

***Ballymoney Chamber of Commerce
c/o Riada House, 14 Charles St
Ballymoney, BT53 5DZ
ballymoneychamber@gmail.com***

The Committee Clerk
Room 416
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

14th August 2013

Call for Evidence in Relation to Carrier Bags Bill

Ballymoney Chamber of Commerce wishes to submit evidence to the Committee for the Environment in relation to the Carrier Bags Bill. As the representative body for traders within Ballymoney, we wish to express our concerns with some aspects of this Bill, in particular Clauses 5, 6 and 7.

Clause 5: Payment of the Charge

Despite the levy being in operation for several months, it is still embarrassing and awkward having to ask customers if they would like a bag and that it would cost an additional 5p. It is appearing as a lack of goodwill on the part of the law abiding retailers and is extremely bad publicity for the retailers concerned, particularly when they've made a significant purchase. There is a perception by the consumer that retailers are in effect, tax collectors, and this perception is bad for business. It only leads to encourage the general trend away from High St shopping towards online shopping. Are online shopping companies having to pass on bag levies to their customers? The Department needs to work closely with the retail sector to ensure that implementing the law is practical for retailers to implement.

Clause 6: Carrier Bags defined by price

As with many retail outlets, advertising on the side of carrier bags is an important aspect of overall marketing. As a result of this bill, customers can opt to put their goods in their own bags, thus removing this vital form of advertising. Often high-end goods e.g. clothes are squashed into inferior bags that can result in crushing expensive garments. The large quality branded bags serve a purpose of protecting the good being purchased and neither consumer nor retailer should be penalised for ensuring this protection. There is still a degree of confusion among traders about what is an exemption and what is not. The Department needs to liaise closely with the retail sector to ensure exemptions are broad enough so as not to deter the use of shop stocked bags to assist in the proper protection of the goods being bought.

Clause 7: Records and Enforcement

While the Chamber agrees in principle with the broad determination to reduce the amount of single use bags being used, the Bill does not take into consideration the amount of additional red tape on small business owners, who must record the purchase of these bags and make a

return. Talk of sanctions in relation to a breach of the carrier bag charging regulations, does nothing to encourage small businesses who are already struggling with rates and other business costs and red tape.

On behalf of the Ballymoney Chamber of Commerce, I would urge the Committee to seriously consider the negative impacts on trade of this Bill on already struggling retailers, and weigh it up against what the positive impacts of this Bill are.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Mellett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W' and a long, sweeping underline.

Winnifred Mellett
President, Ballymoney Chamber of Commerce