

Excess baggage

Campaign action pack

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

Efforts to reduce plastic bag use in England are failing

Five years ago retailers and supermarkets signed up to a voluntary agreement to cut the number of single use carrier bags given out in their stores. Despite seeing an initial reduction in the number of bags issued, the figures have since crept up year by year.

In contrast, the latest figures from Wales, where customers have been paying for plastic bags since 2011, show that plastic bag use has fallen by 81%. Scotland and Northern Ireland have been quick to learn the lessons from Wales' leadership, and are introducing their own charge.

Plastic bags are energy intensive to produce, litter our streets, and pollute the environment. They are often used for a matter of minutes, but remain in the environment for hundreds of years. A resolution to address waste in the production, packaging and transport of goods was passed at the NFWI's 2005 AGM.



TAKE ACTION: Can you help to persuade the Government that a plastic bag charge in England is needed to protect the environment and reduce waste?



A plastic bag charge...

Is positive for the planet: A small charge encourages shoppers to develop more sustainable habits and reduce waste sent to landfills, environmental and marine pollution and litter.

Is fairer to future generations: Why should future generations have to deal with the pollution that we have caused?

Will bring equality to the UK: Wales and Northern Ireland have already introduced a charge, and Scotland will be introducing one shortly.

Helps good causes: In Wales most retailers donate the money raised to environmental charities. One large supermarket alone has donated £1m.

Is popular with the public: 54% of people surveyed in England are in favour of a plastic bag charge. In Wales, support for the charge increased from 59% to 70% after the charge was introduced.

Works! In Wales, where a charge was introduced in October 2011, there has been a reduction of 81% in single use carrier bags. This compares to an increase of 12% in England.

England is lagging behind governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

What now?

The Westminster Government has said that it will examine options on introducing a single use plastic bag charge on several occasions, but we are still waiting for action.

The latest figures on plastic bag use, published in July 2013, show conclusively that a charge works and that voluntary schemes are failing. Northern Ireland and Scotland are following Wales' lead and introducing a charge.

The NFWI is calling on ministers in Whitehall follow suit and introduce a plastic bag charge.

1.8 bags used in Wales per person per month...

...11.1 bags used in England per person per month

How can you help?

Please take the time to write to your MP and help the NFWI to build momentum behind this campaign.

- ⇒ Write to your MP using the template letter overleaf.
- ⇒ Follow up if you don't receive a reply or if you feel that your question hasn't been addressed.

And remember: *Welsh WIs can still get involved. MPs in Wales still have a voice in Westminster on this matter and can bring valuable insight from Wales' experience.*



Template letter

Please use this letter as a guide but remember personalised letters are always more effective.

LETTER
FOR MPs

[INSERT YOUR ADDRESS]

[INSERT MP'S ADDRESS]

[INSERT DATE]

Dear

Re: Introducing a plastic carrier bag charge to England

I am writing on behalf of [INSERT NAME] WI/ OR as a member of [INSERT NAME] WI to ask for your support in the NFWI's new campaign to introduce a plastic bag charge in England.

As you'll be aware, Wales has already introduced a plastic bag charge with considerable success. In fact, since it was introduced in 2011, consumers in Wales have reduced the number of plastic bags that they take home from their daily or weekly shop by 81%. Despite initial reductions in the number of plastic bag issues in England when a voluntary agreement was introduced in 2008, the number has been steadily creeping up ever since.

The Westminster Government has repeatedly said it will examine options for introducing a plastic bag charge to cover England. Yet so far, it has not delivered a decision on charging. As a consumer and WI member, I am frustrated that a policy, which has the support of 54% of the public, which shows proven results, and which benefits good causes, is yet to be introduced. In Wales a 5p charge has been set at such a level that incentivises members of the public to use their own bags, but without being so high as to burden hard-pressed shoppers, or deter impulse shopping.

Like Wales, Northern Ireland has already introduced a plastic bag charge (albeit following a different model). With Scotland set to introduce one shortly, the NFWI believes that now is the time for England to do the same. [FOR WELSH MEMBERS ONLY: and, as a Welsh Member of Parliament, you can bring valuable insight from Wales to the debate.] Please write to Environment Minister, David Heath, outlining our concerns and asking him when he will be making a decision on this important issue.

We would be delighted for you to come and discuss this matter further in our WI should you wish to do so and look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely
[NAME] [WI]