

## **States Divided Over Plastic Bag Bans**

Adam Morton, The Age (Australia)

April 18, 2008

PLASTIC bag use will continue unchecked by governments in most states after environment ministers yesterday failed to agree on a national ban or checkout levy.

Despite federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett having pledged to phase out plastic bags by next year, a meeting of environment ministers in Melbourne yesterday agreed only to boost research into biodegradable bags and work with retailers to cut their use.

As green groups expressed frustration, Victoria vowed to introduce its own pilot study into a bag levy of 10 to 25 cents in partnership with major supermarket chains later this year.

South Australia went further, pledging to go it alone with a bag ban from January next year.

Mr Garrett denied the meeting had failed on plastic bags, but conceded his time frame would blow out. He said there was no agreement on a ban, and he opposed charging households an extra levy.

"What we've decided today is that there will not be a national mandated charge on plastic bags in checkouts, but we do want to see increased action to reduce plastic bag use in the community," Mr. Garrett said.

But Jeff Angel, director of the Total Environment Centre, said the governments had failed to act despite an alternative — recyclable green bags — available.

"Quite clearly the usefulness of the (environment ministers council) on the plastic bag issue has expired," he said.

SA Environment Minister Gail Gago slammed the failure to reach a consensus. "It is extremely disappointing that after six years (of meetings) we are not able to sign off on an agreement," she said.

NSW said it would not act alone, but Victoria promised a trial with the Australian National Retailers Association — representing Coles, Woolworths and Franklins — by about September. Victorian Environment Minister Gavin Jennings said the trial would start at two sites. Once a price was tested and agreed on, he estimated that plastic bags would be phased out in Victoria within two years. The money raised would be spent on environmental projects.

"We think this scheme will set a precedent and a momentum across this nation to finally take some action and get rid of plastic bags once and for all from our supermarkets," he said. A report on the trial would be expected in time for the next ministers meeting in November. Greens leader Bob Brown criticised Victoria for supporting voluntary action from retailers.