

Presentation by the Hon. Daryl Vaz, MP
on the Government's measures to
regulate specific categories of plastic packaging materials
at a Press Conference,
Monday, September 17, 2018
in the Banquet Hall at 9 am

It is now universally accepted that Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as Jamaica, are particularly vulnerable to global environmental challenges, including climate change and marine litter. Our vulnerability to marine plastic litter is even greater given the magnitude of the problem which can have significant negative impacts on economic sectors such as tourism and fisheries which are critical to our economic growth and development. Additionally, improperly disposed of plastics end up in our drains, gullies and waterways after heavy rains, which contribute to flooding and ultimately damage to life and property. Indeed, plastic pollution is one of the biggest threats to the fragile ecosystems of island states. There are well known cases of plastics being ingested by sea mammals such as whales and turtles as well as sea birds and other sea life leading to fatalities.

Scientists have proven that some ten per cent (10%) of the plastic manufactured worldwide end up in our oceans. The majority of the plastics settle on the ocean floor where it will never degrade. The United Nations estimates that 8 million tonnes of plastics reach our oceans each year – this is equivalent to dumping a garbage truck full plastic each minute. Indeed, the Ocean Conservatory has estimated that every square mile of ocean has over 46,000 pieces of plastic floating on it. These are the plastics which end up blocking drains, and contribute to floods and other environmental challenges. The health of our oceans and coasts is inextricable linked to the sustainable development of small island developing states.

Jamaica is literally inundated with all types of plastic including Styrofoam much of which are referred to as single use plastics, that is, they meant to be used only once before being thrown away or recycled. For example, consider the following: we buy breakfast or lunch that comes in a Styrofoam box, and that box is enclosed in a plastic bag. We eat the contents with a plastic fork and drink our juice which comes in a PET bottle, through a plastic straw. Once we eat that breakfast or lunch, we throw

away the waste which may not enter the collection system. This is played out hundreds of times each day.

In addition, when we go to the supermarket, wholesale or the corner shop we leave with several plastic or “scandal” bags. When we throw parties or other types of social events, plastic cups, plates and utensils are oftentimes the preferred products.

The problem of the improper management of plastic wastes has been recognized for some time. In this regard, the Government has been providing financial support to Recycling Partners of Jamaica (RPJ), a public-private sector partnership geared towards the island wide collection and export of PET bottles. Over the past three years, RPJ has collected well over 1.4 million pounds of plastic waste for export. Over that same period, the Government has provided support to RPJ to the tune of over J\$ 150M. Despite RPJ’s efforts however the scope and scale of plastic pollution in the country is still significant.

The Government has been examining the problem caused by the improper management of single use plastics at the macro-level for some time now. This matter was brought to the fore by the Motion moved by Senator Matthew Samuda in the Parliament on the subject, and the subsequent establishment by the Cabinet of a Multi-sectoral Working Group, involving industry players, on plastic packaging material, chaired by Dr. Paris Lyew—Ayee, Jr. The Working Group had two principal mandates, namely:

1] To facilitate the institution of a ban, to be implemented on a phased basis, of single bio-degradable plastic bags of a prescribed capacity and all finished goods manufactured from Styrofoam; and

2] To curtail the production of the items listed above, unless they contain the enzyme which makes them bio-degradable.

Since that time a lot of work has been done not only by the Working Group, but also by the Jamaica Manufactures' and Exporters' Association (JMEA), the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) and the Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) on this issue. The Government has been having

positive discussions with key stakeholders, including the JMEA, to arrive at a consensus on the measures to be implemented.

Based on the outcomes of these consultations, the Government has decided to institute measures to regulate the management of specific types of plastic packaging materials in the country, namely:

MEASURES TO BE IMPLEMENTED

1) Single Use Plastic Carrier/Shopping Bags

As at **January 1, 2019**, the Government will impose a ban on the import, manufacture, distribution and use of all single use plastic carrier bags with dimensions at and below 24 inches by 24 inches (24"x24"), which includes those bags commonly referred to locally as 'scandal bags' and 'T-shirt bags', used primarily in the retail and wholesale sectors.

This ban will not apply to single use plastic bags utilized to maintain public health or food safety standards, such as those used to package raw meats, flour, sugar, rice and baked goods, such as bread.

With regard to single use shopping bags made of polyethylene, commonly branded by retailers, the manufacturers and importers of such products must apply to the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) for limited exemptions. These applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis for continued manufacture and importation, allowable not later than **January 1, 2021**.

The Government will explore with the Development Bank of Jamaica and the Ex-Im Bank possible mechanisms to assist companies in reconfiguring and/or re-tooling their equipment and facilities to cleaner technologies that can facilitate material substitution by using 'design for environment' methods towards enhancing their sustainability and profitability.

Consumers are encouraged to utilize reusable carrier bags, particularly those produced by local enterprises.

2) Expanded Polystyrene Foam

Commencing January 1, 2019, the Government will institute a ban on the importation of expanded polystyrene foam, commonly referred to as 'Styrofoam™', for use as finished goods in the food and beverage industry,

that is, food and beverage containers. In addition, the local manufacture and distribution of polystyrene foam for use as finished goods in the food and beverage industry will be banned as at **January 1, 2020**.

The use of polystyrene for the packaging of food items such as raw meats will be exempt. Producers of products which utilize such packaging must apply to NEPA for limited exemptions.

Industry is encouraged to manufacture/distribute paper-based and other environmentally friendly alternatives for the domestic market.

3) Plastic Straws

The Government will institute a ban on the import and manufacture of plastic drinking straws as at **January 1, 2019**. There will be no ban on wax-lined paper straws or other non-plastic straws. The importation of straws attached to lunch juice boxes and drink pouches will be banned as at **January 1, 2021**. This deadline was arrived at based on the Government's

discussions with the private sector regarding the timeframe for the conversion of existing equipment.

For the medical sector as well as persons with disabilities, drinking straws made from alternative materials such as paper or bamboo are not always suitable. In light of this, exemptions will be examined in consultation with key stakeholders. Applications for such exemptions should be applied through the NEPA.

Procedures for Exemptions

The guidelines for application for exemptions for the specific categories of plastic packaging materials, I have just outlined, will be developed by NEPA in consultation with the relevant public sector agencies. These Guidelines will be posted on the JIS and the Agency's websites as well as circulated to the affected private sector stakeholders.

Please view the display mounted by NEPA and the Planning Institute of Jamaica which shows examples of the products which the measures that I have just outlined will apply as well as the alternatives.

Deposit Refund Scheme

Polyethylene terephthalate or PET bottles comprise fifteen per cent (15%) all plastic waste generated in the country. These bottles are usually packaging for juices, water and other beverages sold on the Jamaican market. While there are several recycling initiatives presently operating within the country, the recovery of PET bottles from the Jamaican environment has been very low. It is well recognized that a Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS) supported by legislation, can significantly increase the recovery rate of waste products, such as PET bottles. A successful DRS has three key components, namely: (i) full participation of the private sector, (ii) the level of the deposit such act as an incentive to the consumer, and (iii) there is adequate infrastructure the facilitate the recovery of the bottles and the redemption of deposits.

The private sector has been in discussions with the Government on the implementation of a Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS) for PET bottles. These discussions are advanced and further consultations will be held with the sector to finalize aspects of a national Deposit Refund Scheme. The Government should be in a position to make an announcement by October, 2018. The Government's ultimate target in the short-to-medium term is the recovery of at a minimum, 80% of the PET bottles currently on the market.

A comprehensive public education programme on the DRS will be implemented, with hotlines for consumers established at NEPA and the Vision 2030 secretariat.

Local manufacturers and distributors are encouraged to make available environmentally friendly goods for the domestic market. Similarly, I urge consumers to be mindful of their level of consumption of goods which have a negative impact on our environment and seek to purchase those goods which are beneficial to the environment and by extension the health and well-being you and your families.

