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# GLOBAL WARNING

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According to live statistics website [theworldcounts.com](http://theworldcounts.com), five trillion plastic bags are produced every year. That's 160,000 a second! Put one after another, they would go around the world seven times every hour and cover an area twice the size of France. Following last month's ban of single-use plastic bags by major supermarket chains across Australia, the Rotary Club of Cromwell, NZ, has joined the cause, banning the use of plastic bags at its annual book sale and offering Rotary-branded reusable bags as an alternative. The New Zealand Government is also considering banning the bag, after a 65,000 strong petition was handed over to Parliament earlier this year.

**Let's  
SAVE  
THE WORLD**







# BAN THE BAG

**PLASTIC BAGS** have been in the headlines recently following their phase out by major supermarket chains across Australia as of July 1. This follows a number of state bans put in place over previous years, with South Australia taking the lead in 2009.

Prior to the ban, Australians used four billion plastic bags every year – around 10 million a day. It's estimated 150 million end up as litter. Even if used again, for example as a bin liner, it is estimated non-biodegradable

plastic bags take 500 to 1000 years to decompose – and even then, it is into microscopic granules of plastic.

The environmental impacts are severe. Plastic bags are often mistaken for food by turtles, fish and other marine life, leading to a slow death by starvation or suffocation. Humans, too, are facing dangers as a result of plastic proliferation. Research conducted in Sydney Harbour found plastics in the nanoparticles of fish flesh among those species caught for human consumption. This means

plastics are working their way up the food chain and onto our plates.

The Rotary Club of Cromwell recently joined the cause by ceasing to provide plastic bags at their annual book sale, which offers up thousands of books to raise funds for club projects.

As an alternative, the club commissioned hundreds of reusable cotton bags for book buyers who didn't have a bag of their own. It is hoped they will see many years of use after they carried their purchases home.



## Plastic Fact #1

Five trillion plastic bags are produced every year – 160,000 a second!

## Plastic Fact #2

Worldwide, ocean debris kills at least one million seabirds and 100,000 mammals every year. Plastic is the largest source of ocean litter, accounting for 60-90 per cent of all marine debris.

## Plastic Fact #3

In 2008, a sperm whale was found beached in California. It died due to the more than 22 kilos of plastic found in its stomach.

## Plastic Fact #4

Plastic will only start degrading after 500 years and will only fully degrade in 1000 years. This means that all the plastic that has ever been produced has not degraded yet.

## Plastic Fact #5

The average time a plastic bag is used for is 12 minutes

## Plastic Fact #6

Australians use four billion plastic bags annually, which means over 10 million new bags are used every day.

## Plastic Fact #7

Only one to three per cent of plastic bags are recycled worldwide.

## Plastic Fact #8

90 per cent of all seabird species have ingested plastic debris – the CSIRO predicts this figure will reach 99 per cent by 2050.

## Plastic Fact #9

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is a floating landfill of garbage in the Pacific twice the size of Texas, is mostly composed of plastic.

The book sale itself is also in the spirit of reuse. Rather than being tossed away, books find new appreciative homes – and potentially another home after that, when readers donate them back once they have finished with them.

“We recognised that if the environment is to be improved, we have to do something proactive,” sale co-convener Denis McEntyre said.

Everyone agrees removing short-term use plastic bags from the equation is just one step in solving our global plastic problem – but it’s certainly a start. •