

Waste Policy and Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate
PO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

PRESIDENT
ANGELA JONES

SECRETARY
JANE GREY

TREASURER
ROBYN OAKSHOTT

ABN: 19 726 352 280

Soroptimist International of ACT & Monaro is a group of local women working voluntarily to improve the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment. Through international partnerships and a global network of members. Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls by: advocating for equity and equality; creating safe and healthy environments; increasing access to education; and developing leadership and practical skills for a sustainable future.

Undoubtedly, one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time is plastic pollution. Some of the substances that stick to plastics, seep out of them, or are released when they decay, are endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). This means they interfere with the normal function of hormones in the human body. A growing body of evidence suggests chemicals commonly found in many plastics are associated with everything from cancer and reproductive problems to thyroid effects, diabetes and obesity. These toxic chemicals have been shown to pass through the placenta and/or can be passed from mother to infant through breast milk – this means that women are passing the impacts of these chemicals on to the next generation.

As we are an organisation that seeks to improve the lives of women and girls, we are very concerned about the damaging impact of plastic particularly on women and girls. Specifically, we are concerned about the impact of plastic and the substances that adhere to them in our waterways and food.

A WWF report released this year reports that on average we each use 53kg of plastic each year. This is expected to double by 2030. By 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean. Yet the problems start long before plastic reaches our oceans, rivers and beaches, and so must the solutions.

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People around the world are coming together to demand change. Many are changing the way they shop, what they eat and how they live. Millions of dollars are being invested in research into alternatives and into cleaning up plastics from our oceans, rivers and streets. But all this vital work will be for nothing if ever more plastic continues to be landfilled, burned, or escape into our environment.

The community of Canberra and the ACT region is more connected than most to our local environment, taking great pride in our clean air, healthy waters and nourishing soils. Therefore we must tackle this flood of plastic pollution at the source.

We are proud that the ACT was one of the first states/territories to ban single use plastic shopping bags. However, there is a lot more to do as you have identified in the discussion paper "Phasing out single use plastics".

We agree with the single use plastic items listed in the discussion paper, with importance placed on plastic bags still in use in supermarkets for, eg fruit and vegetable sections of supermarkets, plastic straws and disposable coffee cups. Members of our club have individually reduced the use of plastic in their lives by replacing plastic bags and cling film with other multiple use options. We are also encouraging shop keepers in our local areas to provide non plastic vegetable bags for sale.

We acknowledge that we must eliminate the plastic we don't need, however, real change will only occur if these items can be replaced with better alternatives. We must innovate so all the plastic we do need is designed to be safely reused, recycled, or composted. We must circulate everything we use, making sure the plastic we produce stays in the economy and never becomes waste or pollution.

Some businesses, working side by side with governments, are already changing how plastic is designed, used and re-used, to stop the pollution before it starts. Yet we need much more to happen.

Cities like San Francisco, Washington DC, Paris and Toronto have all banned the use of polystyrene. This product is even banned in Antarctica because of the impact on wildlife.

There are many examples of governments acting to reduce plastic pollution. Notably, the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to ban single use plastics by 2021; set a 90 per cent collection target for plastic bottles by 2029; and for a more stringent application of the polluter pays principle.

The members and friends of Soroptimists International ACT & Monaro are pleased to be able to contribute to your consultation process and strongly suggest that next steps include continued community outreach and engagement; support for locally sourced, low-carbon footprint alternatives; and long-term monitoring and enforcement.

Please do not hesitate to contact us on this matter. We would be more than happy to arrange a time to meet with you for further discussion.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Jones', written in a cursive style.

Angela Jones

President
SI ACT & Monaro
31 July 2019