



**STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT  
ON THE PLASTIC AND STYROFOAM BAN  
BY  
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(LAND, ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, INVESTMENT)  
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**Introduction**

Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to wish yourself, the staff of Parliament and my esteemed colleagues on both sides of the divide, a happy, safe, and prosperous new year at the beginning of a new decade.

I stand here today to give you a brief update on the plastic ban which includes the ban on polystyrene (Styrofoam) products used in the food and beverage industries as of January 1, 2020.

I will also give a brief update on the upcoming third phase which includes plastic PET bottles, recycling and the Deposit Refund Scheme.

**Update on the Ban on Single Use Plastics**

Mr. Speaker, on September 17, 2018, the Government of Jamaica announced a policy to implement a ban on single-use plastic (scandal) bags, plastic drinking straws and expanded polystyrene foam products used in the food and beverage industry in three phases starting January 1, 2019.

The ban is but one measure to safeguard the nation's natural and built environments. The Ministry of Economic Growth & Job Creation was challenged to fast-track the Orders to support implementation. Two Orders were prepared and gazetted on December 24, 2018.

These are:

- The Natural Resources Conservation Authority (Plastic Packaging Materials Prohibition) Order, 2018
- The Trade (Plastic Packaging Materials Prohibition) Order, 2018

Mr. Speaker, the Government developed and implemented a public education programme, using all media to support the ban.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

In doing so, we were careful to engage all stakeholders as it went forward with the policy ban including the Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association (JMEA); the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC); Small Business Association of Jamaica (SBAJ); National Consumers League of Jamaica; individual manufacturers; importers and distributors, among others.

A dedicated brand, Plastic Free Jamaica, was also established to mark the start of the ban on January 1, 2019 as well as the implementation of a dedicated hotline (876-285-8531) and email address - **policyonplasticban@nepa.gov.jm** to handle queries. Over 800 calls and emails have been received to date.

## **National Reaction**

Mr. Speaker, the Government is extremely pleased with the overwhelming positive national reaction and response to the policy announcement. The support is estimated at over 90% coming from the sector groups, other stakeholders and consumers in general.

Clear evidence of the positive response is the rapid disappearance of single-use plastic bags and plastic straws from the trade and the pronounced behaviour change and attitude coming from the Jamaican people.

## **Monitoring and Enforcement**

Mr. Speaker, prosecution is never the preferred strategy, but the Government saw the need to put in the fines for those who are non-compliant and ensure that the legislative backing was in place should enforcement of the ban become a challenge.

The maximum fine under the Trade Act (Trade Plastic Packing Material Order) 2018, is Two Million Dollars (\$2M), while under the NRCA (Plastic Packaging Prohibiting) Order 2018, the fine is Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000). Both Orders carry a term of imprisonment of two (2) years, respectively.

Unfortunately Mr. Speaker, to date, six businesses have been fined under The Natural Resources Conservation Authority (Plastic Packaging Materials Prohibition) Order, 2018. Thirty (30) other businesses and individuals will face the courts in the coming weeks – making a total of thirty six (36) businesses prosecuted, up to the present.

Warning notices were issued to the non-compliant persons and companies before enforcement action was taken.

Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate, the Government will be taking strong enforcement action against those persons and companies that do not comply with the ban.

The Jamaica Customs Agency has also held firm at the ports of entry confiscating banned items, preventing them from entering the trade.

### **Ban on Polystyrene (Styrofoam) Products**

Mr. Speaker, we have now moved to **phase two** of the ban which restricts the manufacturing, distribution and use of expanded polystyrene foam (Styrofoam) products in the food and beverage industry.

However, we expect an even smoother transition from the use of Polystyrene products to the alternatives on the market for the simple reason that persons and businesses have had a much longer time to prepare themselves for the ban.

Mr. Speaker, if you recall, when we announced the plastic ban in September 2018, at the same time we also announced that the ban on Styrofoam products would come into effect in January 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that 15-months is more than adequate time for businesses to identify suitable alternative packaging at cost effective prices.

Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns, was that the alternatives would not be available in quantities to support the policy ban. However, the market has responded with a variety of reusable bags, containers and paper straws making the transition easier.

We also expect that the prices for alternatives will trend downwards in the coming months, based on the fact that businesses would have retooled, as well as the competition in the market place.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that the sole local manufacturer of polystyrene (Styrofoam) products has opted to close that section of his business. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that in the process, 100 persons were made redundant.

However, at the core of the policy's implementation is a greater focus on pollution control with the aim of improving the lives of all Jamaicans as well as safeguarding public health and the environment. Mr Speaker, the measures we are adopting has Jamaica at heart, and it is Jamaica that will ultimately be the winner.

As was the case with the ban on single use plastics, the Ministry and NEPA are again partnering on an extensive public awareness programme regarding the Styrofoam ban.

So far we have visited the parishes of Manchester and St. Catherine. It is still early days regarding feedback, but it was noted that a number of establishments in these Parishes were compliant.

However, there are a few areas that will have to be revisited and appropriate action taken where necessary.

### **Some of the benefits of the Ban**

Mr. Speaker, since the ban, the country has witnessed a pronounced reduction of plastics in the terrestrial and marine environment. We have observed significant behaviour and attitude change with regard to the banned items and Jamaicans calling for the banning of more items such as utensils, pampers and other plastic food containers.

Mr. Speaker, several business opportunities for large corporations and MSMEs have also blossomed from this initiative with businesses being developed to specialize in the alternatives.

### **Deposit Refund Scheme**

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS). The Deposit Refund Scheme (DRS) is solely a private sector initiative which is being implemented through the Recycling Partners of Jamaica (RPJ). It was launched during September 2019.

This follows the implementation of a \$1 cess on PET bottles to establish start-up capital.

The Government's ultimate target in the short-to-medium term is the recovery of at a minimum, 80% of the PET bottles currently on the market.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector partners have already established islandwide collection centres and are to further fine-tune the system to collect PET bottles. Eighteen (18) locations islandwide have been established as drop-off points by the RPJ.

RPJ will report quarterly to the GOJ, through the Minister with responsibility for the Environment, on its progress, successes and challenges as we move forward.

## **Closing**

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize and pay tribute to the sterling work of my own Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation and the leadership and staff of several public sector Departments and Agencies.

They include the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA); the Jamaica Customs Agency; the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA); the National Compliance Regulatory Authority (NCRA) and the Bureau of Standards, all of whom have worked feverishly and with diligence to effect the Government's policy, making it a resounding success.