



## Coffee Cup Consultation Submission

19/12/2019

Please begin by filling out the details below.

**Name:** Mindy O'Brien

**Role:** Coordinator

**Organisation:** Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment (VOICE)

**Other Relevant Affiliations:** Environmental Pillar, Conscious Cup Campaign

**Contact Email:** [mindy@voiceireland.org](mailto:mindy@voiceireland.org)

# Consultation Categories

Under the headings below, the core consultation categories for the RIA are presented along with some prompting questions as guidance for replies. This is done to support the synthesis of the qualitative results from this consultation. For any material that does not fit within a specific consultation category, please use the general comments section. In terms of length, the consultation response should not exceed one page/500 words per question (6 pages or 3000 words in total). References to other material can be provided as part of the submission.

## 1. General Comments

In order to achieve significant waste reduction targets required under the EU Single Use Plastic Directive and Circular Economy Package, there needs to be effective change both by the producers and consumers. Like the plastic bag levy has demonstrated, one of the best methods of changing behaviour is through economic incentives/disincentives. And like the plastic bag levy, it should be very visible and charged at the till. Retailers should also have signs encouraging people to bring their own cup and that any disposable cup provided will be charged appropriately.

We have found that many companies, community groups, schools, etc. have purchased disposable cups for their employees or members to be used in canteens or kitchens. Additionally, individuals can buy such cups in shops for picnics or home use. The legislation should impose the levy on the wholesale purchase of the cups and if the cups are used in a retail setting, that cost must be passed onto the consumer at the till where the individual can make the choice of using their own cup or buying a disposable one.

The current Conscious Cup Campaign has been effective in encouraging the use of reusable coffee cups with participating coffee houses offering some type of economic incentive. However, it has been confirmed through a study done by Cardiff University for Bewleys, that an incentive alone is not as effective as it is in conjunction with a levy. It states that their "...field experiment explored how the use of reusable coffee cups could be encouraged by easily implementable measures. It found that through clear messaging, the provision of reusable alternatives, and financial incentives, the use of reusable coffee cups can be increased by (on average) 2.3 to 12.5%.

**"The study suggests that a charge may be more effective than a discount. These results are in line with *prospect theory*, which suggests that people are more**

**sensitive to losses than to gains when making decisions. A charge on disposable cups (a loss) is therefore more likely to produce behaviour change than a discount on a reusable cup.”<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis added)**

This type of levy placed on single-use containers will put a value on the item and encourage the take-up of reusable alternatives. We need a paradigm shift where we purchase the product not the packaging and if we want the packaging, we have to pay for it. Such a levy should be placed on disposable coffee cups, whether they are compostable, recyclable or other. It should also be applied to all disposable cups with similar construction, such as soft drink cups found in movie theatres and on the go food retailers.

Article 4 of the Directive states that “Member States may take marketing restrictions in derogation from Article 18...for the purposes of prevention of littering of those products in order to ensure that those products are substituted with alternatives that are reusable or do not contain plastic. Those measures may vary depending on the environmental impact of the products over their life cycle, including when littered. “

## **2. Adaptation Potential**

*What challenges are envisaged, and for whom, with regard to adaptation to the proposed legislation?*

We anticipate that there will be push back from producers of compostable and recyclable coffee cups who contend that their cups are more sustainable than the ordinary disposable coffee cup. However, as happened with the proposed announcement of a ‘latte levy’ a few years back by Minister Naughten, many companies sought and received assurances from the Minister that their compostable or recyclable cup would be exempted from the levy. This put so many holes into the proposal that they sunk the entire initiative. Also, as a result of this, many cafes and coffee shops worried about possible levies, have all invested haphazardly in both recyclable and compostable cups, believing that they were doing the correct and ‘green’ thing. Now we have all types of cups, no infrastructure, no public awareness and no reduction in the use of single-use cups, except what has been achieved through the Conscious Cup Campaign.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/99366/1/Coffee%20cup%20summary%20report%20-%20Poortinga%20%28FINAL%29.pdf>

If there is a two or three tier levy proposed (one for normal cups, one for recyclable and one for compostable cups), this will be very confusing for the consumer in the charge and also confusing in how this cup should be managed at the end of its life.

Lastly, even if the government requires only one material to be used in disposable coffee cups (for example, materials that meet the composting standard, EN13432 or the new CRE standard), there is no existing collection infrastructure to collect these cups for proper treatment in an industrial composting facility and there is no public awareness on this at the moment.

*How might these be addressed? In what timeframe might they be addressed?*

First of all, the levy of at least €0.25 should be applied to all types of cups and all cups should meet one composting standard so that it will be easier to develop the collection infrastructure and it will be easier for the waste companies to sustainably treat the cups.

Infrastructure must be placed on the streets to collect compostable material and food waste and a massive public awareness campaign should be developed which pulls together all stakeholders. Information about the levy and disposal of the cup should be visible at the point of purchase. Street face to face engagement should also be part of the public engagement.

Additionally, the regulation adopted by the government should also require all vendors of coffee/tea/drinks to offer ceramic or other reusable cups to be used on-site to reduce the need for a take-away cup should the customer forget their reusable cup.

### **Timing:**

Mid- to late- 2020: The levy should be imposed first, encouraging consumers to reduce their use of single-use cups. By imposing the levy, this will allow the government to create a baseline on the number of cups and then track the take-up of reusables and how well we are meeting our EU reduction targets. Public awareness campaign on the rationale behind this levy must be pushed out before the levy is applied.

Mid 2020, government should work with the cup manufacturers and waste companies to establish a definitive compostable standard that all single-use cups must meet and enforce these new requirements which should be in place by mid-2021.

Mid 2021, government invests in rolling out compostable bin street infrastructure and public awareness-raising and engagement continues on how to dispose of compostable cups and why it is important to put into the correct bin.

### **3. Competition Related Impacts**

*Are there local, sectoral, national or international impacts in relation to competitiveness for Irish businesses? How might these be mitigated?*

If all businesses are treated the same, there should be no additional competitive implications for Irish businesses. Most consumers will not travel across the border to purchase a cup of coffee to avoid the levy.

As for the cup manufacturers, they will be able to sell their cups both in Ireland and internationally and there is no restriction in their ability to sell abroad.

### **4. Business Impacts**

*Connected to the previous question, what impacts would you envisage for specific business types (e.g. small retailers, major chains, coffee importers, and cup manufacturers) from the proposed legislation?*

There has been talk that major chains would lower their price of coffee to absorb the levy so that consumers do not feel the sting of the additional levy when buying coffee in a disposable cup. This would work against achieving behaviour change and the reduction goal required under EU legislation and goes against the government's priority to support the Circular Economy and SDG Goal 12, Responsible Consumption and Production.

This would also create a competitive disadvantage for smaller independent cafes that do not have the financial resources to absorb the levy.

This argues that the levy should be big enough to change consumer behaviour and big enough to discourage large coffee chains from absorbing the levy. Perhaps a larger levy of around €0.40 would discourage large retailers from absorbing the cost. This levy rate has been charged in companies looking for their employees to reduce single-use cup use to great effect, such as was the case with the Finglas Training Centre.

The levy would also impact the disposable coffee cup manufacturers as hopefully the number of disposable cups will reduce. However, this is the intention of the proposed legislation and a positive impact known by the government.

New businesses have already emerged with 2GoCup<sup>2</sup> and RiCup<sup>3</sup> which offer a deposit return system for reusable cups to be used in closed loop systems where a deposit is paid for the 'rental' of the cup and is returned when the cup is returned.

Businesses may also have to invest in cup cleaning systems to assist their customers who do not have the facilities to clean their cups in between uses (i.e., sales people or delivery people who are in their car most of the day). Some petrol stations have already invested in cup cleaning systems, such as AppleGreen. Businesses offering cleaning services for reusable cups and other reusable containers may crop up to facilitate the take-up of reusable items and make it easier both for the food/coffee establishment and the consumer and address the contamination fears.

## 5. Environmental Impacts

*What impact do you believe the proposed legislative change would have on the environment?*

By imposing a levy large enough to encourage behavioural change, the intended consequence should be the reduction in the number of disposable cups produced and disposed. This will save natural resources, energy, water, and transportation costs embedded in each cup as well as the associate emissions derived from such actions. Additionally, there will be economic savings in the disposal and litter clean-up costs, which currently fall onto the taxpayers shoulders. Currently, County Coucils pay around €1,500/tonne for litter and street cleanings and the management of street bins.<sup>4</sup>

This levy will hopefully reduce the number of disposable coffee cups discarded or lost in the natural environment. As the external costs of litter in the environment and impacts on fish and wildlife are hard to estimate, such reduction will improve the natural landscape, reduce the number of cups in the marine and fresh waters and thus reduce the amount of microplastics.

According to the most recent non-household waste characterisation study published in 2018, the Environmental Protection Agency calculated that there were 14,911 tonnes of coffee cups, which comprised 2.5% of the Mixed Residual Waste and 1.6% of the Mixed Dry Recycling.<sup>5</sup> Averaging a weight of 20 grams per cup, this equates to 745 million cups per

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.2gocup.ie/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ricup.ie/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://voiceireland.org/perch/resources/public-waste-out-of-sight-out-of-mind-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/wastecharacterisation/Final\\_Report\\_NHWC.pdf](http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/wastecharacterisation/Final_Report_NHWC.pdf)

annum or 2+ million cups used per day. According to a report published by the Scottish government, “[t]he CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions associated with producing and disposing of a disposable cup are approximately 1.5 times the weight of the cup itself, with more than half of this coming from the plastic lid.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the emissions from disposable coffee cup use in Ireland is an estimated 22,366.5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year. Reducing the use of disposable coffee cups will correspondingly reduce natural resource, water and energy use as well as carbon equivalent emissions.

*How does it align with specific national environmental ambitions and targets?*

*The Climate Action Plan calls for the sustainable use of resources and states that “[w]e need to focus on designing out waste, prioritising prevention of waste at every opportunity through eco-design, reuse and repair, taxation and levies. An OECD study of four countries’ greenhouse gas emissions found emissions arising from material management accounted for between 55% and 65% of national emissions. Ireland’s material consumption is well above the EU average, and continues to rise as the economy recovers and grows. This indicates that there is scope for savings in greenhouse gas emissions through maximising the efficiency of our material usage.”<sup>7</sup> Under Section 12.4 of the government’s Climate Action Plan, waste prevention is the first priority under the waste hierarchy, as stated in the strategic plan, Towards a Resource Efficient Ireland (2015)<sup>8</sup>, and further reinforced in the priorities under the three Regional Waste Management Plans (2015-2021)<sup>9</sup> and SDG 12.*

Government agencies have adopted a ban on single-use plastics<sup>10</sup> and most departments and agencies have moved to eliminate traditional single-use coffee cups. However, some of these agencies have brought in compostable cups as a stop-gap measure. Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has also instructed agencies, under its Green Public Procurement remit, to switch from single-use plastic items to reusables. The public sector is leading the way for the country at large to reduce its single-use mentality.

This latte levy proposal supports all national priorities and policies that promotes reuse over all other actions under the waste hierarchy; it trumps recycling and composting every time.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-expert-panel-environmental-charging-measures-epecom-recommendations-single-use-disposable-beverage-cups-july-2019/pages/3/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/16/Climate\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/16/Climate_Action_Plan_2019.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/prevention/reports/NWPP\\_Report\\_2015\\_web.pdf](https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/prevention/reports/NWPP_Report_2015_web.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/waste-management-and-policy/Pages/Regional-Waste-Management-Plans.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/news-and-media/press-releases/Pages/Minister-Bruton-Announces-Government-will-Lead-the-Way-in-Reducing-Single-Use-Plastics-.aspx>

### *How might the impact be strengthened?*

Enforcement and Education are key factors to successfully implement this initiative. As was the case with the plastic bag levy, it's hugely important to be transparent and give the reasons behind the levy and enforce the application of the levy.

Many researchers have identified Ireland's plastic bag tax as one of the most successful economic incentives to prevent the generation of waste, and therefore, many countries have adopted similar initiatives. Here, we charge tax on consumers at Point of Sale and the bookkeeping and reporting is fairly easy as it is integrated with retailer VAT returns.<sup>11</sup> Mirroring the success associated with the Irish Plastic Bag Tax, we assert that any single-use packaging levy should be imposed at the point of sale to consumers. This makes the levy visible and allows consumers to make the choice of bringing their own cups. It has been noted that both Denmark and South Africa charged retailers the tax on plastic bags, which sometimes was not passed on to the consumer and therefore, did not affect behavioural change.

According to Dominic Hogg's Economic Instruments report for Belgium, the following approach is the most effective:

- Apply taxes to items where alternatives are clearly available (this is likely to ensure a reasonable response to the tax);
- Continual review of the tax to ensure that its effectiveness is not being eroded over time (e.g. through inflation);
- Ensure the tax is designed with sufficient inbuilt flexibility to adapt to changing economic conditions; and
- Prior to introducing the tax, develop an effective communication campaign to advertise the rationale behind the tax. In this respect, there should be a clear rationale for the tax.<sup>11</sup>

## **6. Consumer Impacts**

*What impacts do you envisage for consumers from the proposed legislation?*

---

<sup>11</sup>

[http://document.environnement.brussels/opac\\_css/elecfile/Etude%20dechets%20Eunomia%20Report%20en](http://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/elecfile/Etude%20dechets%20Eunomia%20Report%20en)

At first, there will be consumer push back during the first months of the public awareness and education campaign, especially for those who have not invested in a reusable cup or those who have forgotten theirs. There will also be individuals who purchase several coffees during the day and do not have the facilities to clean their cup.

These customers should be encouraged to 'sit and sip' in a reusable cup provided free of charge by the retailer.

*Do you believe consumers would welcome a levy to address single use disposable cup waste?*

We believe that there will be huge support for this initiative as we have received very positive feedback from Tidy Town groups, local community initiatives, and schools for the Conscious Cup Campaign. These groups are at the coalface of cleaning up waste and litter in their communities and broadly support initiatives that reduce single-use items and litter. During the debate on the Waste Reduction Bill in 2018, we had 65 Tidy Towns sign up to support its passage. One of the main provisions of this bill was banning single use cups. While this was not a levy, the end result is clear...there is huge public support for the reduction in the use of single-use items.

The Sick of Plastic Campaign petition<sup>12</sup>, which calls for the imposition of a levy on single-use items, has over 22,000 signatures. This proposed levy also supports waste prevention and zero waste, which is a fast-growing sector in Ireland. The Zero Waste Ireland Facebook group<sup>13</sup> has 14,700+ members and new zero waste communities are popping up all over Ireland.

As there is an easy alternative to single-use cups—using a reusable one, consumers should not be adversely affected. They can still get their daily take-away coffee, but in a different way. If they forget their cup, they can either sit and have their coffee in a ceramic cup on premise, or purchase a single-use option. Again, we want to reiterate that there must be a paradigm shift away from pre-packaged items...consumers want to purchase the product, not the packaging.

*Do you believe consumers already understand how to properly dispose of single use cup waste?*

Customers are completely confused as to what to do with their single-cup waste. As these cups look like paper, they are often put in the recycling bin, making it difficult for the waste companies to manage. Additionally, with the advent of the compostable cup, some cups,

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.foe.ie/takeaction/break-free-from-plastic/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1714427525455846/>

whether they are compostable or not, end up in the organic bin. All cups, be they recyclable, compostable or traditional, look the same and the consumer is baffled as to what to do with them. Many of them end up on the streets or in the residual bin.

We are told by the waste industry that if a recyclable cup ends up in the organic bin, it messes up the composting as there is a thin layer of plastic in the cup. If a compostable cup ends up in the recycling bin, it also messes up the paper/board recycling as the cup is not made from a paper product, it being made from corn starch or other compostable material.

Even if the State invests in street recycling bins, if the consumer properly places a recyclable disposable coffee cup in the street recycling bin, the cup will most likely be contaminated by milk, tea bag or other liquid, thus contaminating the rest of the recyclable material collected in the bin.

The government must make it easy for the consumer to manage their waste by encouraging the prevention of the waste in the first place and then regulating for one type of disposable coffee cup, most likely a compostable one.