

***PW 9 - PROGRESS OF PLASTIC BAG REDUCTION PROGRAM  
OCTOBER 2005 - MAY 2006  
For Recommendation***

File Ref: 2161

**Director, Technical Services reports:**

**Synopsis**

This report outlines progress in the development and implementation of the plastic bag reduction program in the Marrickville Local Government Area (LGA) from October 2005 to May 2006. It is recommended that the report be received and noted and that Council continue to support the ongoing Plastic Bag Reduction Program.

**Background**

At the Technical Services Committee Meeting held on 8 February 2005 (01/05, Item PW 2), it was resolved **THAT** Council:

- "1. receive and note the report;*
- 2. adopt and implement the Diversified Education Program for plastic bags reduction as detailed in this report; and*
- 3. consider a budget adjustment at its next budget review to fund the Waste Minimisation Education Program for Plastic Bag reduction from the Domestic Waste Management Reserve."*

The Plastic Bag Reduction Officer (PBRO) commenced employment in October 2005 in a temporary part time position under the Property Services section. The position was made available for up to two years. The position is based on a 21-hour week and the officer operates from the Watershed, Newtown.

The PBRO receives continual support from both the Property and Environmental Services section within Council and works together with volunteers to ensure the program success. The extremely dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers have been crucial to the progress of the program.

**Discussion**

Plastic bags are a serious threat to the local environment. They are responsible for killing 100,000 marine and terrestrial animals each year (Planet Ark), contributing to visual pollution as seen in **ATTACHMENT 1** and the blocking of drains. With a dwindling supply of petroleum and landfill reaching full capacity, Marrickville Council has taken a proactive approach towards reducing plastic bag consumption.

After engagement of the PBRO, a plastic bag reduction program was implemented in October 2005 to assist the waste minimization and management areas of Council's Local Waste Management Plan. This program, entitled **Bagbusters**, is an effective coordination and integration of waste education and best practice to reduce the reliance upon plastic bags. The Bagbusters program recognises that retailers and shoppers both have a significant responsibility for plastic bag

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reduction. Since the implementation of the Bagbusters program, businesses and shoppers in the focus area, Dulwich Hill, have an increased awareness of plastic bags and have implemented strategies to reduce plastic bag consumption.

**A. Progress of Retailer Strategy**

The objective of the retailer strategy is to liaise with business retailers and assist them in developing strategies to help reduce the use of plastic shopping bags. The Bagbusters program engages with a cluster of small businesses to consider the environmental implications of supplying plastic bags to customers, and empower them to make changes through the provision of information, signage and tailored strategies for their business. In a preliminary survey of 29 retailers in the Marrickville LGA in October 2005, 44% of business owners were very concerned about the environmental impacts of plastic bags, however their limited time, resources and finances meant that they had not translated this environmental awareness into action. Dulwich Hill was chosen as the focus location for the Bagbusters program because of the high retailer concentration, wide business diversity and a close-knit community feel.

Between October 2005 and May 2006, Bagbusters has worked closely with 17 retailers to present a context for plastic bag reduction, and then develop a tailored plastic bag reduction strategy that suits individual business needs. Bagbusters have supported the implementation of the plastic bag reduction program by offering:

- signage to 59% of businesses;
- 24% of businesses were provided with alternative bag wholesalers;
- assistance in staff training to 24% of businesses;
- facilitating inter-business dialogue for bulk purchasing to 18% of businesses; and
- Bagbusters has revisited 47% of the businesses to discuss and review their progress and provide additional support and motivation if necessary.

Bagbusters has provided recognition and incentives for retailers that have demonstrated excellence in plastic bag reduction. The Bagbusters 'Wall of Fame' is currently promoting 12 businesses that are actively reducing plastic bags. In addition, 2 Bagbusters Case Studies included in **ATTACHMENT 2**, that document innovative business practices, were shown to other local business owners for positive reinforcement and as a living, working and successful example of plastic bag reduction in Dulwich Hill. Bagbusters keeps up-to-date records and databases of business liaison and a register of materials which have been distributed to each business.

**B. Progress of Shopper Strategy**

To communicate alternatives and solutions to the wider community, Bagbusters stimulates the involvement of shoppers through a series of interactive educational activities, local media, communication and the distribution of free calico bags.

A preliminary random survey of 32 shoppers in Dulwich Hill indicated that 65% of shoppers are very concerned about the environmental impacts of plastic bags, particularly because plastic bags do not decompose and they damage the life of marine animals. There were only 5 people out of the

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32 surveyed who were not concerned or aware about plastic bags and their environmental consequences.

Bagbusters conducted a series of interactive, face-to-face events for generating awareness of the impacts of plastic bags, specifically targeted to those who were not concerned or aware about plastic bags. During the events, Bagbusters encouraged behavioural change by suggesting realistic, simple and cost-effective ideas for reducing plastic bags. Furthermore, shoppers had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss their own bag-related practices. There were 1195 free calico bags presented to 1475 participants at the following events:

- **Bagbusters Checkout Days (395 participants, see ATTACHMENT 3)**  
The Bagbusters team was stationed at the checkout, packing groceries into 395 free calico bags at three different locations: IGA Dulwich Hill; Country Fresh Fruit and Vegetables; and Excellent Price Variety Store. These events successfully demonstrated to both staff and shoppers that using reusable bags is fast and convenient.
- **Marrickville Council Festivals (980 participants, see ATTACHMENT 4)**  
Over 980 festival-goers participated in the interactive Bagbusters Challenge at four festivals in Marrickville LGA: Newtown Festival, Dulwich Hill Street Fair; Australia Day Fair; and Cooks River Arts and Sustainability Festival. The participants progressed through a series of engaging activities, quizzes and debates that encouraged participants to think about how their own plastic bag practices connect with their local environment. Bagbusters presented 700 free calico bags to participants as a positive reinforcement to refuse plastic bags. The charismatic Ecopella Choir entertained the crowd at the Dulwich Hill Street Fair, singing educational songs about plastic bags and pollution.
- **Bagbusters Easter Special (100 participants, see ATTACHMENT 5)**  
On 12 April, 2006, the Bagbusters team celebrated Easter with the shoppers of Dulwich Hill. The Bagbusters Bunny, a volunteer, hopped along delivering Easter eggs to shoppers that were spotted using a reusable bag. Shoppers could also take the Bagbusters Challenge to play for their chance to win their own reusable calico bag. Over 100 participants received free calico bags and they were reminded to bring them shopping in the future.

**C. Progress of Communication Strategy**

The Bagbusters communication strategy informs the shoppers and businesses of Dulwich Hill about the environmental threats of plastic bags, notifies shoppers of services to which they are entitled, updates shoppers on reduction progress, stimulates feedback and dialogue between and amongst businesses and shoppers, and ultimately instigates behavioural change that will benefit the local environment. A combination of communication modes, including personal liaison, signage, educational displays and information sheets, has been adopted to improve the accessibility of information in accordance with the Diversified Education Program.

Bagbusters relies on frequent personal contact and face-to-face liaison to harness ongoing business commitment and shopper interest. In addition, printed material is important for promoting the Bagbusters identity as a reminder to avoid plastic bags. Recycled paper is used wherever possible,

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printed with the Marrickville Council and Bagbusters logo. The following signage and educational material is distributed to retailers:

- a cash register ‘wobbler’ with the message “Choose to Refuse” in the shape of a plastic bag, seen in **ATTACHMENT 6**;
- a Bagbusters ‘Tips for Businesses’ sheet, seen in **ATTACHMENT 7**, which informs businesses about simple, cost effective ideas to reduce plastic bags;
- a cardboard shop window sign, **ATTACHMENT 8** that says “Thanks for bringing your own bag” acting as positive enforcement to those who bring a reusable bag, and as a reminder to those who forget; and
- over 200 multi-language inserts have been placed inside plastic bags and given away to shoppers. The English, Mandarin, Greek, Vietnamese and Arabic docket warn shoppers that their plastic bag can harm the environment, with suggestions for environmentally friendly alternatives. The dockets were a response to the preliminary shopper survey where approximately 30% of those interviewed came from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB).

Local media, in particular, The Cooks River Valley Times, reported the success of the Bagbusters Easter Special that was held on 12 April 2006. Upcoming communications will include a feature on the Marrickville Council website, a large poster in the Dulwich Hill notice board and an article in the Marrickville Matters.

With the high frequency of events and promotions, the Bagbusters team has been encountering the same shoppers twice or three times. This recurrence is an important step in affirming practices, providing further support and increasing the familiarity of the Bagbusters identity.

#### **D. Volunteer development**

Extremely dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers have been crucial to the progress of the program. Between October 2005 and May 2006, 6 volunteers have contributed 164.25 hours of work on research, design of communication materials, business consultations, Bagbusters events and Marrickville Council festivals. The PBRO works together with volunteers to maximise their contribution to the program. A preliminary interview identifies the skills, interests and commitment of the volunteer, and includes a discussion about the opportunities and activities available in the Bagbusters program. Volunteers participate in a formal OH&S induction (SAFE procedures) and complete a volunteer registration form for insurance purposes. Skills training occurs as required. Volunteer feedback, suggestions and ongoing evaluation have been vital for improving the direction of the program, providing a support network and helping volunteers to take ownership of the Bagbusters project. The 6 Bagbusters volunteers have demonstrated an extraordinary effort towards reducing plastic bags.

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**E. Bagbusters Expansion**

The following stakeholders outside the Marrickville LGA have expressed an interest in adopting the Bagbusters model.

- The Inner Metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils (IMROC) was presented with the Bagbusters model at the Waste Educators meeting on 15 November 2005;
- During promotions events, several business owners outside the Marrickville LGA have approached the Bagbusters team requesting support in plastic bag reduction. The relevant councils were informed about this proposition and support and advice were provided to the councils;
- The Manly Environment Centre has exhibited a Bagbusters educational display in their centre. The information, signage and bag samples for the display were provided by Marrickville Council;
- Strategic support and advice was given to assist a new plastic bag reduction campaign in Toronto, Canada. The project coordinator is seeking to introduce reusable bags through the creation of a committee of stakeholders in the industry, commerce and education sectors; and
- Bagbusters in Marrickville LGA has ongoing partnership with The Watershed, a sustainability resource centre supported by Marrickville Council and City of Sydney Council.

**F. Personal Development and OH&S**

The PBRO has completed the Computer Applications Orientation Program that encompassed Corporate Information, Merit CRM, Proclaim, Exponare and Finance One. TRIM training was conducted on 24 January and an EEO induction was performed on 12 October 2005. All work is conducted under the OHS and EM Policies, Policy Statements and the SAFE system. A monthly review of SAFE work procedures is conducted at The Watershed workplace to identify and mitigate potential risk and hazards.

**G. Budget**

The annual budget of \$10,000 for this program comes from the Domestic Waste Management Reserve. The major investments for the plastic bag reduction program have included printed signage for businesses (\$3,880) and reusable bags for shoppers (\$4,800). These resources will be sustained throughout the following 18 months. An additional \$225 has been spent on resources at Marrickville Council festivals and Bagbusters events.

**H. Future Direction**

The Bagbusters program will continue to support retailers and conduct interactive educational activities for shoppers in Dulwich Hill. Contact will be made with 100% of targeted retailers. Bagbusters will consider the opportunity to form partnerships with local schools and the Dulwich

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Hill Mainstreet Committee, and place pressure on the State and Federal government to implement policy to regulate the use of plastic shopping bags.

**Conclusion**

Marrickville is committed to reducing plastic bags to reduce environmental impacts and improve amenity. Plastic bag reduction in Marrickville Council is currently being achieved with the implementation of the Bagbusters program. This program brings together waste education and best practice principles that are targeted specifically towards businesses and shoppers in the Dulwich Hill community. Between October 2005 and May 2006, Bagbusters has worked closely with 17 retailers in the Dulwich Hill area to develop and implement plastic bag reduction strategies. Around 1475 shoppers have been engaged in educational activities. Marrickville is making outstanding progress towards plastic bag reduction and is setting a strong example for other local councils, businesses and community groups. Sustained support from the Property and Environmental services sections within Council and volunteer development will enable the programs continued success.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT** Council:-

1. receive and note the report; and
2. support the ongoing plastic bag reduction program as a strategy to reduce the environmental impacts of plastic bags and improve the amenity of Marrickville LGA.

**ATTACHMENTS: Total 9 Pages**

Attachment 1	Photo of plastic bag causes visual pollution, 1 page
Attachment 2	Plastic Bag Case Studies, 2 pages
Attachment 3	Photo of Bagbusters Checkout days at IGA, Dulwich Hill, 1 page
Attachment 4	Photo of the Bagbusters Challenge at the Cooks River Festival, 1 page
Attachment 5	The Article on the Bagbusters Easter Special, 1 page
Attachment 6	Bagbusters "wobbler" used at checkouts, 1 page
Attachment 7	Tip for businesses on plastic bag reduction, 1 page
Attachment 8	Window sign used for positive reinforcement, 1 page

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**ATTACHMENT 1: A plastic bag caught in a tree at Stanmore, November 2005.**



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**ATTACHMENT 2: Bagbusters case studies**



## Bagbusters! case study Country Fresh

407 Marrickville Road, Dulwich Hill

*"Do you know how many bags Australians use? Five million in one day! That's a very serious problem. That's why we work towards reducing plastic", - Country Fresh staff*

Country Fresh has been in business for 10 years, selling a delicious selection of fresh fruit and vegetables. The store owners, Ivy and Jack, were both shocked about the quantity that are used by Australians each day. They have been dedicated to reducing the number of plastic bags used in Dulwich Hill.

**Achievements?** Over a period of 2 hours, Country Fresh saved 50 plastic bags from entering landfill. Instead of using plastic bags, Marrickville Council's Bagbusters team gave away free reusable calico bags to customers. Staff enthusiastically demonstrated that packing reusable bags is easy and efficient. In addition, a single calico bag can save up to 3 plastic bags. The staff also explained to their customers that these bags could be cleaned in the washing machine when they get dirty.

**Customers?** The customers were delighted to receive a free calico bag. They were reminded to bring these bags back next time. It is exciting to see that several customers have already been spotted reusing their calico bag!



**Trends?** Reusable bags are fashionable! Three years ago, shoppers rarely brought reusable bags to Country Fresh. Today, many shoppers say no to plastic and bring their own colourful bag from home. This saves \$30 worth of plastic bags per month at Country Fresh!

**Advice for other businesses?** Reducing plastic bags is easy. Simply asking your customers "do you need a bag?" or packing 8 items in each bag can save money and help the environment. Chat with customers about their favourite alternative bag to plastic bags. Have they tried calico bags, green bags, hemp or cardboard



Country Fresh Fruit and Vegetables in Dulwich Hill.

**More information?** Please contact the Plastic Bag Reduction Officer on 0438 440 692 or email [pbro@marrickville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pbro@marrickville.nsw.gov.au).



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### Bagbusters! case study Excellent Price Variety Store

303–307 Marrickville Road, Dulwich Hill

With 300 shoppers visiting each day, Excellent Price Variety Store is concerned about the plastic bags polluting Dulwich Hill. To tackle this problem, Excellent Price Variety Store provides reusable alternatives that can substitute for those ugly disposable plastic shopping bags.

#### What are the alternatives to plastic?

There are plenty of bags that are not made from plastic, a non-renewable resource. For example, calico bags, hemp bags, baskets, string bags, and recycled cardboard boxes are made from natural renewable fibres. Excellent Price Variety Store sells reusable green bags for \$1. These can be conveniently folded up and kept in your backpack or car so you are never caught without a bag. Excellent Price Variety Store encourages customers to bring in their own bag from home instead of using plastic bags.



A plastic bag is saved from landfill. Bagbusters volunteer Kaya hands out a reusable calico bag.

#### Bagbusters Checkout Day

Excellent Price Variety Store was part of the Bagbusters 'Checkout Day'. On the 23rd of February, Marrickville Council's Bagbusters team worked alongside staff, helping to pack purchases into free calico bags. Shoppers were encouraged to reuse these calico bags next time. Bagbusters has also provided signage for Excellent Price Variety Store, promoting awareness about plastic bags.

#### Customer Response and Business Impact

The Checkout Day was very popular with Excellent Price Variety Store shoppers. As the news spread, shoppers flooded to receive their free bag even after supplies ran out. Several shoppers were spotted reusing their bags the next time they came to the shop – a very positive result!

Excellent Price Variety Store has been very supportive of initiatives to decrease plastic bag usage.

#### What support can Bagbusters provide?

Marrickville Council have assisted by promoting environmental issues in the local area, raising awareness of the environmental problems associated with plastic bags and facilitating free bag giveaways.

#### Future aims?

Excellent Price Variety Store strives to reduce plastic bags in their business. They are pioneers in plastic bag reduction, dedicated to reducing litter in Dulwich Hill.



More information? Please contact the Plastic Bag Reduction Officer on 0438 440 692 or email [pbro@marrickville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pbro@marrickville.nsw.gov.au)

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**ATTACHMENT 3: Bagbusters volunteer, Sophia, and IGA Dulwich Hill staff, Bonbon, pack groceries into reusable bags at the Bagbusters Checkout Day on the 23rd March, 2006.**



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**ATTACHMENT 4: Participants choose their preferred alternative to plastic bags in the Bagbusters Challenge at the Cooks River Festival, 9th April 2006.**



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**ATTACHMENT 5: The Bagbusters Easter Special, reported in the Cooks River Valley Times, page 4, 20th April, 2006.**



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**ATTACHMENT 6: The Bagbusters Wobbler for cash registers**



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**ATTACHMENT7: Tips for Businesses sheet for plastic bag reduction.**



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**ATTACHMENT 8: The window sign acts as a positive reinforcement for shoppers.**

