

# PLASTICS ACTION PLAN: Policy Consultation Paper

Presented to:

**Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy**

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**Restaurants  
Canada**

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

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Restaurants Canada has been the voice of foodservice in this country for 75 years. With over 30,000 members, our primary goal is to improve the foodservice industry for the millions of Canadians that rely on our industry for employment, entertainment, socialization and above all for good food.

We recognize sustainability is simply a part of doing good business in restaurants today. **In fact, nine out of 10** respondents to our annual Restaurant Outlook Survey said they **plan to continue or increase their current level of environmentally sustainable operations** over the next three years. The theme of the 2019 RC Show was *Sustainability* and featured products, seminars, workshops and services to support our members in their environmental efforts.

Restaurants across the country are working hard to navigate the complex and often contradictory patchwork of municipal bylaws and regulations around single-use items while balancing the needs of diners seeking increasing convenience and delivery options and working towards improving environmental outcomes.

We believe an effective single-use item reduction strategy may only be achieved through a **harmonized national and provincial approach** that includes:

- standardized recycling,
- adequate recycling infrastructure, and
- comprehensive public education campaigns.

Restaurants Canada supports the government's goal of reducing our environmental impact and encourages the provincial government to work in lock-step with its counterparts in other jurisdictions and the federal government to avoid the duplication of efforts, while creating a level playing field for businesses across the province.

As a leader in recycling and Extended Producer Responsibility programs, British Columbia is well-positioned to contribute to the development of national approaches related to single-use items.

We are pleased to submit the following in response to the government's *Plastics Action Plan: Policy Consultation Paper*, and look forward to working with the government on this important matter.

## Consultation Paper Responses:

### 1. Bans on Single-Use Packaging

Restaurant Canada members are making efforts to reduce single-use items, however it is important to recognize that customers are increasingly demanding more takeout and delivery food and beverage options. In fact, off-premise sales growth grew several times more than on-premise sales in 2018.

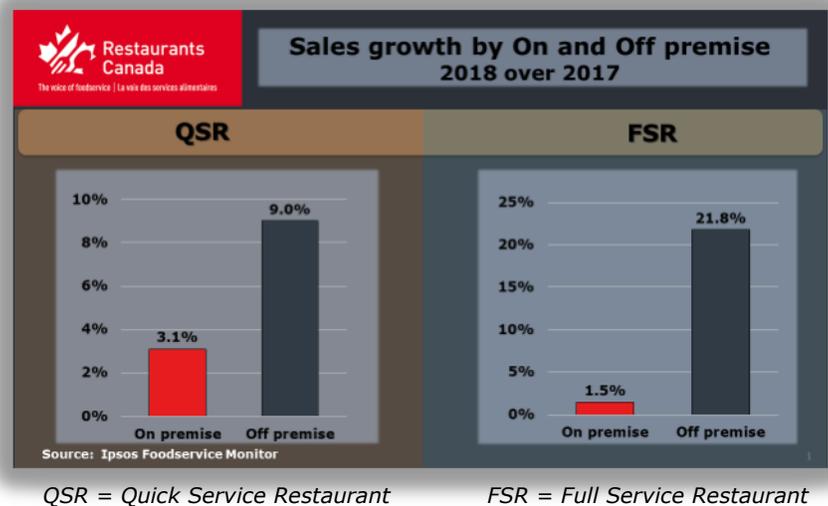
Canadians are increasingly turning to delivery and take-out over on-premise dining. Delivery foodservice sales by digital (online and mobile apps) or traditional telephone totaled more than \$4.3 billion in 2018, a staggering 44 per cent increase over 2017.

Given this growing trend, it is important for governments understand the essential role packaging plays in being able to meet customer demand, but also in protecting the health and safety and integrity of the food our industry serves.

It is crucial that restaurateurs be able to maintain the flexibility needed to be able to continue to meet consumer demand, protect the food we serve, while working to improve environmental outcomes. Eliminating certain single-use items will not accomplish this.

As such, **Restaurants Canada supports a harmonized approach to single-use packaging, based on a scientific approach at highest practical level.** National harmonizing will lead to improved environmental outcomes, lower consumer costs, and reduce the operational impacts on business. With the federal government's announcement in June, Restaurants Canada encourages the Government of British Columbia to work closely at the national level to develop a consistent approach to single-use plastics, including proposed bans.

Restaurants Canada does not support the introduction of local government usage bans, nor does it support broad bans of specific items or materials. A patchwork of municipal bylaws increases consumer and business costs is confusing to consumers, and adds unnecessary red tape and complexity to business operations without achieving significant environmental benefits.



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While a ban on single-use plastics may remove select items from the marketplace, it may not result in an overall waste reduction or meaningful change. In other jurisdictions that have implemented bans, such as San Francisco, litter audits have revealed the volume of litter remained the same while the composition of the litter changed. Additionally, implementation of a ban does not eliminate the need for alternative packaging to replace plastics.

Further, Restaurants Canada recommends that the full life-cycle of packaging be considered when reviewing packaging. It is our understanding that focusing on end-of-life disposal, such as recyclability, may lead to selecting packaging with a larger overall environmental footprint, an unintended consequence that may be avoided through a scientific approach.

With the successful diversion of many single-use items via Recycle BC, Restaurants Canada would recommend that any currently accepted materials with confirmed end markets and successful diversion rates not be considered for bans. Further, we recommend fully exploring new diversion opportunities in advance of any proposed bans, as technology continues to advance in this area it is important to remain in close contact with Recycle BC and its members to review emerging diversion opportunities.

Any regulations that aim to discourage or eliminate certain types of packaging or materials must depend on whether there are appropriate alternatives available, consider any food and consumer safety issues, and whether it is feasible to collect and recycle the packaging being considered for a ban.

In considering policy approaches and bans, it is also important to consider operational challenges at restaurants related to single-use packaging bans. As an example, many foodservice establishments do not allow for the use of reusable bags and/or containers due to health and safety concerns that would contradict existing provincial health regulations. As a result, food and consumer product regulators and health agencies would need to make regulatory changes before contemplating bans on certain single-use items.

Ban exemptions must recognize the unique and diverse operational realities of foodservice operations versus retail, as well as the role packaging plays in food safety. For example, Prince Edward Island's plastic bag ban, which was initially based on Victoria's bylaw, now includes a number of regulatory exemptions for food service operators including:

- An exemption on web based and third party delivery orders, as well as drive-thrus
- An exemption on accepting reusable bags
- An exemption on the need to ask customer if they want a bag,
- Doubling the size of acceptable paper bags that would be exempt from a bag fee from 300 square cms to 600 square cms.

PEI plans to amend their plastic bag legislation to include these regulatory exemptions as part of the Act.

Other plastic bag bylaws in Canada and North America completely exempt foodservice such as (Montreal) or exempt foodservice take out specifically (Seattle).

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Foodservice establishments must be able to continue meeting the needs of their customers in a way that is accessible and safe, as well as sustainable.

Restaurants Canada is supportive of British Columbia aligning landfill disposal bans with items currently managed through Recycle BC and other Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs. In other jurisdictions, such as Europe, landfill bans on items under EPR have resulted in higher recycling rates. Further, as part Phase 1 of its *Canada-Wide Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste*, the CCME has committed to developing best management practices for disposal bans of end-of-life plastics by December 2019 which may assist the province in setting direction.

## 2. More Recycling Options

We encourage the Government of British Columbia to align with the federal government with respect to any planned expansion of EPR programs, which is expected to include setting targets for plastics collection, recycling and recycled content requirements. As a leader in EPR, British Columbia will be well-positioned to contribute to this effort and expansion of programs across the country.

Any considered expansion of products managed via EPR should allow for a reasonable timeframe to ensure the cost is passed on to businesses incrementally, while allowing for new waste management arrangements to be made and diversion opportunities to be ascertained in order to facilitate improved environmental outcomes. This should include the development of necessary infrastructure and processing facilities using new technologies such as chemical recycling, gasification and pyrolysis.

## 3. Expanding Plastic Bottle and Beverage Container Returns

As the Government of British Columbia considers the modernization and expansion of plastic bottle and beverage container returns, Restaurants Canada would request consideration for an exemption for foodservice establishments to accept returns on site. This is an unpractical operational requirement for foodservice businesses that sell plastic bottles and beverage containers for a variety of reasons.

This would be a difficult process to manage as restaurants cannot accept any materials across the counter that may compromise health and safety. Conversely, directing customers to public recycling containers available in-restaurants may allow for the same container to be refunded more than once. As the province looks to expand the list of beverage containers in the deposit return system, this will become increasing unmanageable for restaurants.

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British Columbia is the only jurisdiction that has a requirement for restaurants to provide a customer with an onsite refund for plastic bottles and beverage containers. In other areas, depot programs successfully manage deposit refunds.

Restaurants Canada supports moving used beverage containers for milk and related products into the deposit-refund system but recognizes that this will likely result in a reduction of Recycle BC's revenue.

### 4. Reducing Plastics Overall

Reduction is an important aspect of any sound environmental strategy. Our members across the province are making efforts to reduce their overall packaging footprint and to ensure sustainable operating practices are in place. That being the case, as noted above, consumers are increasingly seeking convenience and delivery, which drives the ongoing demand and need for packaging. Overly burdensome regulations and bans may reduce flexibility and prevent businesses from implementing innovative solutions and reduction strategies while still maintaining their product and serving their customers.

Restaurants Canada recently released our **Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy Guide**, focused on supporting our members in building strategies for their unique businesses.



As noted in your consultation paper, the CCME *Canada-wide Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste*, identifies the federal government as leading the development of national performance standards for plastics.

Our members are willing and eager to implement increasingly sustainable practices and make investments to support progress toward the implementation of a CCME *Canada-wide Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste*. However, they want to ensure these investments are effective. Consistent standards and waste management practices are needed across all jurisdictions to ensure current and alternative packaging solutions are consistently and easily diverted from landfills.

Further, any change in single-use items will take time to ensure acceptable alternative packaging exists in the supply chain to meet demand supported by waste management (recycling and diversion) standards to avoid the current confusion among stakeholders including restaurateurs and consumers. That is why on April 29, Restaurants Canada supported City of Vancouver staff recommendations on their single-use item reduction strategy including the recommendation for a provincial strategy. Now with the federal government announcement and commitments, the discussion and actions may be elevated to the national level.

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On the matter of a national standard on recycled content, Restaurants Canada supports an approach that recognizes the marketplace including availability of materials for recycling, manufacturing capacity and food contact requirements. Similarly, the use of reusable containers within the foodservice industry must consider the health and safety of our guests and staff while balancing the need to reduce single-use items.

### CONCLUSION:

Restaurant owners, operators and staff are working hard to navigate the complex regulatory environment related to the day-to-day operations of their businesses.

Environmental actions in the foodservice industry involve the balancing of often conflicting pressures:

- The pressure to reduce single-use items while protecting food safety and meeting the needs of guests seeking increasing convenience and delivery options.
- The desire to improve diversion of single-use items with the realities of available recycling programs.
- The requirement to meet different standards and expectations in different jurisdictions.

The desire for governments of all levels to act has created a patchwork of by-laws and regulatory frameworks that make it difficult for foodservice chains and independent operators to make decisions that benefit the environment.

Businesses are willing to amend their practices and make investments to support a harmonized approach to single-use items, but they want to ensure these investments are effective. The government's commitment to work in concert with business will maximize everyone's efforts.

Ultimately, it will be up to the public to buy into changes that will better our environment. Government's role in public education can be supported by business if we work together to a common goal creating a better province and a better Canada for future generations.

To enable success, policy approaches should reflect the broadest scope possible. Restaurants Canada is supportive of frameworks that may be applied nationally that consider a scientific approach to single-use items.



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Consumer education and participation is required for single-use items reduction goals to be successful. We believe our members could have a greater impact on consumer behavior by working with the provincial government on comprehensive consumer awareness and education campaigns on the general issue of single-use items to the millions of guests we serve each week.

We look forward to our continued dialogue on single-use items with the Government of British Columbia to allow for our members to contribute to the province's goals while acknowledging the uniqueness of our industry.

### LINKS:

- Single-Use Items Reduction: Reduction Strategy Guide  
<https://info.restaurantscanada.org/hubfs/Resources/Toolkits/Single-Use-Items-Reduction-Strategy-Guide.pdf>
- Sustainability: Best Practices Guide  
<https://info.restaurantscanada.org/hubfs/Resources/Toolkits/Sustainability-Best-Practice-Guide.pdf>