

# ***Carrier Bags Bill (2013)***

***Comments by***

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**15<sup>th</sup> August 2013**

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 57 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are made on behalf of Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

Prof Sue Christie, Director  
Northern Ireland Environment Link  
89 Loopland Drive  
Belfast, BT6 9DW  
P: 028 9045 5770  
E: [Sue@nienvironmentlink.org](mailto:Sue@nienvironmentlink.org)  
W: [www.nienvironmentlink.org](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org)

*Northern Ireland Environment Link is a Company limited by guarantee No NI034988 and a Charity registered with Inland Revenue No XR19598*

NIEL supports the provisions laid out in the Carrier Bags Bill (2013).

The 2011 consultation on 'Proposals for a Charge on Single Use Carrier Bags' deemed a ten pence levy the most efficient and effective measure, from an environmental and economic perspective. However, it was agreed that a two phased approach would be implemented. Therefore, a five pence levy was introduced in April 2013 as a temporary charge to allow consumers to adapt to the new charging policy, before producing a Carrier Bags Bill to increase the levy to ten pence in April 2014. There is no substantial evidence to suggest that this original position should be changed. Preliminary figures indicate that, the introduction of the five pence levy has encouraged a radical shift in shopping habits, with a significant decline in the use of single use carrier bags<sup>1</sup>. However, further progress is still required. Increasing the levy to ten pence is necessary to act as a further disincentive to the use of single use carrier bags and continue the downward trend in bag consumption. Meanwhile, the increased levy will help cover the costs of collection and enforcement, while providing funds for environmental projects.

It is important to extend the levy to include low cost reusable bags, with higher cost reusable bags remaining exempt from the levy. A price threshold is required to establish the minimum price that can be charged for bags which are exempt from the levy. This is a necessary measure to avoid the 'substitution effect', whereby low cost reusable bags (which typically have a greater environmental impact than single use carrier bags) are used as single use throw away bags. This will ensure that the legislation fulfils its intended purpose of limiting the environmental impact associated with carrier bag usage.

It is also appropriate to strengthen the Department's enforcement powers, for example through powers to impose interest charges for late payments of levy proceeds by a retailer. The Department should also have the ability to make specific provisions to exempt certain businesses in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/bag-tax-not-such-a-big-moneyspinner-29452096.html>