



Total plastic ban on the cards

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A wholesale ban on plastic packaging by 2022 is on the cards for Namibia.

Environment and tourism Minister Pohamba Shifeta this week said discussions were under way that could lead to a complete plastic packaging ban by 2022.

He was speaking at the fifth meeting of the National Solid Waste Management Advisory Panel at Walvis Bay on Wednesday, where he also announced Namibia's first 11 waste-disposal sites. Shifeta said plastic bags have become an eyesore and plastic pollution constitutes a threat to the environment.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asset/plastic-ban-on-the-cards2019-07-260.jpg>)

POLLUTE: Plastic pollution poses a threat to the environment, people and wildlife. PHOTO: NAMPA

He explained further that the proposed levy on plastic bags is a temporary measure to mitigate the impact of plastic on the environment, but underlined that the ultimate goal is to ban plastic packaging within the next three years.

He said the ministry was in consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure that by 2022 alternatives to plastic packaging are identified, notably for plastic producers in the country. According to the Earth Policy Institute, around one trillion plastic bags are used worldwide every year. In Africa, more than 15 countries regulate the use of plastic bags, either through complete bans or taxation.

Among the countries regulating plastic bags are Kenya, Mali, Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana and Ethiopia.

Levy

On the issue of the proposed plastic bag levy, the finance ministry on Wednesday released a statement saying that recent levies introduced by Namibian retailers was their own initiative and did not form part of the environmental levies the government intended to introduce.

"Although the ministry of finance welcomes initiatives by business outlets to curb pollution of the environment, we wish to inform the nation that the money that is currently being charged by retailers is not yet part of the plastic levy that government has proposed."

The levy has not yet been gazetted, the ministry stated.

Some retailers have introduced a levy of 50 cents per plastic bag, and the ministry announced that this payment forms part of the individual businesses' incomes.

The ministry however pointed out that two outlets, namely Pupkewitz Megabuild and its subsidiary, Kaap Agri Namibia, voluntarily introduced the Break Free from Plastic Campaign, charging fifty cents per plastic carrier bag as of December 2018.

The quarterly proceeds have been handed over to the government's Environment Investment Fund (EIF) since then, totalling N\$60 000 to date.

The company has committed to this arrangement until Schedule 1 to the Customs and Excise Act is amended.

The ministry said the finance and environment ministry and EIF Namibia have been working out modalities on the income consolidation policy to facilitate the effectiveness of a plastic levy.

“The implementation of this levy will be done through the Customs and Excise Act No 20 of 1998, which is administered by the Ministry of Finance,” the ministry said.

The process of amendments to the Act has been completed and will be gazetted on 01 August 2019. The new levies will be in operation after it is tabled in the National Assembly.

“The nation will be informed once the entire process has been finalised. In the meantime we wish to reiterate our position that charges that shops have begun to charge their customers are not part of the environmental levies,” it concluded.

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