

Statement by Hon. Daryl Vaz, MP
Minister without portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and
Job Creation
(Land, Environment, Investment and Climate Change)
on
Reduction of plastic waste: Implementation of a Deposit Refund
Scheme for Plastic Bottles
in the Houses of Parliament
Tuesday, February 5, 2019

In my Sectoral Presentation to the Parliament earlier this financial year, I indicated to the nation that ‘change is coming’ in relation to the manner in which we, as Jamaicans, treat with our environment and the country’s natural resources. As an indication of that much needed change, I elaborated on, *inter alia*, the measures that the Government intends to take to minimize the country’s plastic waste generation and management.

The Government, through my Ministry – the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation - has made good on this commitment to the population with the implementation of a ban, on a phased basis, on single use plastics, namely plastic bags of a specified dimension and thickness, plastic drinking straws and expanded polystyrene foam products used in the food and beverage industry, effective January 1, 2019.

Implementation of the ban is governed by two Ministerial Orders, that is, The Trade (Plastic Packaging Materials Prohibition) Order, and The NRCA (Plastic Packaging Materials Prohibition) Order. The public's response to the ban has been overwhelmingly positive and I would like to thank all Jamaicans for their continued cooperation and support in ensuring that the implementation of this measure is a success.

It is the Government's intention to continue the public education and awareness programme being undertaken by the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) and the Jamaica Information Service across

the length and breadth of the island. Additionally, the relevant regulatory agencies, including the Jamaica Customs Agency, NEPA, the National Compliance and Regulatory Authority and the Bureau of Standards Jamaica will be intensifying their monitoring activities and commence their enforcement actions in the coming weeks. I take this opportunity to reiterate my invitation to the public to submit any queries, suggestions or comments regarding the implementation of the ban on single use plastics to policyonplasticban@nepa.gov.jm or call [876 285 8531](tel:8762858531).

Change is never easy and can be disruptive, but change is necessary, if we are to ensure a good quality of life for present and future generations of Jamaicans.

The ban on single use plastics while it serves to mitigate some of the country's waste management challenges, is not a panacea. My colleague, the Minister of Local Government and Community Development, and the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA), will continue to

strengthen the country's waste management infrastructure and regulatory framework. However, the effective management of the country's waste is not the responsibility of the Government alone, but also of the private sector, civil society and the individual. Collectively we can realize the much-needed change.

I call upon the private sector, including our micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), to seize the opportunity presented through the ban to supply Jamaican designed and produced alternative products for the domestic and regional markets. As you are aware, both the Development Bank of Jamaica (DBJ) and Ex-Im Bank have been requested to support the private sector in making the transition to alternative packaging.

As part of the national programme to minimize plastic wastes, I also made reference in my Sectoral Presentation to the implementation of a deposit refund scheme for polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and high-

density polyethylene (HDPE) bottles or plastic bottles. Over fifty per cent (50%) of the plastic waste generated in the island are plastic bottles.

Indeed, approximately eight hundred and fifty (850) million plastic bottles are placed on the local market each year. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of these bottles are collected in the formal waste management system or recycled. As one traverses the country, you will see plastic bottles indiscriminately discarded along major thoroughfares, on open lots/dumps, in gullies, drains and other waterways.

Not only are these bottles unsightly, but they are potential hosts for vectors, such as mosquitoes, and have contributed to the flooding which occurs in several of the main urban centres after heavy rains. This was recently evidenced by the large quantity of plastic bottles seen in Kingston Harbour as well as several of the major drains and gullies within the Kingston Metropolitan Area, Montego Bay and other major towns, after the rains the island experienced two weeks ago. Indeed, each International Coastal Cleanup Day, the country is alarmed at the

increasing volume of plastic waste collected along our coasts. Business as usual is not an option. The time for change is now.

The Government has partnered with the private sector in supporting Recycling Partners of Jamaica Limited, through its contribution of J\$50M per annum, to facilitate the collection and recycling of plastic bottles. Despite Recycling Partners of Jamaica Limited's efforts to date, only eleven percent (11%) of the plastic bottles generated are collected. This level of recovery is inadequate and will not ensure the change the Government intends to effect.

Studies have shown that the implementation of a deposit refund scheme or deposit return system for specific categories of wastes, including plastic bottles, can result in a reduction in litter, increase in recycling rates, creation of decent jobs - reduction of poverty - as well as support the Green and Circular economies. It should be noted however that Implementation of a Deposit Refund Scheme is not new to Jamaica. A Deposit Refund Scheme has been successfully implemented by one of

the country's major bottlers for several decades to facilitate the recovery of its crates and glass bottles. Institution of a Deposit Refund Scheme on plastic bottles is therefore an expansion of a 'tried and true' approach which the Government has embraced as a viable strategy for addressing the millions of plastic bottles generated in the country each year.

Indeed, The Most Honourable Prime Minister had indicated in his contribution to the 2018/19 Budget Debate in this Honourable House the Government's commitment to support a Deposit Refund Scheme for plastic bottles. He had also indicated that the private sector had submitted a proposal for the Deposit Refund Scheme which was being considered by the Government. The idea of a private sector-led Deposit Refund Scheme for plastic bottles was also one which was endorsed by the National Partnership Council.

I am therefore happy that the private sector has stepped up to the plate and will therefore provide further details of this private sector-led deposit refund scheme for plastic bottles. The Deposit Refund Scheme

will allow for the application of a deposit on plastic bottles placed on the market and a cash rebate to the consumer on the return of these bottles to designated redemption centres across the island. This Scheme will be implemented by a reconstituted Recycling Partners Jamaica Limited.

It is important to note that the participating members of the private sector have instituted a self-imposed Cess of J\$1.00 per bottle, which will see an initial private sector investment of J\$ 850mn into the program. the initial investment in Recycling Partners will be used to put in place collection points and increase collection capacity by way of truck purchases and fund an expanded education campaign. It is the expectation of the government and should be the expectation of the public that this J\$1.00 deposit per bottle will increase the capacity for the collection in place.

In lending its support to this Deposit Refund Scheme, the Government has charged the private sector partners to ensure that: (i) the Scheme is fully operationalized early in the 2019/20 financial year, (ii) the requisite

infrastructure is in place to facilitate the effective implementation of the Deposit Refund Scheme, including the siting of redemption centres to allow for ease of return of bottles by consumers, and (iii) a plastic bottle recovery rate of at least eighty-five percent (85%) is achieved within the next four years of implementation of the Scheme.

Additionally, the Deposit Refund Scheme must be supported by a comprehensive and sustained national public education and awareness programme. The Government will monitor the implementation of the Deposit Refund Scheme to ensure accountability and transparency, and if deemed necessary, promulgate legislation to govern the Scheme. Un-refunded deposits will be used to maintain the Deposit Refund Scheme as well as provide support to the NSWMA in its efforts to improve the island's waste management infrastructure.

Again, the plastic bottles, once collected, present an excellent opportunity for our recyclers to catalyse economic activity, particularly

at the micro- and small levels, by designing and producing products for local and regional consumption.

Plastics, by their chemical characteristics, take decades, in some cases thousands of years, to degrade in the environment. Hence, collection of plastics for disposal at landfills is not a sustainable solution in the long-term – particularly in small island developing island states such as Jamaica where land is a scarce and extremely valuable resource.

I have seen and received proposals for the use of these bottles in construction and as inputs in other sectors. The Government of Jamaica would like to see these proposals come to fruition and stand ready to support viable ventures.

The members of this house can be assured that this policy initiative will increase the availability of plastic bottles as raw material for other business initiatives ensuring that there are improved prospects for existing operators and new entrants.

The country must therefore employ creative and sustainable approaches to manage its plastic wastes. It is a social cost, as well as an environmental cost, which we need to factor into our consumption decision. As consumers, we must all take a more responsible approach in the actions we take or not take for our survival and sustainability.

I therefore call upon all Jamaicans to get involved! Reduce, Reuse, Recycle! We all have a responsibility to create the Jamaica we want for ourselves and our children. A new Jamaica is emerging and each and every Jamaican needs to play an active role in its renewal.