

BBOT POLICY BULLETIN:

WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING BUSINESS TO ACT ON PLASTICS WASTE

Opening Statement

Plastic and plastic products have emerged as a significant source of environmental pollution. However, plastic is a cheap, effective, and light-weight product that has countless practical uses in many business processes. The provincial government should work with the business community to act on plastic waste, but in a way that identifies which plastic use is necessary and which is redundant or excessive, and which plastic uses can be replaced with alternatives or with source reduction/circular economy efforts. The provincial government should then, through its unallocated CleanBC funding, invest in initiatives with business to make reductions in plastic use and waste .

Background

The facts about plastic waste are staggering. Only “11-12% of the approximately 3.84 million tonnes of plastics used annually is collected for recycling, and a significant portion of this is never actually recycled,” instead ending up in landfills, in waterways and oceans, or incinerated. According to one estimate, by 2050 over 12,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste will be in either landfills or polluting the open environment.

Making, using and disposing of plastics not only generates waste and pollution, it costs us economically as we use virgin materials and resources in new products. The provincial government, under the CleanBC plan, can play a major role in reducing unnecessary plastic waste through targeted investment and industry engagement.

Working with industry to identify areas of opportunity for plastic reductions

Plastics are used in a variety of industrial and commercial settings, and in the manufacturing, transportation, and packaging of countless products. While for many applications there may not be realistic, safe or effective alternatives, for other uses new alternative products may have been developed, or source reduction could be achieved through circular economy efforts.

However, in determining which applications are necessary and which can be made redundant it is industry itself which should play the primary role. The business community ought to be fully engaged by government in the effort of determining which sectors, processes and products can be targeted for plastics reduction initiatives. This will maximize the benefit of plastic reduction efforts by focusing actions on the areas with the most potential change, and limit any unintended consequences of removing plastics where they are actually necessary, or alternatives would be untenable.

Supporting research into and demonstrations of plastic alternatives and circular economy models

Where alternatives do not already exist, the provincial government can still play a role in funding efforts to develop such alternatives. In Budget 2019, the provincial government set aside \$299 million in funding for yet to be announced initiatives under the CleanBC banner. Some of that already allocated money could be focused on implementing new and enhancing existing programs to support research efforts targeted specifically at improving plastics recycling or developing plastics alternatives.

In addition, while there may already be plastics alternatives available in some cases, these are often difficult for businesses to adopt because they are untested in the marketplace or are uneconomical compared to current plastic products. The provincial government should consider funding demonstration projects and incentive programs specifically for implementing plastics alternatives in businesses. By helping businesses overcome the economic and logistic barriers of implementing plastics alternatives, it will create test cases that will show the viability of plastics alternatives and will encourage other businesses to adopt similar changes.

However, beyond simply finding and implementing plastic alternatives (which still generate waste through their creation, use and disposal) circular economy models could also be supported, developed and promoted. A circular economy business model focuses on keeping materials in use for as long as possible, planning for disassembly, re-use, or recapture of resources in an effort to make the supply chain a closed-loop. As this is a major shift from traditional production and consumption patterns, government supports for businesses implementing circular economy model should be a priority.

Ensuring government requirements are not adding to the problem

In consultation with local businesses, it was learned that occasionally government requirements or regulations mandate the use of plastics in manufacturing, packaging, and other processes. In many cases these requirements will be necessary and warranted to protect consumers, increase efficiency, and reduce overall waste. However, in some instances, particularly in the food sector, there may be redundant or excessive requirements. A review by government of these types of regulations may uncover opportunities to reduce the demand for and use of plastics in certain instances.

To address the issue of plastic waste in our economy, the Burnaby Board of Trade recommends that the Provincial Government:

- 1. Engage with industry and the business community directly to identify those sectors, processes, and products which should be first targeted for plastics reduction initiatives and efforts.**
- 2. Through CleanBC's unspecified \$299 million in funding announced in Budget 2019, invest in**
 - a. research efforts focused on improving plastics recycling and developing plastics alternatives**
 - b. demonstration projects and incentive programs aimed at helping industry implement plastics replacements and plastic reductions initiatives**
 - c. supports, research, and incentives for the implementation of 'circular economy' models that reduce source consumption of materials**
- 3. Review the requirements of government agencies such as regional health authorities to ensure plastic packaging requirements are updated to reflect current needs and are not excessive.**