



**People with
Disabilities**
ACT Inc

People with Disabilities ACT
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To Transport and City Services Directorate
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Submission

Response to ACT Government Discussion Paper

Single Use Plastics

People with Disabilities ACT acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we work and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders past, present and emerging.

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About PWD ACT

People With Disabilities ACT Inc. (PWDACT) is a disabled peoples organisation (DPO) governed by people with disabilities. PWDACT works to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life, to remove barriers to our inclusion and to inform the community discussion of disability issues by bringing to bear the daily lived experience of people with disabilities. PWDACT advocates from a human rights perspective. PWD ACT also conducts its advocacy in an ethical manner. Accordingly, PWDACT strongly supports measures to protect the environment and to promote ideas of sustainability and social responsibility. PWD ACT strongly supports measures to fulfil Australia's and the ACT's obligations with respect to the UN Goals for Sustainable Development.

PWDACT also acknowledges the ***UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***. The text of this Convention can be found at: www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/convention.htm. Article 10 of this Convention ("Right to Life") is especially relevant to this submission. Other relevant Articles are Article 21 'Inclusion in Community and Living Independently' and Article 25 'Health and Recreation' are also relevant.

PWDACT has chosen not to specifically address each question raised in the Discussion Paper. Instead, our submission focuses on question 7 and those aspects of the Discussion Paper proposals which we believe will disproportionately affect people with disabilities.

Environmental concern

PWDACT shares the community concern at the harmful impacts of plastics on the environment. In particular we acknowledge the harm caused by plastic bags, plastic lined disposable cups, takeaway containers, straws and cutlery.

PWDACT supports measures to address the environmental degradation caused by single use plastics which are practical, effective and address social equity concerns.

People with disabilities are a cohort of the community which is potentially adversely affected by the phasing out of single use plastics in particular with respect to plastic drinking straws. The Twitter campaign *#suckitableism* contains evidence of the limitations of alternatives to plastic straws, including sustainable paper, bamboo and metal straws. The popularity to this campaign clearly demonstrate how available alternatives to plastic drinking straws do not meet the needs of significant numbers of people with disabilities.

The ban on plastic drinking straws was the subject of an article in the Canberra times on Sunday 9 September 2018. PWD ACT contributed comment to this article expressing our concern at the adverse impact of the proposed ban on people with disabilities. Since the appearance of this article PWD ACT has refined its position. PWD ACT is highly supportive of environmental initiatives:

-we recognise the harmful environmental impact of plastic straws and support their general ban

-however, many of our members have movement restrictions and/or medical conditions for which they need continued access to plastic straws as the available alternatives are unsuitable for them

-accordingly, within the scope of a general ban on plastic drinking straws, there must be provision to allow ACT businesses to be mindful and sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities who need plastic straws and be able to stock these straws for when they are needed.

Affect on those on low incomes

There is a second matter which requires further investigation which is beyond the scope of our resources. This is the extent to which any restrictions on the availability of single use plastics would disproportionately and adversely affect people on low incomes. Many of our members, by reason of their disability, experience poverty and incomes which are below average. The ACT Government needs to consider the impact on people in poverty and people who are socially and economically disadvantaged of proposals to restrict the availability and use of single use plastics and to include measures to address these adverse effects in any new regulatory framework for single use plastics.