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Takeaway Throwaways campaign launches to tackle New Zealand's waste crisis

Zero waste campaigners are petitioning the Government to take a more active stance in tackling Aotearoa New Zealand's waste crisis, with a comprehensive ban on single-use disposable plastic food and drink serviceware, and a phasing in of accessible, reusable alternatives.

Laura Cope, founder of New Zealand's responsible café guide, Use Your Own (UYO), has joined forces with Hannah Blumhardt and Liam Prince, co-founders of The Rubbish Trip, to launch the campaign, Takeaway Throwaways.

Blumhardt says that the country must move away from a throwaway culture towards a circular, reuse economy, and that takeaway food and drink packaging is a great first test case.

"The scale of the country's waste problem can be overwhelming, so tackling the easier things first makes sense," she said.

The Takeaway Throwaways petition is calling on the Government to introduce a mandatory phase-out of disposable food and drink serviceware containing plastic (including degradable, biodegradable and compostable plastic), such as cups and lids, food containers, cutlery, and single-serve condiment sachets and pottles.

The petition excludes plastic straws from the proposed list of banned items because some disabled people require plastic straws to drink.

The petition is also calling for the Government to mandate reusable alternatives to replace disposables, and to require that these alternatives are accessible, and co-designed with a wide range of stakeholders.

"The Government has a role not only in taking away throwaways, but in creating the right conditions for reusables to flourish. What's more, the powers to do all this exist already

under the Waste Minimisation Act 2008. The Government just needs to push play," Blumhardt says.

"We've seen recent headway in this area with proposals to phase out takeaway cups and containers made of PVC and polystyrene. However, the scale of our waste problem demands more urgent, strategic solutions that target a wider range of products and that encourage and support a reuse culture."

Cope says the changes called for in the petition would support, boost and normalise the growing culture of reuse amongst individuals, community groups and the hospitality sector.

"We are seeing more and more cafes voluntarily jump on board with reuse systems and reusable alternatives, and customers embracing BYO cups and containers. Increasingly, events and festivals around the country are cutting back on disposable serviceware too.

"However, takeaway throwaways remain pervasive. People are often confused about what to do with single-use items once they're finished with them, which can lead to waste stream contamination. The emergence of various 'compostables' has increased confusion and further enabled a throwaway culture. Replacing all these products with reusables seems simply logical," she said.

The Takeaway Throwaways campaign encourages those who support the cause to sign the petition, but also to consider how they can influence a shift towards reusables in their own lives, workplaces, businesses and communities.

"We can make this shift to a reuse culture and a zero waste society. The potential for innovation is really exciting. We could be leading the world and offering a real solution to the plastic pollution problem at grassroots, business and Government level," said Cope.

The Takeaway Throwaways petition, FAQs and resources about reuse systems and reusable alternatives can be accessed at www.takeawaythrowaways.nz

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