

For immediate release

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NZ Plastics Industry says, 'Bring it on' and welcomes Government's sensible approach to phaseout of problematic plastic packaging.

Minister for the Environment, David Parker, today announced the phaseout of hard to recycle food and drink packaging made from PVC and polystyrene, some degradable plastic products (e.g. oxo and photo degradable), and a variety of single-use plastic items.

Rachel Barker, CEO of Plastics NZ, says the plastics industry is fully behind the transition to a low-emissions circular economy and the move away from unnecessary and problematic packaging.

"The NZ plastic packaging manufacturers have already been moving away from the problematic materials covered under the announcement. This has been seen in the rapid decline of EPS meat-trays and the dramatic reduction of PVC food packaging within our system over the last few years. The local industry is ready for these changes."

Ms Barker notes that these phaseouts are necessary for NZ to successfully transition to a circular plastics economy where our packaging materials are captured and remanufactured onshore.

"We have a strong plastics manufacturing sector in NZ that can utilise recyclable plastic packaging. The removal of the problematic materials from kerbside collections means less contamination for local recyclers to deal with, and a higher quality for remanufacture."

Plastics NZ provided significant technical feedback on the proposals and have continued to discuss the logistics with the Ministry for the Environment.

"Overall, we have no issues with the announcements. It's really pleasing to see that the feedback from industry has been clearly heard on these proposals. Our one disappointment is the narrow scope for PVC packaging. The intent of the phaseout is the removal of the material from kerbside as it contaminates PET (#1 plastic) recycling. By only focusing on food & beverage packaging our government has missed the opportunity to deal fully with the problem. A large amount of retail packaging on products imported into NZ has PVC packaging"

Plastics NZ is also pleased to see the timeframes being long enough to allow the hospitality sector to use up the packaging they may have bought in bulk. This was a problem after the plastic bag ban with whole pallet-loads of pre-purchased bags ending up in landfill. The timeframes will help ensure reduced impact on a sector already hit hard through the pandemic.

The exclusion of the EPS (Expanded Polystyrene) used in cold-chain supply lines and as protective packaging is likely to be unpopular with some. However, this is one key area where the government has listened to industry. Field testing of the supposed alternatives has shown they are not viable in most use scenarios. In most cases the 'sustainable' alternatives also have a significantly higher environmental impact than the EPS, particularly in relation to climate change. The Plastics NZ's EPS Sector Group has suggested mandated product stewardship for EPS packaging is more appropriate to ensure the material is better dealt with.

"Our NZ EPS manufacturers prevented over 150,000 cubic metres of expanded polystyrene going to landfill in 2019 (1,200 tonnes) through their recycling efforts. This was also actively increased

throughout 2020. A large portion of this material went back into NZ-made EPS products rather than offshore. The sector is keen to see product stewardship in this space as that would pull the manufacturers together with the retailers who are the main source of EPS packaging material in NZ”.

Further information on the EPS recycling in NZ can be found at <https://airpop.co.nz/recycling>

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Plastics New Zealand is the trade organisation representing the New Zealand plastics industry. Our Membership comprises over 200 businesses including manufacturers, suppliers, recyclers (reprocessors) and consultants to the industry.