



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Walter Roban, JP, MP

Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs

18th March 2022

"Regulating single-use plastics in Bermuda: results from the public consultation and the next steps"

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of the results of the public consultation on single-use plastics that was conducted during the autumn of 2021. Honourable members will be aware that a policy was launched in August entitled: “Regulating Single-use plastics in Bermuda: Policy paper for public consultation”. I would also like to inform Honourable Members of the next steps that we intend to take to ensure the realization of this Throne Speech initiative.

Mr. Speaker, you will be aware that the general public was asked to provide feedback on the policy paper and the proposals contained therein. I am happy to inform this Honourable House that the response was

extremely good. The Bermuda Government Forum page has been in use for over three years now and this request for feedback garnered the third highest public response in terms of ideas generated and the fifth highest in terms of numbers of participants, with nearly sixty unique respondents. The Ministry also directly received a number of responses to the policy paper.

Additionally, during the consultation period, five public information talks were held in conjunction with the Bermuda National Trust, Keep Bermuda Beautiful, the Chamber of Commerce, and Beyond Plastic. The talks were co-presented by a representative from the Ministry of Home Affairs as well as one from the Ministry of Public Works. Furthermore, I participated in a phone-in session on the radio on the topic of single-use plastics. In total, some 250 persons were registered for the public presentations and the numbers reached by radio were likely substantial as well. Thus, in total, the Ministry engaged with hundreds of persons during the public consultation period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the public for their interest and engagement on this important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, we have undertaken a thorough analysis of the feedback from the public consultation. Based on the demographic data supplied by the respondents, the responses can be seen to be a good reflection of the Bermuda population as a whole. The respondents were both representative of residents by age and by place of residence in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, the results from the public consultation are unequivocal. A large majority, some three-quarters of all respondents, were supportive of the policy to regulate the use of single-use plastics. The small minority of the remaining quarter of respondents were evenly split between either expressing a neutral or mixed-message or expressing an unsupportive stance towards the policy.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the very favourable public view of the policy paper, the results were thematically analysed to give us an understanding not only of how and why there was support for the policy but also where there may be challenges or misgivings. The results showed that the themes that emerged from the feedback were either problem-oriented or solution-oriented.

Mr. Speaker, given the overwhelming support for the policy, not surprisingly the majority of themes in the feedback were solution oriented. These responses offered ideas on how Bermuda retailers can better do business in order to reduce the need for single-use plastics. Such suggestions include but not limited to:

- bringing your own containers;
- offering discounts for recycling; and
- returning containers.

It should be noted that many businesses are already adopting some these approaches, and I have no doubt that many more will do so. Other

responses stressed the need for ensuring that the changes we make are sustainable and do not have negative unintended consequences of also being harmful for the environment. For example, many containers that are now being made and used as alternatives to plastic are labelled ‘compostable’ which might lead one to think this is good for the environment. However, many of these items are only compostable in an industrial composter, which is a large and expensive facility, and something that we do not have, and are unlikely to have, in Bermuda. Yet other solution-oriented comments stressed the importance of highlighting, amongst other things, the health risks associated with plastics as well as the hidden costs in the production and use of single-use plastics.

Some other solution-oriented comments included: highlighting the need to continue to collaborate; the desire for Bermuda to lead the way in eliminating single-use plastics; and the potential for promoting sustainable tourism. Additionally, respondents called on the Bermuda Government to lead the way by banning single-use plastics within the public service. I am pleased to say that the Office of Project Management and Procurement have already started on developing this policy.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of where respondents felt there would be problems in implementing the policy, many responses focussed on costs – noting the potential for alternatives to plastic being more expensive, and therefore driving up costs and having possible negative effects on the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted supply chains and

made sourcing products generally more difficult. This was also highlighted as a concern - finding replacement items that are not single-use plastic – with comments that it is important to not ban items that may not have alternatives available. Other commentators raised the issue of whether alternatives to single-use plastic were as sanitary or safe, with others asserting that foodstuffs that are not packaged in plastic potentially could have a shorter shelf-life and therefore lead to potentially more wastage, again driving up costs. Finally, others noted the need for plastic-packaged goods, such as water, in times of national disasters such as hurricanes.

Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of continuing openness and consultation, I am pleased to state that the full analysis of feedback document undertaken by the Ministry will be available on the Bermuda Government Forum page www.forum.gov.bm from next week for everyone to download and to read.

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward with the next steps, I have stated many times in numerous public arenas that it is the intention of the government to move forward with legislating single-use plastics in such a way as to have the largest possible positive impact on the environment and human health whilst at the same time minimising any negative economic impacts. We are cognisant of the need to ensure that the phase-out periods are both realistic and clearly communicated; that we make allowances for some single-use plastic items that do not currently have alternatives; and that

exemptions based on medical and other grounds are made. We will continue to provide opportunities for further consultations with the public. We will be arranging meeting with those that may be most affected, particularly grocery stores, importers, the hospitality industry, restaurants and caterers and retail outlets to obtain their feedback. In addition, we will be exploring the different ways in which government can assist businesses to manage the move away from single-use plastic, such as altering import tariffs to minimise any economic impacts. We will also continue with public education campaigns designed to support the behavioural changes that will be required from all of us.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like to thank once again, the continued engagement of the Bermuda public, businesses, and interest groups in this initiative. I would like to thank those business such as Gibbons Company, the Marketplace, Nonna's Kitchen, Rock Island Coffee, and others that have already embarked on implementing schemes and business practices that encourage their businesses and customers to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics. I strongly encourage everyone to do the same. I would also like to recognise the work of both Beyond Plastic in assisting and consulting with businesses to help them to move 'beyond plastic,' and also the work of the Chamber of Commerce in liaising with its members to ensure we move forward together in progressing this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the excellent work that has been produced by the Ministry's Policy Analyst, Mr. David

Northcott. Mr. Northcott has spearheaded this project from its inception, and I am profoundly grateful for his management of this project.

Mr. Speaker, moving away from the current heavy reliance on single-use plastic will not be an easy task but it is one that can be successfully tackled with sufficient collaboration, public education, and leadership.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.