

Investigation - Sustainability in the food and hospitality industry:

Stage 2 – 2021- Food and Hospitality

SACE NO – 971456F

Main question: *To what extent has the food and hospitality industry responded to the single use plastic ban in South Australia?*

Word count: 1999

Contents:

Introduction	Page 2
Scope of study	Page 2
Methodology.....	Page 3
Focus Question 1	Page 4-5
Focus Question 2	Page 6
Focus Question 3	Page 7-8
Conclusion.....	Page 9
Reference list.....	Page 10-11

Single Use Plastics:

Introduction:



As the single use plastic ban continues to be implemented throughout South Australia, the food and hospitality industry must respond to ensure businesses comply with regulations. According to the *Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC)*, single use plastics are utensils or packaging, primarily derived of fossil fuel chemicals and are required to be disposed of directly after use.¹ Single use plastics are often used as they are cost effective and convenient for food and hospitality businesses.²⁻³ However, on March 1st 2021, South Australian premier, Steven Marshall, announced the commencement of the act to eliminate single use plastics and implement biodegradable replacements for food and hospitality businesses across South Australia, hoping to eliminate the use of single use plastics by 2025.⁴⁻⁵ The South Australian implementation has already prohibited single use plastic straws, stirrers and cutlery, *figure 1*, with additional strategies in place to increase sustainable alternatives for the future of the food and hospitality industry within South Australia.⁶

Figure 1 - SA's prohibited plastics

Scope:

This investigation intends to explore the extent and influence that the South Australian single use plastic ban has had on the food and hospitality industry.

The scope of the investigation was maintained within a concise boundary through the construction of a main research question and the following three focus questions:

Main question: To what extent has the food and hospitality industry responded to the single use plastic ban in South Australia?

FQ1: Has the South Australian ban of single use plastic affected food businesses financially?

FQ2: Has the single use plastic ban influenced food businesses to make further sustainable choices to other areas of their business?

FQ3: What has been the response of single use plastics in South Australia from consumers?

Therefore, this issue is topical as it relates to the, "economical and environmental influences" area of study that explores how the sustainable legislation has impacted the food and hospitality industry within South Australia.

¹ Courtney Lindwall, 9th January 2020, "Single use plastics," *Natural Resources Defence Council*,

<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/single-use-plastics-101#:~:text=Put%20simply%2C%20single%2Duse%20plastics,wrappers%2C%20straws%2C%20and%20bags>, date accessed 19th April 2021.

² *The Guardian*, 2021, "Single use plastic to be phased out in Australia from 2025 include plastic utensils and straws,"

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/16/single-use-plastics-to-be-phased-out-in-australia-from-2025-include-plastic-utensils-and-straws#:~:text=A%20national%20meeting%20of%20environment,polystyrene%20food%20containers%3B%20polystyrene%20consumer>, date accessed 20th April 2021.

³ *Government of South Australia*, 2021, "Replace the waste," <https://www.replacethewaste.sa.gov.au/legislation-explained>, date accessed 1st August 2021.

⁴ David Spiers, 23rd December 2020, "Single use plastic ban to kick in from March," *Government of South Australia*, <https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news/media-releases/news/single-use-plastic-ban-to-kick-in-from-march>, date accessed 20th April 2021.

⁵ *The Guardian*, 2020, "Single use plastics to be phased out in Australia from 2025 include plastic utensils and straws," <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/16/single-use-plastics-to-be-phased-out-in-australia-from-2025-include-plastic-utensils-and-straws#:~:text=A%20national%20meeting%20of%20environment,polystyrene%20food%20containers%3B%20polystyrene%20consumer>, date accessed 20th April 2021.

⁶ *ABC News*, 9th September 2020, "SA bans single-use plastics in Australian first but new rules delayed due to coronavirus pandemic," <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-09/sa-first-state-to-ban-single-use-plastics-in-australia/12647434>, date accessed 20th April 2021.

Methodology:

Both primary and secondary research were sought to ensure the information gathered was equally utilised. 24 food managers from South Australian food and hospitality establishments were interviewed, consisting of cafes, bars and restaurants. The substantial scope of primary sources provided relevant and credible information on how the food and hospitality industry has responded to the ban⁷. These were cross-referenced and supported with secondary sources, including websites, PDF's, news reports and blog posts to reduce biased perspectives and reinforce primary research.

Limitations which may evoke bias include, the opinions of the primary research and business managers however, will be mitigated by obtaining a balanced distribution of information covering the whole issue.

⁷ Zara Richards, 22nd July 2021, "A guide to Adelaide venues still open for takeaway and delivery," *Glam Adelaide*, <https://glamadelaide.com.au/a-guide-to-adelaide-venues-still-open-for-takeaway-and-outdoor-dining/>, date accessed 22nd July 2021.

FQ1: Has the South Australian ban of single use plastic affected food businesses financially?

The sudden change from plastic to sustainable packaging has raised a few financial challenges for businesses, namely in the additional costs of these products. According to the *CNBC* and *Forbes*, paper straws and other sustainable alternatives are ‘10 times’ more expensive than plastic packaging and eating implements.^{8 9} Many South Australian food businesses declared that insufficient time has been provided to adapt to these adjustments due to Covid regulations and managing finances.¹⁰ Additionally, 18 of 24 interview respondents indicated that the transfer from plastic takeaway containers to single use alternatives increased business expenses, *figure 2*.¹¹

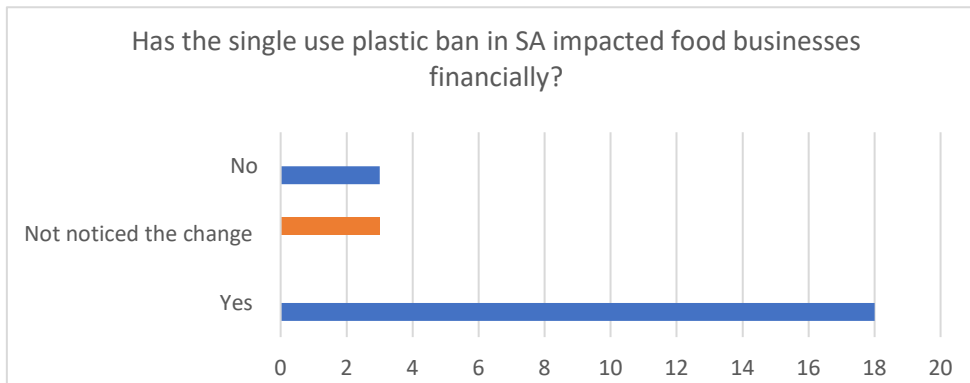


Figure 2 - Business financial opinion

One respondent Chloe Briddon, from Argo on the square in Adelaide, stated, “It’s a lot cheaper to not have the biodegradable packaging so I don’t think food businesses would make the change without it being forced.”¹²

However, if food businesses did not comply with this legislation from March 1st, fines of up to \$315 to \$20,000 dollars would be issued.¹³ Thus, for long term benefits it is still better for businesses to commit to purchasing sustainable alternatives to avoid additional costs in the form of fines. Financially, most companies within this industry have allowed for these increased costs and incorporated them into their business models ensuring a successful transition from plastics to sustainable packaging.¹⁴

Plastic straws:	Teacher superstore (1100) - \$19.95	WF plastic (3000) - \$28.00	Dura home (200) - \$20.69
Paper straws:	BioPak (2500) - \$47.41	Kraft (250) - \$6.99	Eco Straw (250) - \$38.60

Figure 3 - Pricing comparison

When comparing the prices of plastic and paper straws, *figure 3*, it is evident from a cost prospect, that plastic straws purchased in large quantities are the cheapest alternative.¹⁵ However, plastic straws are banned in most states within

⁸ Wood Mackenzie, August 24th 2020, <https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i41/cost-plastic-packaging.html>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

⁹ Alexander H. Tullo, October 17th 2016, “The cost of plastic packaging,” *Chemical and Engineering news*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/woodmackenzie/2020/08/24/is-paper-a-more-sustainable-flexible-packaging-material-than-plastic/?sh=4159cd6112d4>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

¹⁰ *ABC News*, 9th September 2020, “SA bans single-use plastics in Australian first but new rules delayed due to coronavirus pandemic,” <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-24/south-australian-businesses-prepare-for-plastic-ban/13184934>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

¹¹ Interview phone calls with South Australian food and drink businesses, Adelaide, conducted on 22nd, 23rd, 24th of July 2021.

¹² Sarah Mullins, 24th February 2021, “Businesses prepare for South Australia’s plastic ban ahead of March 1 roll-out,” <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-24/south-australian-businesses-prepare-for-plastic-ban/13184934>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

¹³ *SA life*, 1st March 2021, “SA single use plastics ban kicks in,” <https://indaily.com.au/news/2021/03/01/sa-single-use-plastics-ban-kicks-in/>, date accessed 22nd July 2021.

¹⁴ *Government of South Australia – Green industries*, 23rd August 2019, “Consultation response document - Turning the tide on single use plastic products discussion paper,” [https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/media_downloads/200329/Single-use%20Plastics%20Consultation%20Summary%20Report%20\(2019\).pdf](https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/media_downloads/200329/Single-use%20Plastics%20Consultation%20Summary%20Report%20(2019).pdf), date accessed 9th August 2021.

¹⁵ Kellie Ell, June 9th 2018, “Paper straws cost ‘10 times’ more than plastic straws,” *CNBC*, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/09/paper-straws-are-better-for-the-environment-but-they-will-cost-you.html>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

Australia¹⁶ due to environmental considerations such as excessive waste build ups¹⁷ and the empowering attitudes from Australian citizens.¹⁸ The Australian Government have therefore ensured that sustainable packaging companies provide inexpensive biodegradable straws, stirrers and cutlery to “phase out” single use plastics.^{19,20}

As each company approaches the plastic ban in a different manner, expenses may vary depending on the products each company offers and the sustainable packaging resources required for their delicacies. One employee from *Pantry on Egmont* stated, “we have had sustainable packaging in place for a while. It costs a bit more, but it is our commitment to our customers and the environment”^{21,22}, suggesting that the cost made little impact to their business. In contrast, *Café Clay* indicated that, “for our business the change was 30% more expensive, approximately 2 dollars extra for each straw or stirrer we provide to customers.”²³

This packaging price increase was also influenced by the South Australia lockdown as takeaway and online orders were the only alternative to instore purchases and therefore a large quantity of takeaway containers was required²⁴. Additionally, *Mckinsey and Company* indicated that there was a large spike in the purchase of takeaway containers and cutlery within the period of SA’s lockdown.²⁵ Therefore, as demand increased for this packaging, many South Australian businesses were faced with increased prices for these products.²⁶

Interestingly, the implementation of single use plastics have actually led to a rise in customers as more and more consumers are motivated by ethical and environmental considerations²⁷ and has encouraged companies to continue purchasing biodegradable products.²⁸

¹⁶ *Tembo paper*, July 9th 2020, “Plastic straws and the environment: what is the impact?”

<https://www.tembopaper.com/news/plastic-straws-and-the-environment-what-is-the-impact>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

¹⁷ *WWF Australia*, 2nd July 2020, “10 worst single use plastics and ecofriendly alternatives,”

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¹⁸ Kaitlin Keefer, 28th August 2018, “Why Australia is moving towards plastic straw bans,”

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²⁰ *The Guardian*, 2020, “Single use plastics to be phased out in Australia from 2025 include plastic utensils and straws,”

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/16/single-use-plastics-to-be-phased-out-in-australia-from-2025-include-plastic-utensils-and-straws>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

²¹ *Pantry on Egmont*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

²² *Plains producer*, 11th March 2021, “Parting with plastic,” <https://www.plainsproducer.com.au/2021/03/11/parting-with-plastic/>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

²³ *Clay café*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

²⁴ *Oskar Lingqvist*, April 2021, “How the packaging industry can navigate the Coronavirus pandemic,” *Mckinsey and Company*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Paper%20and%20Forest%20Products/Our%20Insights/How%20the%20packaging%20industry%20can%20navigate%20the%20coronavirus%20pandemic/How-the-packaging-industry-can-navigate-the-coronavirus-pandemic.ashx>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

²⁵ *David Feber*, 16th April 2020, “How the packaging industry can navigate the coronavirus pandemic,” *Mckinsey and Company*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/paper-forest-products-and-packaging/our-insights/how-the-packaging-industry-can-navigate-the-coronavirus-pandemic>, date accessed 13th August 2021.

²⁶ *Hades hula house*, SA Drinks company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

²⁷ *MDPI- Publisher of Open Access Journals*, 16th December 2020, “Factors Influencing Consumers decision to purchase food in environmentally friendly packaging: What do we know and where do we go from here?” *Sustainability*, <file:///C:/Users//Downloads/sustainability-11-07197-v2.pdf>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

²⁸ *City of Adelaide*, March 2020, “Compostable Packaging Supplies for SA,” <https://d31atr86jngq2.cloudfront.net/docs/guide-compostable-packaging-suppliers.pdf?mtime=20200320111944&focal=none>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

FQ2: Has the single use plastic ban influenced food businesses to make further sustainable choices to other areas of their business?

Whilst some South Australian food businesses had introduced sustainable packaging takeaway options prior to the ban, other businesses did not have any of these alternatives in place and continued to purchase plastic products.

The State Government has been pleased with the response of the food and hospitality industry in South Australia, however, it also has plans for further sustainable packaging legislation.²⁹ By early 2022, the government plans to ban polystyrene cups, bowls, plates, containers and all products with oxo-degradable plastic.³⁰ Therefore, food businesses in South Australia must start to consider other areas of their business where sustainability can be improved.

South Australian food businesses have adopted the *Green industries* and *Food South Australia's "Zero – waste strategies,"* encouraging the utilisation of renewable energy sources and waste reduction.^{31 32} *Fino Seppeltsfield* in the Barossa indicated that 95% of their restaurants produce is seasonally and locally grown, whilst also maintaining compost bins as fertiliser for the surrounding gardens.³³ Local businesses are also implementing sustainable alternatives such as installing solar panels, recycling 10c plastic bottles, providing complimentary plastic reusable bags, investing in entirely biodegradable packaging and a series of different food bins to reduce landfill.³⁴ *Seafaring Fools*, suggested that they are going to halt the sale of plastic bottles, utilise biodegradable bin bags, invest in solar panels, insert LED light globes within their store and purchase South Australian and locally grown products to reduce the carbon footprint.^{35 36} *Ragi's café* shared, "we have always been quite sustainable by reusing our oil and food products, using less waste and our staff also take it in turns to take home our coffee grinds that we daily produce to put in our gardens."³⁷ Demonstrating the influence that the ban has had on businesses furthering their sustainability to other areas of their business, as food companies have recognised their overuse of plastic.

SA Department for Environment and Water has indicated that from 2019-2021 there has been a 33% reduction in carbon and greenhouse gas emissions from 2005, highlighting the increased awareness the food industry has maintained.³⁸ Since the South Australian single use plastic ban was initiated in 2020, it has led to a significant reduction of carbon emissions across all SA industries.

Thus, it is evident that most South Australian food businesses will continue to incorporate these environmental factors, positively influencing consumers as the food and hospitality industry sector continues to evolve.

²⁹ Government of South Australia – Green Industries SA, 2020, "Single use plastics product legislation," <https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/plastic-free-precincts>, date accessed 28th August 2021.

³⁰ Government of South Australia, 2021, "Replace the waste – from March 1st 2022," <https://www.replacethewaste.sa.gov.au/#:~:text=From%20March%201%2C%202022,or%20production%20in%20the%20state>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

³¹ Zero Waste SA – Government of South Australia, 2011-2015, "South Australia's waste strategies," <https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/green-industries-sa-and-food-south-australia>, date accessed 6th August 2021.

³² Government of South Australia – Green Industries SA, 2021, "Green Industries SA and Food South Australia," <https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/green-industries-sa-and-food-south-australia>, date 6th August 2021.

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³⁴ *Pantry on Egmont*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 24th July 2021.

³⁵ *Seafaring fools*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

³⁶ *Café Verde*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 24th July 2021.

³⁷ *Ragi's café*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

³⁸ The Australian Government – Department for Environment and water, 2019, "South Australia's greenhouse gas emissions," <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/climate-change/south-australias-greenhouse-gas-emissions>, date accessed 29th August 2021.

FQ3: What has been the response of single use plastics in South Australia from consumers?

The response of South Australian customers to the single use plastic ban has been mixed. Many community members have been delighted with the changes they have been pushing for, whilst others are resistant to the change.^{39 40}

An interviewer from *9 News* states, "It's been a long time coming and its fantastic that it's finally happened."⁴¹ Another indicating, "There is too much plastic in our ocean so it's about time that these changes are made..... It's been amazing, there are so many other options out there that work."⁴²

Immense planning and preparation by the Government has ensured customers' demands are met, resulting in the South Australian community's positive feedback.⁴³ This positive feedback is likely due to an increase in awareness around the frequent use and detrimental impact of plastics upon the environment.⁴⁴ A Brighton café worker commented on this awareness, "as we are near the beach most of our clients are conscious of the environment, so having business values which comply with customer values is important."⁴⁵

However, while many customers have been satisfied with the change, some have criticised the alternatives such as cutlery and especially straws as these soak up water and bend slightly after a few uses. One business in particular has noticed this irritation for customers, making a change to sugar cane straws and bamboo substitutes that withstand soaking for 24 hours.^{46 47} Courtney Writer for the *NRDC* reveals "we often prioritise convenience over durability and consideration of long-term impacts when using takeaway plastics."⁴⁸

A survey conducted by the South Australian Government, 2019, uncovered concerns many South Australians have regarding single use plastics, providing a list of plastic examples the Government could eliminate.⁴⁹ *Forbes Sustainable Packaging* declared, "most customers want to do their part to help the environment and are aware of their purchases"⁵⁰, despite the increase to consumer spending.⁵¹

Local interviews confirming this, revealed that prior to the South Australian lockdown less customers were purchasing takeaway meals, in an attempt to reduce further increases in landfill.⁵² However, to assist in minimising excessive waste issues, some customers have decided to use their own metal straws and utensils prior to the Governments implementation, leading to a decrease in expenses from both consumer and business.⁵³

³⁹ *The Nourished Kitchen*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

⁴⁰ *A Mother's milk*, SA Food company, Interview, 2021, Adelaide, conducted 22nd July 2021.

⁴¹ *9 News Australia*, 28th February 2021, "Single use plastic ban starts tomorrow,"

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⁴³ *Government of South Australia – Green industries*, 23rd August 2019, "Consultation response document - Turning the tide on single use plastic products discussion paper," [https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/media_downloads/200329/Single-use%20Plastics%20Consultation%20Summary%20Report%20\(2019\).pdf](https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/media_downloads/200329/Single-use%20Plastics%20Consultation%20Summary%20Report%20(2019).pdf), date accessed 9th August 2021.

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⁴⁵ *7 News*, 1st March 2021, "Single-use plastics banned in South Australia," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OgmlCxVBqI>, date accessed 3rd September 2021.

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Main Q: *To what extent has the food and hospitality industry responded to the single use plastic ban in South Australia?* **971456F**

It is evident, through public response, that the community and Government have acted to shape and positively influence the food and hospitality industry. The single use plastic ban highlights the delicate balance required in satisfying the demands and obligations of the Government, food industry and consumers. Overall, the South Australian public have embraced the new legislation and witnessed the positive impacts of landfill reductions and other environmental benefits, despite cost.

Conclusion:

Overall, the food and hospitality industry have responded in a positive way to the single use plastic ban initiative for South Australian businesses. Financially, it has been expensive for the food industry to persist in purchasing such packaging, however, due to influential customer feedback and legal regulations the industry will continue to partake in these alternatives. Additionally, food businesses have been influenced by the contemporary sustainable trends presented by the community to review other unsustainable areas of their business. These include green energy and additional biodegradable takeaway containers and packaging. The single use plastic ban has had a significant influence upon the industry causing business owners to not only consider packaging options but also minimise carbon footprint and realise the importance of buying South Australian and locally grown produce. This awareness as a whole has likely led to a reduction in South Australia's carbon emissions. Evidence suggests that both consumers and businesses will need to push for further evolution of sustainable strategies and products to make sustainable alternatives more readily available, lower costs and reduce environmental impacts.

Word count: 1999

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