalties apply for non-compliance.

WHAT SHOULD BUSINESSES DO?

1 CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

All businesses should carefully weigh their options and consider what retailers in other states have learnt, even if you currently use a legal plastic bag. There is increasing impetus and support for businesses choosing more sustainable solutions.

Options include:

- not offering a bag at all or reusing stock boxes
- cloth or hessian bags
- non-woven “green” bags
- recycled paper or cardboard bags
- heavyweight recycled plastic bags
- a combination of above.

Visit www.vicbagban.com.au to see real-life examples of the alternative options other retailers are using.

If you decide to use heavyweight reusable plastic bags, consider bags with 80% recycled content and ask your bag supplier to provide written evidence of the bag’s **minimum thickness** in microns (µm).

If you are unsure, contact the NRA for advice.

The risks of using medium-weight plastic bags

The NRA does NOT recommend that retailers use plastic shopping bags **close to the minimum thickness** as your business could be exposed to substantial risks such as:

- inconsistent thicknesses across the bag could risk non-compliance
- having to defend the bags because they appear too similar to the one it replaced
- missed opportunity to reduce cost burdens
- 96% of submissions to Government were in favour of a ban (strong indication of consumer preference)
- Read more at: www.vicbagban.com.au

Labelling on plastic bags such as “compliant”, “reusable” or “bag ban approved” is not proof of compliance.

Fines apply to suppliers if they provide false or misleading information (or withhold info) about banned bags.

2 CONSIDER BAG FEES

You cannot supply or charge for banned bags but many businesses across Australia now charge a small fee for more sustainable bags. It is your choice whether to charge customers for bags, but retailers should consider the long-term benefits such as reducing business costs. Bag fees should be fair and in line with industry standards.

NRA research has found that consumers are more willing to pay for jute, hessian, cloth and recycled paper bags, but are reluctant to pay for plastic bags.

In addition, retailers around Australia have witnessed up to a 90% drop in total bag consumption when fees are introduced with a plastic bag ban, as more consumers remember their own bags or refuse a bag for small purchases. This is important to remember when you order bags as you will not need as many.

3 UNUSED STOCK

Businesses must not supply banned bags to customers.

If you purchased the bags recently, we recommend contacting your supplier and discussing whether a refund or exchange is possible to retain your business. If refund/exchange/credit is not possible, and you only have a small amount of stock leftover, you may want to use these as bin-liners or for stockroom purposes. You may also be able to donate these to a food charity which does not sell goods (and are exempt). Finally, if you have a large amount of unusable stock, contact a local soft plastics recycler to arrange collection and recycling.

If you are unsure of what to do with unused stock, contact the NRA for help.

4 TRAIN STAFF

A critical element of managing the ban in your business is training your team, particularly those who have regular contact with customers, such as checkout operators and customer service staff. Inform your staff so that they know the law, are familiar with your new range of bags, and can answer customer questions.

5 INFORM YOUR CUSTOMERS

Inform your customers about the ban so they are aware of changes. We recommend displaying the official VIC Bag Ban signage in your store or near the point-of-sale. **Download official signage:** www.vicbagban.com.au

If you decide to introduce bag fees, we recommend giving your customers plenty of notice so they can be prepared.

HELP FOR RETAILERS

The NRA has created a dedicated website of resources and toll-free hotline to assist retailers.

Go to the website: www.vicbagban.com.au or call the **NRA Hotline: 1800 817 723**