



What We Heard

A summary on the engagement on the Reduction of Single-Use Bags Regulation

Executive summary

Background

The Government of Yukon has been working to make the territory's recycling system more resilient and sustainable. Yukon residents have consistently expressed interest in actions to reduce waste. In previous public engagements on waste management and recycling programs, feedback has been to address single-use products.

In 2019, the Government of Yukon engaged the public in a proposal to place a surcharge on single-use bags. Feedback received during the 2019 engagement showed support for a ban on single-use bags instead of a surcharge. In response to this feedback, the Government of Yukon tabled Bill 14 in Fall 2020 Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly to amend the *Environment Act* and enable regulations to ban single-use items. With the passing of Bill 14, the government conducted a public engagement from January to March 2021, collecting feedback on details for the ban on single-use plastic and paper bags and the ban's timing.

Through these engagements and previous outreach on other recycling initiatives, Yukon residents have consistently expressed interest in actions to reduce single-use products.



Plastic has been found in waterways, forests and the stomachs of birds and wildlife. Once in the environment, plastic may require thousands of years to break down. Minuscule plastic pieces called microplastics can accumulate in aquatic life and animals that many Yukon residents harvest and eat during the decomposition process.

Despite being compostable, paper bags also have negative environmental impacts, which are significant. Paper bag production is an energy-intensive process that releases chemical by-products resulting in water pollution and air pollution.

Biodegradable bags share similar production issues as paper bags. They often require specific conditions to degrade and may contain plastic and metal additives.

Engagement process

Purpose

The purpose of the engagement was to hear ideas and concerns from stakeholders and the public about a proposed ban on single-use bags. We also asked more specifically about the kinds of bags to be exempted and the timing of the ban's implementation.

Engagement methods

Led by the Department of Environment, the public engagement period was held from January 7 to March 8, 2021. It was advertised using social and traditional media. Stakeholders were able to provide input through an online survey, by directly calling or emailing Environment staff, requesting meetings in their place of business, or by participating in one of a series of online meetings.

How we reached out

The Government of Yukon promoted the engagement and online survey via its corporate and department Facebook and Twitter accounts.

A media release was issued at the beginning of the engagement period. Articles were posted in a number of media outlets. Further outreach and signage offered a reminder of the engagement as it was coming to an end. Ads were included in local newspapers and on radio stations.



Invitations to engage were sent directly to known stakeholders (stores, restaurants, chambers of commerce, local governments and others around Yukon) advising of the engagement period and inviting to comment.

How we engaged

A survey was available online at engageyukon.ca from January 7 to March 8, 2021.

Background information attached to the survey described the purpose of the engagement and provided an overview of the proposed regulation. There were a total of 478 responses to the survey.

A series of online meetings were held with various stakeholders between February 15 and March 8, 2021. These meetings included a quick overview of the proposed regulation. Stakeholders were invited to participate in a roundtable-style discussion. Stakeholders provided input on the exemptions to the ban, the timing of implementation and any other comments they might have in general and on the potential ban on other single-use items.

Several stakeholders engaged by sending emails, by calling the branch, or in some cases, at the stakeholder's request. Environment staff met with stakeholders at their place of business.

Survey content and results

The survey focused on the kinds of bags that should be exempted from the ban and on the timing of implementation. We also asked stakeholders about whether they use reusable bags and, if not, why not. Environment took the opportunity to gather additional data and asked questions about reducing or banning other single-use products and the priority for managing other waste categories.

Who responded

The survey was slightly different depending on whether the respondent identified as a business owner or a member of the public. The first question asked respondents whether they were responding on behalf of a business or organization: 87% identified as individual residents, and 13% of respondents identified as business owners or on behalf of an organization.

Those responding as business owners or on behalf of an organization were asked which Yukon community they are based.



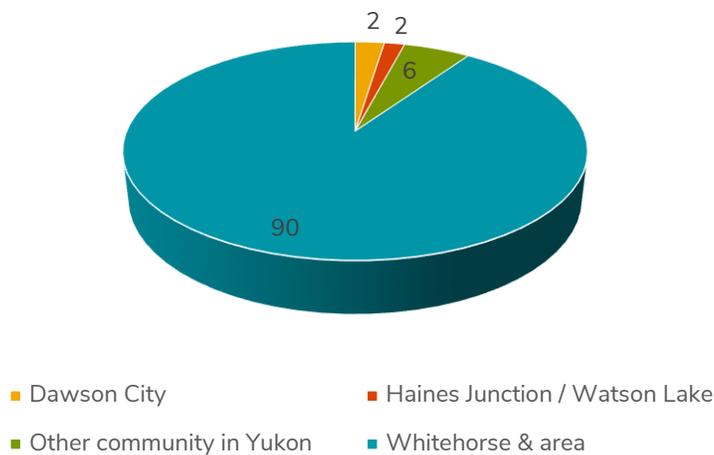
Location of respondent's business



Residents were asked whether they reside in Yukon, and if they indicated that they did not, their survey was ended in order to restrict responses to Yukon residents. For businesses or organizations identifying as operating outside of the territory, these respondents were prompted to complete the survey, As there are a number of groups and businesses with interests in Yukon that could be impacted by the reduction of single-use bags.

Residents were then asked where in Yukon they live. The results are summarized as follows:

Location of residents



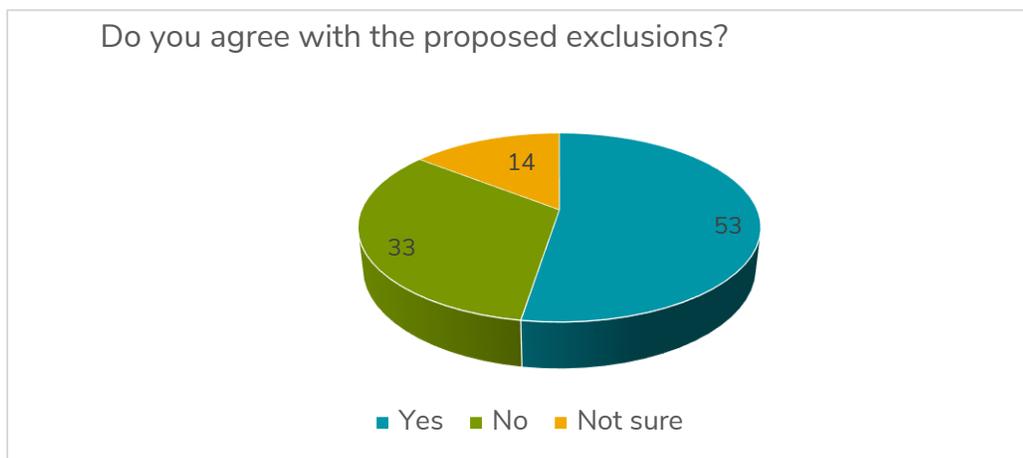


Ban exemptions

The next question was asked of both residents and those responding on behalf of an organization. It related to the proposed exemptions to the ban:

We proposed the following bags be EXEMPTED from the ban:

- Bags that are manufactured with the intended purpose to be reusable;
- Bags provided by a pharmacist to carry prescription drugs;
- Bags provided to a consumer as **primary** packaging for:
 - Food, produce (e.g., raw fruits and vegetables), bulk foods, bakery items, fresh or frozen meat, deli items, fish or poultry;
 - Ready-to-eat foods (e.g., fries, doughnuts, etc.); and
 - Bulk items such as hardware nails.
- Packages of bags sold as products for:
 - garbage, compost and animal waste, or
 - other uses related to waste (e.g., to contain separated recyclable or reusable materials to keep them dry and clean, such as electronics and clothing); and
 - snack, sandwich and freezer-type bags, including Ziploc®-style re-sealable bags.
- Small bags that are less than 750 cm² in the area when laid flat, excluding handles if any (e.g., bags that are 25 cm by 30 cm in size).



We asked for comments about the proposed exclusions and received a considerable amount of written feedback. A common response is a variation of, "there are too many products being exempted." Another common theme was that this ban does not go far enough to deal with the waste problem and that more single-use materials should be banned.



There were several commenters who opposed banning paper bags on the basis that they are not bad for the environment because they can be burned or will biodegrade easily and leave no pollution behind. Another common comment was that single-use bags are not, in fact, single-use because many people reuse them as garbage bags or for other purposes.

Some quotes:

"We are very much in favour of a ban, but we need to change people's behaviour to make this work well."

"What about gift bags or packaging for baskets? Special bags for Christmas time? These are important to our business."

"Paper Bags should be included as they are compostable."

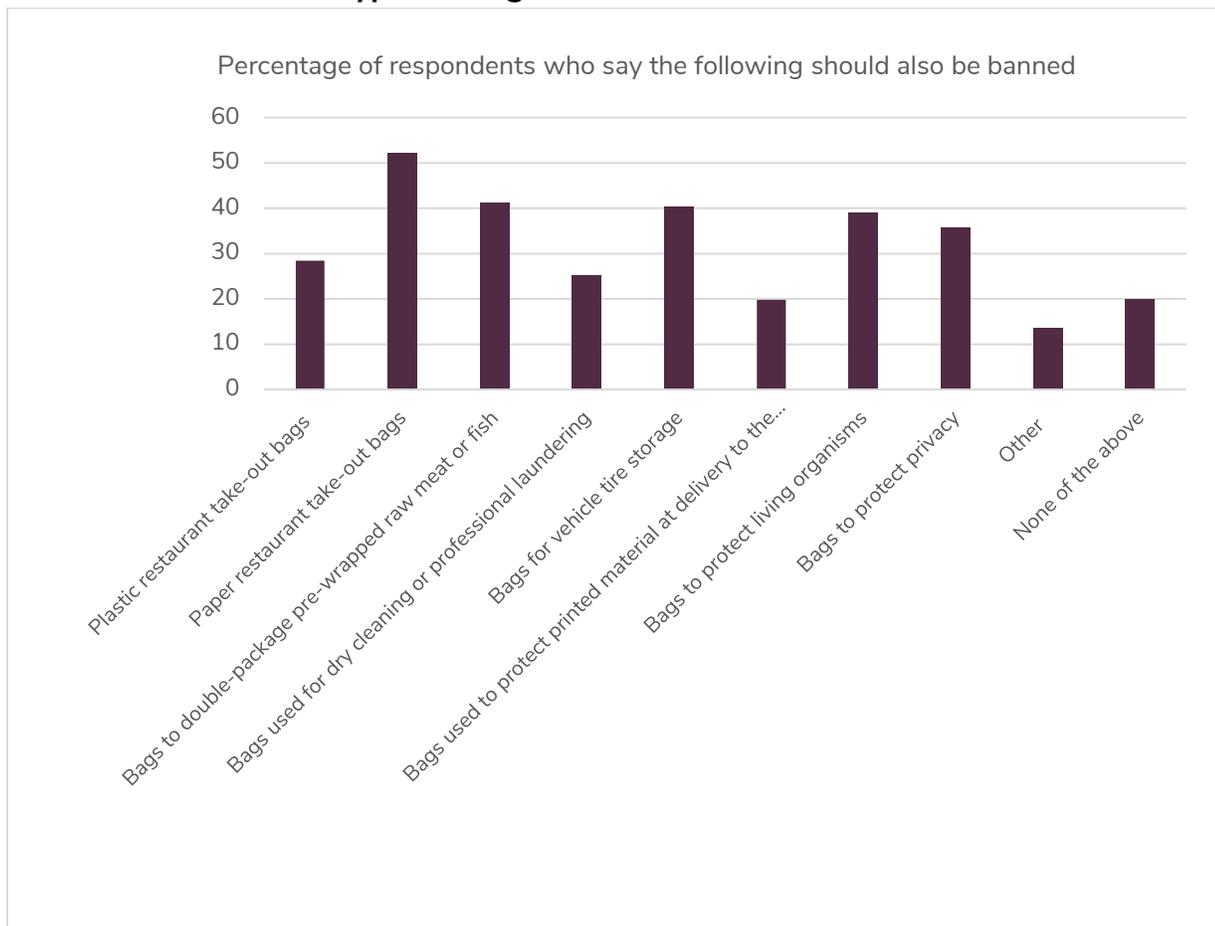
"Ban all single-use plastic."

"I don't think paper bags should be banned."

"There are too many exclusions - people don't need bags for those things."

"I do not think that paper bags should be included. Paper bags are always reused for wrapping, gift-giving, composting, etc."

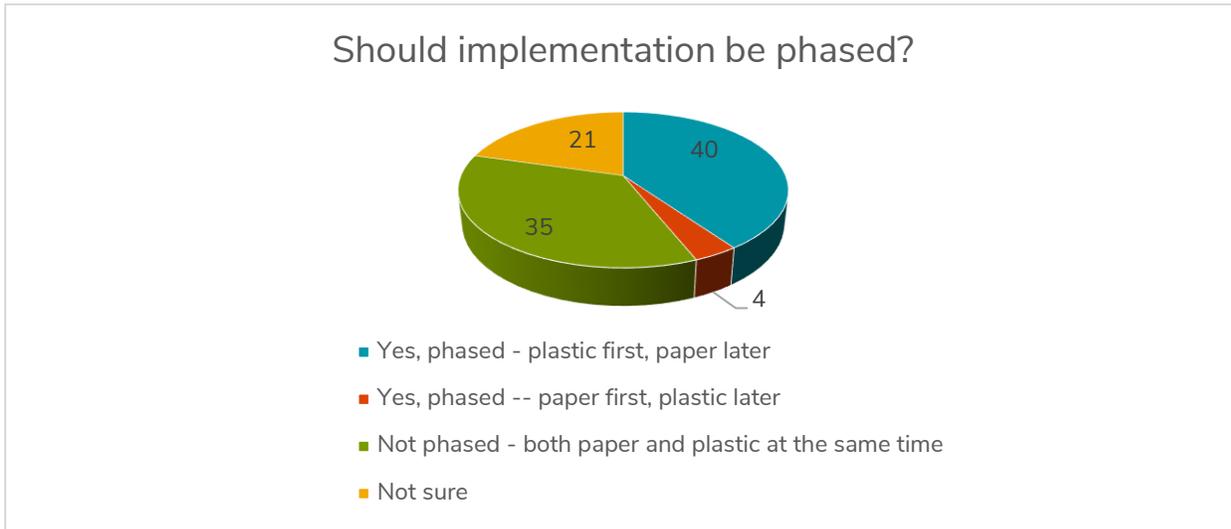
We asked about other types of bags that should be excluded from the ban:



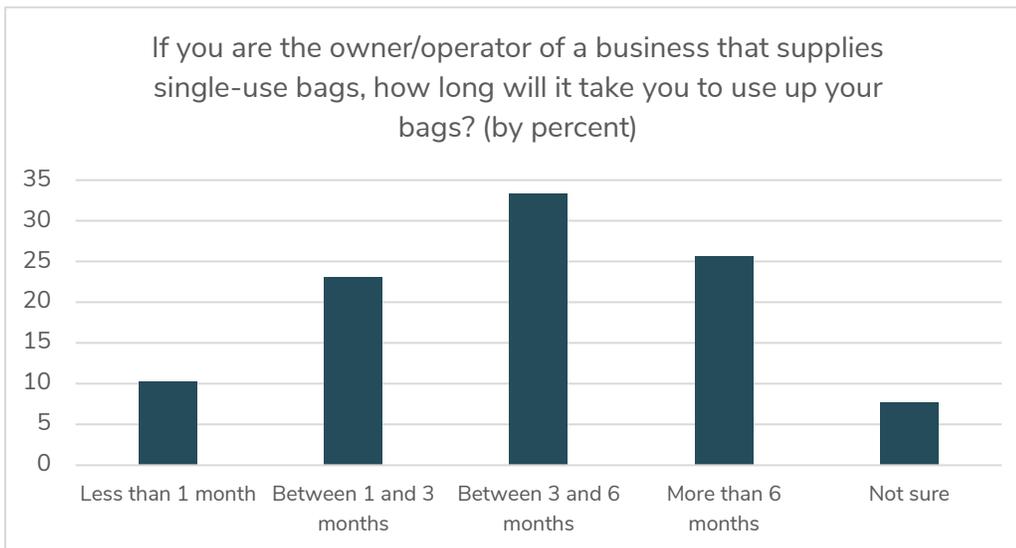


Ban implementation

We asked if the ban should be phased in, and 40% were in favour of banning plastic first, then paper, 4% of the respondents said the paper should be banned first, then plastic, 35% said the ban should be implemented all at once, and 21% were not sure.



We asked businesses that supply single-use bags to customers how long it would take them to use up their existing stock of bags:





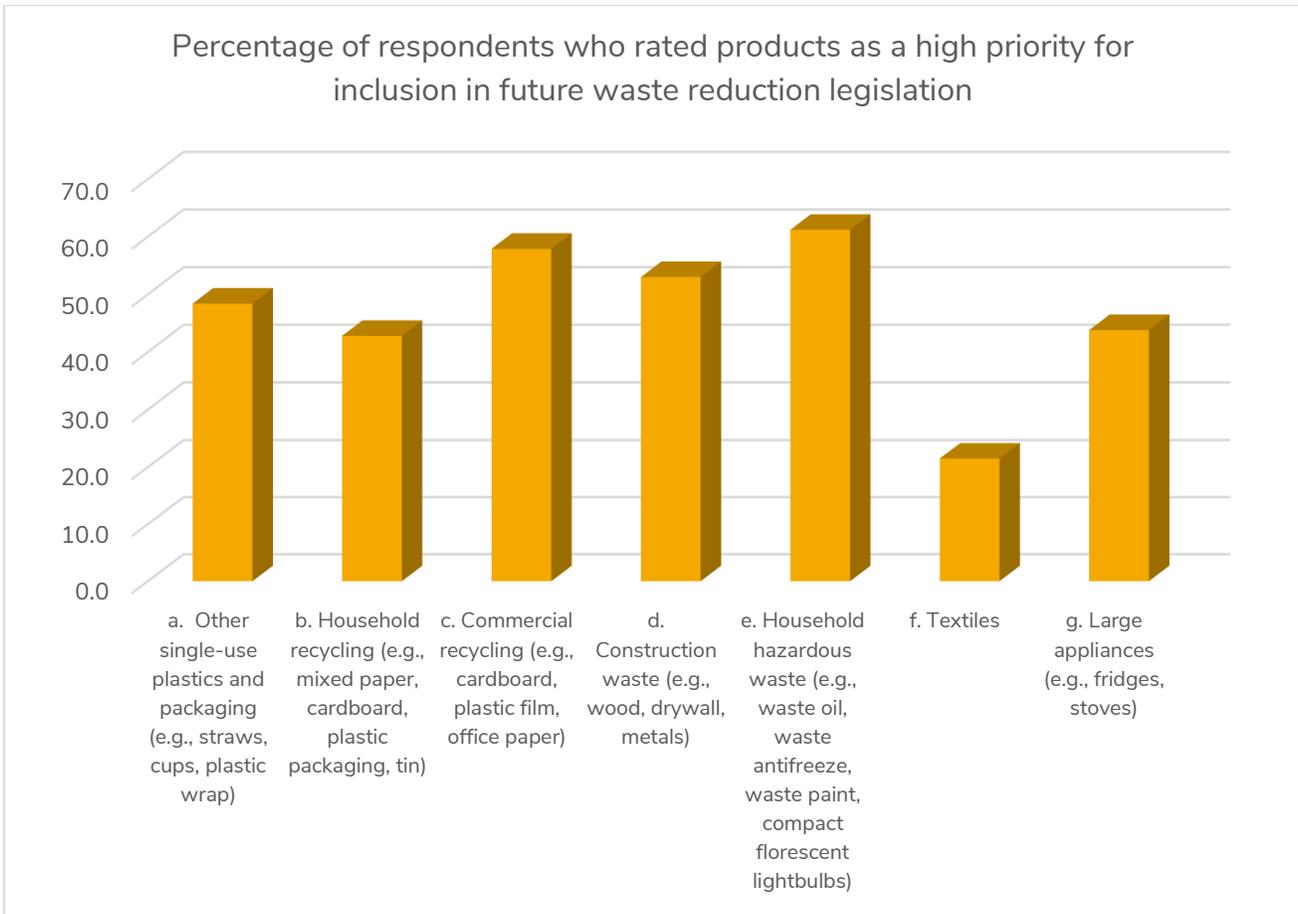
Reusable bags

We asked all participants whether they use reusable bags (or an alternative) when shopping. 85 % of respondents said they use reusable bags or alternatives when shopping, while 15% indicated they do not. We asked what prevents them from using a reusable bag or alternative when shopping.



Future regulations

The final survey question asked participants to assign a priority level of low, medium or high to additional products for inclusion in future waste reduction regulations. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who ranked the listed products as a high priority for inclusion in future waste reduction and management legislation:



Respondents ranked household hazardous waste, commercial recycling, and construction waste as the highest priority products, including legislation to reduce waste.

Stakeholder meetings

During the engagement, we held seven meetings with various stakeholder groups in order to get input on the proposed regulation. Invitations were sent to all available contacts to participate in one of a series of meetings. The Yukon Chamber of Commerce and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce also invited members to the meetings.

Meeting #1: Quick Service Restaurants and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce:

The main feedback provided during this meeting was that bags are essential because they allow the restaurants to safely package items to provide to customers for drive-through, take-out and delivery orders. Participants were concerned banning all bags would result in a situation where they might not be able to assure food safety, particularly when using a third-party delivery driver. Participants noted bags are essential to protect the integrity of the food and ensure it has not been tampered with after leaving the restaurant and before getting to the customer. Respondents were also concerned about the practicality of providing



customers with multiple items like fries and burgers, especially at drive-throughs. They do not want to hand out multiple products to customers with no bag, as this could be awkward and delay service.

The participants also expressed concerns about bans on future products stating that banning cold drinks and coffee cups would present such a challenge that this action could force them to close their business.

Meeting #2: Restaurants plus Yukon Chamber of Commerce

The feedback provided in this meeting was generally in favour of the ban, noting that food safety must take priority, so single-use products may not be avoidable in some instances. A participant suggested that the Government of Yukon should do more to help businesses and customers find safe ways to allow some reusable products, such as customers bringing their own reusable containers for take-out foods.

Meeting #3: Retailers

Feedback was mixed during this meeting. One participant noted that many small businesses are struggling right now due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and banning bags would be another challenge for them to deal with in an already challenging time. It was suggested the Government of Yukon wait until COVID-19 is no longer impacting the country before implementing this ban. It was stated a ban like this would disproportionately impact small businesses who do not have the buying power to purchase reusable bags at a low price that large businesses/corporations have.

They suggested mandating minimum pricing on reusable bags might be one way to level the playing field. One retailer noted they stopped providing single-use bags at their large store months before the meeting, and customers have adapted well by not using bags, bringing their own or purchasing bags when necessary.

They noted there had not been any negative feedback from customers about the lack of single-use bags. A representative of a national chain advised that the lack of harmonization across Canada regarding this kind of legislation presents a challenge.

Meeting #4: Retailers

One retailer expressed support for the ban and advised that they are planning to have their own unique art bags made up to sell to customers. They wondered whether Yukon might compensate retailers by buying any remaining single-use bags at cost at the time of implementation.



Another retailer suggested tire bags should not be banned because there is no reasonable alternative as reusable tire bags start at about \$40 each. They also said paper bags should not be banned, because they make great fire starters.

Meeting #5: The Yukon Chamber of Commerce's Food, Beverage and Cannabis Committee

A participant in this meeting strongly opposed the ban, particularly for paper bags, as it will have significant negative impacts on restaurants, which are already struggling due to COVID-19 restrictions. There were participants who believed the ban was targeting specific industries; however, their concerns were addressed in the proposed exclusions.

Another participant recognized the importance of environmental protection but stressed the timing is essential to get it right. Participants spoke to the need to balance environmental protection with convenience and economics. In addition, the Government of Yukon needs to ensure alternatives are not worse than what is being banned.

Another participant advised that while this ban does not impact their business very much, there should be consideration given what this might mean to the restaurant industry in a particularly challenging time. One participant advised there needs to be greater transparency in the decision-making process as they felt decisions were being made before the engagement was concluded.

Meeting #6 – Environmental NGOs other Community Groups

A participant suggested a full ban, with no exceptions, would be preferable to the many exemptions being proposed. Other participants agreed, noting that if the Government of Yukon is too soft, there will be no pressure to innovate. Participants agreed implementation should take place sooner than later. There was a suggestion that the Government of Yukon keep apprised of Canada's proposed ban on single-use plastics to ensure we are working effectively with what may be coming federally.

Meeting #7 – Communities and the Association of Yukon Communities

Stakeholders advised the City of Dawson has had a bag ban in place for a while. The ban includes plastic bags, with some exemptions, and allows paper bags with a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content. It was noted an unintended consequence of banning produce bags is that people are buying more pre-packaged produce.

A participant was concerned about how enforcement would be handled. The Government of Yukon advised Environmental Protection Officers will be responsible for enforcement. Stakeholders indicated they were concerned communities might be made accountable for



enforcement. The Government of Yukon advised enforcement of the legislation would be with the Government of Yukon.

The meeting participants gave general support to the ban, encouraged quick implementation, and suggested that the Government of Yukon continue to ban other single-use products to reduce waste going into landfills.

Feedback from email, phone and meetings

Government of Yukon received a number of emails and phone calls in response to the survey and, upon request, met in person with some business owners.

One stakeholder advised they reuse all of their bags and that they are not, in fact, single-use.

A caller advised that they are concerned about the Government of Yukon banning egg cartons.

A small-business owner emailed indicating they would like to provide bags for gift-wrapping, including gift baskets, but supported exempting small bags.

This was echoed in a meeting held with another business owner. This same business owner was concerned about being able to provide his customers with a bag to carry the items they buy from their specialty shop. This business owner was not in favour of banning all paper bags – but felt bags with recycled content should be allowed to be provided, particularly in a boutique type of shop.

Another stakeholder said it is important for the Government of Yukon to implement extended producer responsibility in Yukon as soon as possible in order to reduce the amount of waste going into our landfills of both single-use and reusable products.

An emailer suggested the Government of Yukon make reasonable efforts to educate all customers, including incoming tourists, about the ban, so they can be prepared by bringing their own bag.

A local business owner expressed support for the ban but said the Government of Yukon should ensure it is based on current science. They advised education will be key, so people understand they do not need a plastic garbage bag or that it's okay to wrap fresh bread in plastic or clean cloth.



A stakeholder who participated in one of the meetings forwarded an email and letter about the ban. The letter provided a number of reasons why single-use bags should not be banned for restaurants using them for take-out food, including food safety reasons, increased food safety protocols due to COVID-19, the need to ensure the food has not been tampered with between the time it leaves the restaurant and when it gets to the customer when a third party delivery is used. They concluded with the following: "Until a viable alternative is readily available and easily accessible, banning paper bags will pose an undue burden on restaurants and risk for customers."

Another person emailed: "When you outlaw grocery bags, you will be paying more than 5 cents for a bag to put your garbage in. That will be a single-use plastic bag."

A restaurant owner commented a ban on all paper bags would "destroy (their) business," and there is no viable alternative for restaurants to use that is safe. Customers can't bring a reusable bag into the restaurant to take food away. It is not sanitary, and they would not be willing to charge customers more for reusable bags.

They emphasized this is a challenging enough time with COVID-19 with no tourists, and banning the bags they use for take-out would put them out of business.

Another email expressed general support for the ban and suggested it be done with few exemptions and implemented as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

The input received during the engagement held in early 2021 on the proposal to ban single-use paper, and plastic bags was mixed. Some strong themes emerged: the importance of single-use bags to restaurants for carrying take-out food items. Respondents generally supported the ban and provided feedback on which bags should be exempted from the ban and how it should be implemented.

The Government of Yukon will take all of the feedback received into careful consideration when drafting the single-use bag legislation. We are grateful to all of the residents, community and organization representatives, as well as the business owners and operators who took the time to provide their input on the proposed ban.