

Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy  
Recycling Regulation Amendments  
PO Box 9341 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9M1

Dear Minister Heyman,

September 29, 2019

## **Joint Local Government Response to Provincial Plastics Action Plan**

As local governments who have taken steps to reduce single-use items in our communities, we write together in response to the Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy's (the Ministry) call for submissions regarding proposed amendments to the *Recycling Regulation* of the *Environmental Management Act* to address plastic waste.

In reviewing the "Plastics Action Plan Policy Consultation Paper" (Consultation Paper), the following five topic areas were collectively determined as matters requiring specific feedback from the local government sector. In addition to this letter, local governments may also be submitting individual feedback relevant to their communities. We thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to continuing the conversation on these important matters.

### **1. FOCUS ON REDUCTION AND REUSE**

The pollution prevention hierarchy emphasizes reduction and reuse over recycling and disposal. These priorities are also apparent in the Ministry's Consultation Paper, which discusses reducing plastic consumption through the use of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs and bans on single-use items. However, local governments feel that these programs can only be considered successful if any unintended shift to excessive consumption of damaging single use alternatives is avoided. To avoid this shift, we recommend that EPR policies be accompanied by incentives to encourage the use of sustainable, reusable options.

In addition, the Consultation Paper frames reuse in terms of recyclability, "ensuring recycled plastic is re-used effectively" through standards on recycled content. We agree that this approach can help reduce emissions and support EPR programs, but there is also an opportunity to consider reuse in terms of behaviour. We urge the Ministry to adopt a policy which supports and enables practices of reuse outside of recycling, with the ultimate goal being reduction of single-use items. This includes encouraging refillable containers (e.g. growlers, wine bottles, soap bottles, etc.), allowing patrons to bring their own container (e.g. takeout food, restaurant leftovers, bulk food shopping, etc.), enabling the right to repair (e.g. repair cafes, requirements for the provision of spare parts and services, online publication of manuals, etc.), and promoting zero waste shopping (e.g. zero waste stores, farmers' markets, etc.). This added focus on reduction and reuse will help move the Plastics Action Plan forward in accordance with pollution prevention best practices.

### **2. CLARIFY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY**

We appreciate that the Ministry has acknowledged the actions being taken by local governments to address the local impacts of single-use items in BC communities. Indeed, more than 23 communities in B.C. have been actively developing bans, fees and levies, to address single-use items. However, as noted in the Consultation Paper, the B.C. Court of Appeal ruling regarding the City of Victoria’s business licence regulation bylaw is of major concern to local governments as its implications for municipal authority to adopt bylaws under sections 8 and 9 of the *Community Charter* are potentially significant.

Until the Court of Appeal decision was issued, it has been the view of many municipalities that the nature of concurrent powers expressly described by statute in sections 8 and 9 of the *Community Charter* allowed for the regulation of unsustainable business practices. To be certain, there are numerous examples of municipal business regulations which already include one or more provisions intended to protect the environment, including imposing requirements or prohibitions on the pollution of waterways, drains and sewers.

As the Province reviews the Court of Appeal’s decision, we urge the Minister to consult with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide clarity on the limits and intent of the general concurrent authorities shared by local governments and the Province in relation to the protection of the natural environment, and specifically as it applies to single use items. Moreover, we request that a clear, timely and uniform process be developed for local governments who choose to act on those matters which fall under section 9(1) [*spheres of concurrent authority*] of the *Community Charter*.

### **3. A “STEPPED” OR PHASED APPROACH**

As each local government faces unique challenges with respect to recycling and solid waste management, a one-size-fits-all provincial regulation may not meet the needs or expectations of all communities. To this end, we recommend the Minister regulate single-use plastics through a “stepped” or “phased” approach akin to the *BC Energy Step Code Regulation*. A phased approach would allow local governments to move at a pace appropriate for their communities, while also providing industry with a set of consistent targets for waste reduction and recycling across British Columbia. This flexibility is particularly important for smaller rural communities while also enabling faster action to be taken by those local governments who are ready for more ambitious, multifaceted approaches to regulating waste and single-use items. In this way, communities can adopt these regulations gradually or more quickly depending on their ability and resources. Moreover, a consistent incremental framework that raises standards would ensure that, as the recycling and packaging industries innovate, we are able to avoid the current patchwork of disparate standards in each community.

The *BC Energy Step Code* is an excellent example of collaboration between the Province, local governments, industry, and other stakeholders. We encourage the Ministry to consider a similar approach to the regulation of single-use items to encourage innovation while respecting the capacity of all municipalities.

### **4. IMPROVING EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY (EPR)**

BC is a leader in implementing EPR programs and moving ahead on its commitments to the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment Canada-wide Action Plan on EPR. As the Ministry now has experience with these programs, it is important to foster continuous improvement, address problems that have arisen and push for programs to meet their full potential.

EPR programs are designed so that producers pay for their products' end of life management, but also so that products and packaging become better designed. The *Recycling Regulation* and the work of the Ministry have focused on collection for recycling or responsible handling, however few programs are achieving success in redesign, reduction or reuse. There needs to be a focus higher up the hierarchy, which would hold the business sector accountable. This could include exploring ways to redesign products, reduce the amount of packaging, or change the materials used. There are different ways to achieve this, including mandating differential fees based on environmental-impact or waste-creation (rather than fees set by operational costs only), implementing financial penalties for non-compliance, or requiring targets for reduction or redesign.

Another area for expansion within the EPR framework is the inclusion of industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) materials. The main driver for participation by businesses in diversion is the cost of participation relative to disposal. As changes in global markets drive down the revenue potential of these diverted materials, and with high costs of hauling to recycling markets, the segregation and recycling of materials (e.g. plastic containers, plastic film and expanded polystyrene) are challenging to justify for many businesses. Thus, the segregated collection and diversion of materials from the ICI sector is cost prohibitive to the businesses, and in many cases is substantially subsidized by local governments and taxpayers. Inclusion of ICI materials (with a focus on packaging) into the *Recycling Regulation* would create efficiencies within the transportation network from remote communities and prevent landfilling of recyclables by the ICI sector. In this way, the expansion of regulated products captured by the *Recycling Regulation* is supported, including packaging-like products, mattresses, single-use household pressurized cylinders, and new and used gypsum drywall.

EPR programs also need to be structured to ensure that they are accountable and cover the full costs related to the product disposal. Often, many of the costs associated with the collection of EPR products are not covered by the stewardship programs, which results in fees or taxpayer subsidization of the collection, transportation, and responsible disposal of the materials (e.g. tires). In addition, local governments are subsidizing the collection and management of material that escapes the stewardship collection program (through streetscapes, litter collection, illegal dumping, etc.). On a final note, EPR programs should enhance accountability and transparency. This includes local government and public representation on boards, open access to information given to boards and to their decisions, and the inclusion of financial and material management information for all programs. These changes to EPR programs would greatly enhance their effectiveness in the reduction of plastic waste.

## **5. ENSURING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

Finally, it is unclear from the Consultation Paper how and when other Ministries and impacted stakeholders will be specifically consulted. When policy tools are evaluated, it is important to consider all impacts and to ensure that viable alternatives are available. To this end, we recommend that the Ministry of Health be specifically consulted regarding potential regulatory changes to allow restaurants to fill take-out orders in reusable containers brought in by customers. This measure is integral to the implementation of bans on single-use containers and packaging, as the City of Vancouver found that nearly 50% of all garbage collected from public waste bins consists of take-out containers and disposable cups. Compostable and recyclable packaging materials often get mixed up when discarded, contaminating both streams and making them impossible to process.

In the development of exemptions, we support evidence-based policies that have been shown to be effective at reducing waste. Moreover, disability advocates, care facilities, local governments, and other provincial agencies (such as the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty) should be specifically consulted in the development of exemptions as a means to highlight and ensure accessibility.


## CONCLUSION

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment and strongly encourage the Ministry to continue to consult with local governments in the upcoming regulatory process. In this letter, we have highlighted the need for a focus on reduction and reuse, clarification of local government authority, and further internal and external consultation. We have also made suggestions for the improvement of EPR programs and a community-led approach akin to the existing *BC Energy Step Code* adoption model. We hope that these concerns are taken into consideration and we look forward to further engagement with the Ministry.

Sincerely,



Karen Elliott, Mayor  
District of Squamish



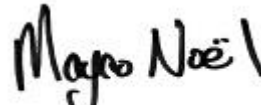
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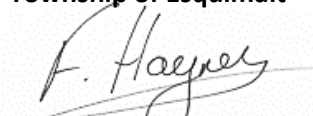
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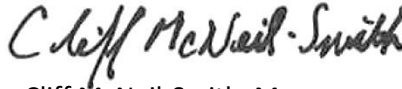
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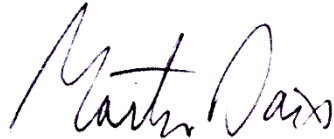
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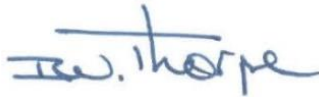
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