



## POLICY BRIEF

# Plastic Straws Are Not The “Last Straw”

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## SUMMARY

Single-use plastics, like plastic straws, are commonly regarded as major contributors to ocean plastic and Canada’s ecological footprint. In an attempt to reduce plastic waste, the current federal legislature bans six types of single-use plastics: plastic grocery bags, straws, stir sticks, cutlery, six pack rings, and various food packages. However banning their sale and use does not fully address three key factors of ocean plastics or Canada’s ecological impact.

This paper examines the real impacts of single-use plastic, considers the three key factors of ocean plastic and Canadian ecological impacts, and discusses multiple potential policy responses to further our efforts.

## PLASTIC WASTE SUPPLY CHAIN

Canadian plastics, whether single-use or not, do not often make it into waterways. The vast majority of plastic waste is packaging and actually comes from second and third world countries. 60% of all mismanaged plastic comes from the East Asia Pacific region, largely driven by India. However, most notably, Canada and the US are well known to ship garbage to these areas for processing. Furthermore, mismanaged plastics are noted to commonly be swept into water ways and contribute to global ocean plastics. Therefore, the issue does not solely lie with the typical Canadian consumer but rather the whole processing framework which allows garbage to be treated and mismanaged.

## GHOST GEAR OVER SINGLE-USE PLASTIC FEARS

Of the plastic waste in the ocean, micro-plastics have been gaining traction. However, studies have found that the most detrimental and prevalent large plastic pollution is discarded fishing gear. Often regarded as ghost gear, owing to their ability to continue catching fish after being lost, they not only lead to

## KEY POINTS

- Single-use plastics, in Canada, **do not majorly contribute to ocean plastics**. Their ban in Canada is not enough to largely benefit ocean ecosystems. Smaller second and third world countries are some of the largest contributors to ocean plastics.
- Fishing waste has been increasing over the last decade in correlation with heightened demand for seafood. **Ghost gear and fishing waste** are the single largest contributor to large ocean plastics and also have large effects on wildlife and fisheries.
- The true ecological impacts of Canada are not largely influenced by single-use plastics. **Carbon footprints** remain the largest contributor to the typical Canadian’s ecological footprint.



Photo: Michael Pitts/naturepl.com

needless animal mortality but also contribute to microplastics during degradation. Furthermore, policy which addresses the presence of ghost gear and provides reasonable action should be pursued.

## ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Over a third of Canadians actively seek out environmentally conscious choices. Therefore, it remains a popular opinion to control Canada's ecological footprint. The current legislation reflects such feelings as six categories of banned plastics are front and centre. However, the single largest contributor to Canada's ecological footprint is actually not resource use or plastic waste. But rather, it is the burning of fossil fuels. Thus, truly ecologically conscious policy should target this sector more intensely than the single-use plastic debate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Plastic waste supply chain:

- **Revamp the garbage disposal** process and introduce a policy which would bring processing plants back to Canada where they can be monitored and federally regulated.
- Produce policy which would act to **reduce** the individual Canadian's household **garbage production**, through the use of initiatives or subsidies based off of resource saving technologies
- Policies that **target industry** to find solutions to **plastic packaging** and associated waste

## Ghost gear over single-use plastics

- Policy which **targets the fisheries** could include further subsidies for the use of ecologically conscious fishing techniques or equipment
- A policy could include furthering research into commercially feasible **biodegradable or plastic-free** nets and fishing equipment

## Ecological consciousness:

- **Increase the federal carbon tax** from \$30 dollars per tonne of carbon to the BC rate of \$40 dollars per tonne. Studies have shown that after the introduction of the BC rate, British Columbian reliance on fossil fuels had decreased compared to the rest of Canada



Photo: Garth Lenz

## MAIN TAKE AWAYS

- **Revamp and reduce** garbage disposal and production • **Target** harmful ghost gear • **Increase** the federal carbon tax

## REFERENCES

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Name	Position	Contact Information	Reason
<b>John Horgan</b>	Current Premier of BC	<a href="mailto:john.horgan.mla@leg.bc.ca">john.horgan.mla@leg.bc.ca</a>	As the current premier of BC, he may be able to advocate for BC's higher carbon tax. BC has experienced a reduction in fossil fuel reliance (note that our carbon tax is only 10 dollars higher per tonne of carbon than the federal rate)
<b>Jonathan Wilkinson</b>	Current Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change	<a href="mailto:jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca">jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca</a>	As the Minister of Environment and Climate Change he is most likely integral to policy making regarding Canada's environmental obligations and contribution to climate change
<b>Justin Trudeau</b>	Current Prime Minister	<a href="mailto:justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca">justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca</a>	As the Prime Minister these issues could reach the very top of Canadian government. Also if he were to mention these issues during his speech from the throne it would bring impact and weight.
<b>ANY POLITICAL OPPONENTS TO THESE INDIVIDUALS</b>	///	///	One way to get the attention of government officials is to get their political opponents involved in the issue. Either they could press the current representatives on these issues or even run with these issues as part of their campaign. Ergo, it can put pressure on the representatives (especially during an election cycle)