



# Plastic Bag Free Town – Maldon

# CASE STUDY

## Project Background

The town of Maldon is located 20kms north of Castlemaine in the Central Goldfields region of Victoria. A former gold-mining town, the area is now known for its historic town centre, scenic countryside and was declared Australia's First Notable Town in 1965 by the National Trust of Australia.

As well as traditional retail stores, including a supermarket, butchers and pharmacy, catering for the 1,500 residents, Maldon is a popular tourist town and so hosts a range of luxury homewares, clothing and local gourmet produce retailers.

In 2016/17 the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group allocated funding to support three towns within the region in becoming Plastic Bag Free. For a town to achieve this status no retail stores can distribute single use plastic bags to customers unless complying with OH&S requirements. Maldon Inc, Maldon's business network, nominated the town to participate in the program.

### The objectives of the project were to:

1. Work with Maldon businesses to replace single use plastic bags with a more sustainable alternative such as paper or calico.
2. Raise the profile of Maldon as a Plastic Bag Free Town.

## Project Overview

Of the 60 retail stores in Maldon thirteen provided single use plastic bags to customers. The transition process took approximately six months from initial meeting with Maldon Inc to program launch. The process involved:

1. Face to face conversations with store managers/owners to establish:
  - a. Bags currently supplied to customers,
  - b. Whether they were supportive of the Plastic Bag Free Program
  - c. Barriers they saw to becoming Plastic Bag Free
  - d. Alternative bag most appropriate for their store.
2. Distribution of sample paper and calico bags to stores and following up with managers/owners a week later for feedback.
3. One month from launch, radio and newspaper media campaign to inform community of transition and launch.
4. One week from launch, distribution of paper and calico bags to businesses as well as information on transition date and process.
5. Launch Plastic Bag Free Maldon Program with community event and town raffle.
6. One month after launch, follow up with businesses to identify successes and issues.



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## Outcomes

When the program launched all thirteen businesses that previously provided customers with single use plastic bags transitioned to paper and calico bags.

Despite fears that the IGA supermarket and butchers would be opposed to the program, due to the number of customers they have and plastic bags they distribute, they were in fact the greatest supporters. The supermarket now sells paper and reusable bags and provides cardboard boxes free of charge. The butchers, though still required to wrap meat in plastic, now provides branded paper bags to customers, which has helped promote their business.

Surveys conducted four weeks after the transition showed that no businesses had returned to single use plastic bags. There had been some resistance from customers when plastic bags were first removed, particularly at the supermarket, however the frequency of complaints quickly reduced and the majority of customers have been supportive of the program.

## Conclusion

The Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group will continue to work with businesses in Maldon over the coming years. A follow-up visit will be conducted six months after the launch and, following that, every 24 months. The aim of these visits will be to check whether businesses are still plastic bag free, assess the level of community support and supply information to new businesses in the town.

Maldon Inc have made an ongoing commitment to work with new businesses that open within the town to support them in complying with the Plastic Bag Free program. They will also establish a paper bag buying network for businesses that have moved to paper from single-use plastic bags. This will allow the businesses to buy bags in larger volumes, and therefore at lower cost than they would if purchasing bags individually.

Now that an effective transition process has been established it will be rolled out to other towns within the Loddon Mallee region.

