



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
SUZANNE ORR MLA (CHAIR), CANDICE BURCH MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), JAMES MILLIGAN MLA

**Inquiry into referred 2017–18 Annual and Financial Reports**  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**15 November 2018**

Asked by Ms Lee, Professor Kate Auty took on notice the following question:

In relation to: Review of the ACT Plastic Shopping Bag Ban Report

**Breakdown of work contributed by OCSE and ANU towards the plastic shopping bags ban report.**

**PROFESSOR KATE AUTY:** The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

My Office and the Australian National University (ANU) worked in collaboration on the preparation of this report and its supporting technical analysis. Significant deliverables achieved included:

- *Unfantastic Plastic – Review of the ACT Plastic Shopping Bag Ban* (Public summary report with infographics).
- *Regulating Plastic Shopping Bags in the Australian Capital Territory Plastic Shopping Bag Ban Act 2010 Options Analysis* (Technical Report).
- *Unfantastic Plastic* (web page 'storymap' summary).

ANU contribution

The Technical Report provided by ANU *Regulating Plastic Shopping Bags in the Australian Capital Territory Plastic Shopping Bag Ban Act 2010 Options Analysis* was based on research that involved eight components:

- (a) an analysis of the consumption of plastic bags in Australia and the ACT;
- (b) a literature review on the environmental impacts of plastic bags, from production through to disposal;
- (c) a review of plastic bag regulation in other Australian jurisdictions;
- (d) a literature review on previous analyses done on the effectiveness of Australian plastic bag bans;
- (e) an analysis of the impact of the ACT plastic bag ban on plastic bag consumption and plastic bag litter;
- (f) a review of the challenges associated with the regulation of plastic shopping bags;
- (g) an evaluation of community attitudes to the ban and reform options; and

(h) a conceptual and empirical analysis of reform options.

The main obstacle to the project was the absence of data. There are no publicly available data on the consumption of plastic bags, either at the national or Territory level. The Australian Customs Service collects data on plastic bag imports, which are available for purchase through the Australian Bureau of Statistics. However, these data cannot be accurately disaggregated by bag type and they do not track the destination of bag imports. The Customs data were acquired for the project, which enabled its weaknesses to be identified (and reported).

Due to the absence of relevant public data, the next best source of information on plastic bag consumption is importers and retailers. The research team approached most major Australian plastic bag importers, all major retailers and a sample of smaller retailers in the Territory. However, only a small number of the relevant businesses agreed to provide data. To overcome this, two surveys had to be undertaken to devise a robust estimate of plastic bag consumption in the Territory: a household survey; and a small retailer high density polyethylene (HDPE) bag survey. The household survey was undertaken at randomly selected major supermarkets across the Territory by a team of 10 researchers. The survey asked randomly selected shoppers at the supermarkets about their consumption patterns in relation to particular bag types: reusable low density polyethylene (LDPE) bags, reusable polypropylene bags; barrier bags and garbage (kitchen tidy) bags. There were 1025 respondents to the household survey. The HDPE bag retailer survey was undertaken at randomly selected smaller retail outlets by a team of 3 researchers. The survey asked retailers about their distribution of single-use and reusable HDPE bags. There were 43 retail respondents to the survey.

The household and retailer HDPE bag surveys were used to complete parts (a), (e) and (h) of the project. Without these data, none of these parts could have been completed - for example, at the most simple level, it is not possible to evaluate the impact of the bag ban on the consumption of plastic bags without data on consumption.

In addition to the household and retailer HDPE bag surveys, a community attitudes survey was designed by the research team, with the conduct of the survey contracted to ReachTel. These data were used to complete part (g) of the project.

To assess the impact of the ban on the ACT litter stream, data had to be obtained from the Keep Australia Beautiful Network, normalised and then analysed.

The analysis of reform options involved a qualitative and quantitative assessment of six reform options.

The research team also had to collect and analyse the mass and thickness of a sample of LDPE, HDPE, and polypropylene bags using specialised equipment. Standard equipment cannot be used for these purposes.

The project was a substantial research undertaking, with the final report being over 100 pages.

The ANU lost money on the project due to the extensive amount of empirical work and the project's breadth.

#### OCSE contribution

The ANU technical report was distilled within my Office into the 76 page *Unfantastic Plastic – Review of the ACT Plastic Shopping Bag Ban* report with the aim of making this content approachable for the general public.

The project manager within my Office who prepared this report was responsible for the entire development and delivery of this project. This included:

- Project management and administration including developing scope, project plan, financial management, contract management, consultation and reporting.
- Procurement of technical experts including scoping, preparation and distribution of requests for quote, managing and chairing the assessment panel to evaluate quotes received, notifying successful and unsuccessful respondents, developing and administering contract, inception and project plan control, financial management, scope and time variations, draft and final report approvals.
- Project control of consultation tasks including developing and approving survey mediums and focus questions.
- Ongoing liaison and contractor supervision of the ANU in relation to the direction of the project and resolution of obstacles, including face to face meetings, regular and ad hoc telephone discussions, and email correspondence
- Government liaison with relevant staff within the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and Transport Canberra and City Services.
- Ministerial liaison including finalising terms of reference, providing progress updates as required, reporting outcomes and recommendations, preparation of tabling statement, media material and associated communications.
- Public communications including responding to enquiries, raising awareness through social media, developing and updating web content and communication tools.
- Identifying and engaging with industry and technical experts including requests for expert contributions to the report.
- Concept development and data distillation for infographics and contract management of graphic design specialists in the preparation of the 15 infographics used to communicate key information and consolidation into the final report.
- Analysing data and creating the first office and ACT Government public 'Storymap' to engage the public and present key messages from the report using ESRI online web content tools.
- Liaison with the Australian Association of Environmental Education and the Actsmart Schools Program to communicate the findings of the report to these audiences.
- Ongoing promotion of the report and its findings through social media, professional networks, community organisations, and industry fora.
- Presenting the report and its findings at forums and the submission of abstracts, and development of presentation material for forthcoming conference presentations.

The report has received a great deal of interest, and the use of infographics to communicate the complex messages has been especially commended.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services

Signature:



Date: 26 November 2018

By the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Professor Kate Auty