

Murray. Backyard water bans are a distraction from governments' lack of action on water projects.

Addressing South Australia's water problems includes separating Adelaide from the Murray and allowing our farmers and river communities full access to the Murray's available water. Adelaide has a long coastline with consistent winds. Re-using waste water and combining wind energy with desalination would afford coastal rural communities and Adelaide itself access to green and plentiful solutions, at a price within our ability to pay.

State governments across the country are headed the same way with plastic bags. It's another example of a ban which is unnecessary, won't work, will cause community pain, and carry hidden social and economic costs. What will be 'fixed', by banning plastic shopping bags? Plastic bags are not the litter culprit they are alleged to be, so litter won't be reduced markedly.

Plastic bags make up two per cent of Australia's litter. Of the plastic bags used, a tiny one per cent end up as litter. And the oft-alleged damage that plastic bags cause to sea life (usually photogenic dolphins and turtles) misrepresents scientific reports which refer to the harm caused by plastic debris—mainly nets and fishing lines.

Nevertheless, we are already plastic-bag savvy—93 per cent of shoppers re-use or recycle their plastic bags.

The value of education over enforcement has again been acknowledged by government, with Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett referring to voluntary action (including by supermarkets) causing plastic bag numbers to drop from 7 billion bags in 2002 to 4 billion now.

State government's plans to ban plastic shopping bags defy independent research showing the proposed ban on 57 per cent of the state's plastic bags would be inefficient and more expensive than the litter problem at which it is allegedly aimed.

Governments should do away with bans and prohibitions, embracing education and eschewing bureaucratic inaction.

Australians are increasingly waste-wise and prudent with plastic bags, re-using them, not misusing them. With education and constructive government action, we can do even better—but not with bans or prohibitions.

That's not to say that we should never have bans or restrictions imposed by law. But they should be the very last resort, not headline-grabbing camouflage for inaction. It's a matter of balance—a balance which Australians are letting governments take increasingly out of kilter.

Building the Australian Nanny State

Free bibs

Victorian Deputy Premier Rob Hulls has announced an additional \$35,000 of funding for Auskick programs to provide bibs and waist bags to identify volunteers who had met working with children checks.

V-chip for Australia

The Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts has recommended that parental content controls be mandatory on all new digital televisions and set top boxes. This technology is already in use in the USA (known as the V-Chip) where only 15 per cent who have the device bother using it.

Local councils

Manly City Council in NSW is undoubtedly the epicentre of the Nanny State in Australia. Attempts have been made to ban the sale of bubblegum in shopping centres, the sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores, smoking on the beach, plastic bags and the sale of bottled water at public events.

Run for your life

Soft drinks, chocolate bars, lollies and ice-cream are likely to become the next victim of the Nanny State. In Victoria, the sale of soft drinks at government schools has already been banned, with all confectionary to be phased out by the end of the year as part of the 'go for your life' Healthy Canteen Package. The most exciting snack on the menu is a frozen banana on a stick.

Junk food

Groups such as the Australian Medical Association are calling for a ban on junk food advertising targeting children, a proposal which was strongly rejected by the Howard government. Adult obesity rates are much higher than children's rates in Australia; perhaps parents should consider leading by example rather than blaming snap, crackle and pop.

Net nanny

The Howard Government tried to make the internet safe for children with their free parental content control software called net nanny. The initiative was underutilised; Telstra stated that only one per cent of its customers utilised the software. The Rudd government will go further by ensuring all internet feeds are censored. Users must opt out to receive an uncensored feed.

- Christopher Murn



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