

07th December 2015

Shri Madan Gopal,
Hon Principal Secretary,
Forests, Environment and Ecology Department,
Government of Karnataka

Subject: Request for Appointment

Hon Principal Secretary,

Greetings from Retailers Association of India!

It is my pleasure to write to you from the Retailers Association of India (RAI).

Retailers Association of India (RAI) is the unified voice of Indian retailers, working with all the stakeholders for creating the right environment for the growth of the modern retail industry in India. RAI, is the body that encourages, develops, facilitates and supports retailers to become modern and adopt best practices that will delight customers. RAI has a three charter aim of Retail Development, Facilitation and Propagation.

This has reference to the draft Notification no FEE 17 EPC 2012, Bengaluru issued by the Forests and Ecology and Environment departments on dated 28th October 2015 that seeks to ban numerous plastic products.

We wish to submit our suggestions as under:

As you are aware, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India, vide its notification dated 21st February 2011, called the Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2011 has notified a minimum thickness norm of 40 microns for the plastic carry bags.

The notification also states the explicit pricing of Carry Bags - no carry bags shall be made available free of cost by retailers to consumers.

1. Plastic products are utilized on daily basis and are a critical aspect of our advancement. We believe that the actual problem is the capability to manage recycling of plastic and the lack of proper Solid Waste Management. The recycling of plastic and more responsible disposal of waste are two immediate solutions to this problem.

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Kishore Biyani,
Future Group

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Shashwat Goenka,
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Vinay Nadkarni,
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ITC - LRBD

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2. We emphasized that the plastic bags came into being to prevent the massive felling of trees for manufacturing of paper bags. Plastic bags did help in serving that purpose, preventing deforestation. The places where plastic bags are banned, shopkeepers have started using paper bags. So we are actually going back in time. Hence the solution doesn't lie in a blanket ban on plastic bags. Promoting paper bags in place of plastic bags is in no way wise. We recommend instead of having plastic products dumped off in the landfills, awareness should be created about recycling of plastic bags. Biodegradable plastic and plastic bags of proper thickness should be made available and promoted. These are any day better to environment than paper bags.
3. The biggest negative impact of usage of plastic carry bags has been its indiscriminate disposal. This initiative of charging customers for the plastic carry bags has significantly curtailed the process of indiscriminate disposal as customers now value plastic carry bags. Plastic carry bags, now, are treated the same as newspapers and many are reselling the bags as scrap which then is used for recycling. **Charging consumers the cost of plastic carry bags has led to a substantial drop in consumption of plastic bags.** As per survey conducted by us on our modern retail outlet, plastic carry bags consumption shows a 70% drop, after the initiative to charge customers for the carry bags. 56% of Customers have started carrying their own bags.

Suggested Approach

It is our humble request that in accordance with the MoEF Notification no FEE 17 EPC 2012, Hon government of Karnataka should consider a strict ban on the use of plastic bags below 40 microns and do not recommend imposition of a complete ban on plastic carry bag usage.

The law if followed properly will stop the indiscriminate use of plastic carry bags and the ban on usage of plastic carry bags will not have to be formulated.

- **Charge consumers cost of bag:** We propose the view that subscribes to the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP), that all retailers be mandated to charge for shopping bags, which from the evidence presented above would lead to a substantial drop in consumption

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of plastic bags whilst at the same time allow flexibility to service consumers who are ready to pay.

- **Widely used principle.** The PPP approach implies that the cost incurred from any form of pollution should be the responsibility of the polluter in order to ensure that the environment is protected for present and future generations. The PPP is widely acknowledged as a general principle of International Environmental Law and is frequently mentioned in Multilateral Environmental Agreements.
- **“Freshness Bags”** which are used for hygienic reasons to pack fruits and Vegetables should not be brought under the purview of definition of “Carry Bags”. Though these are not sealed, they are indeed used as protective packing material. These bags are not used for the purpose of carrying or dispensing commodities but form an integral part for the purpose of hygiene.
- **Experience in other countries.** Past experience in countries like Ireland, Germany, Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand and Switzerland has proven that this approach affords significant benefits by greatly reducing plastic bags in circulation in the immediate term. Annexure I gives various approaches adopted by countries around the world.
- **Paper Bags carry a higher impact on the environment.** Paper bags impact the environment even more than plastic bags and hence need to be treated similarly. Therefore the mandate for retailers to charge for bags should also include paper bags. **PAPER BAGS SHOULD BE TREATED SIMILARLY AS PLASTIC BAGS.**
- **Encouraging Jute Bags.** Efforts should be made to encourage use of jute bags which are far more environment-friendly than plastic or paper, and as such consumption of jute bags should be encouraged by the Government with tax exemptions. **Currently jute bags are not a viable option because of the high costs involved.**

On behalf of member retailers, we would like to assure the Government that we are committed to make positive efforts to control the use of plastic in a phased and focused manner.

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Assurance from the modern retail Community:

- Modern retailers will follow the Polluter – Pay – Principle and charge consumers the cost of carry bags.
- Customers will be encouraged to bring their own carry bags, with the help of in-store signages.
- Modern retailers will continue to use plastic carry bags which are greater than 40 microns. All these bags will be recyclable as well. (This is already being followed).
- The minimum thickness norms will be strictly enforced by the modern retail community.
- Modern retailers will make positive efforts to control the use of plastic carry bags in a phased and focused manner.
- Modern retailers with the help of media will play a significant role in education, awareness and intelligent use of plastic in public domain.
- Modern retailers will make sincere efforts to bring down usage of plastic carry bags through innovative means.
- Modern Retailers will work hand in hand with the Government / local authorities to ensure that recycling of plastic bags is effective.

We are writing this letter to seek your appointment for a meeting with a high level RAI delegation to put forth our view in regard to the subject matter.

We believe such a meeting would surely bear fruitful results in both, supporting the industry as well as taking forth the objectives of the government.

Looking forward to your kind response.

Warm Regards,

For and on behalf of Retail Association of India



Gautam Jain
Director - Advocacy

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