

Countdown joins the rebellion

How far around Countdown can you get before putting plastic into your trolley?

Extinction Rebellion Waiheke (XRW) is ramping up the drive to minimise plastic waste on supermarket shelves.

On Wednesday, Robyn Bailey of XRW, which is part of an international movement calling for governments to take urgent action to limit climate change, met with Countdown manager Brad Rossiter and sustainability representative Charlotte Haycock.

"Consumer buying habits are dictated by Countdown," said Robyn, who asked the supermarket to make changes to increase plastic-free options.

"Shoppers usually put items such as loose fruit and vegetables into small plastic bags provided in the fruit and vegetable section. We're asking Countdown to look at introducing a bag stand near the entrance to the supermarket and the fresh produce section."

The proposed stand would hold a selection of small, reusable, drawstring, paper or mesh bags for people to put fruit and vegetables in.

Robyn also recommended that in light of Waiheke's reliance on septic tank systems, the supermarket should look at getting rid of the type of harsh drain cleaners which kill the essential bacteria needed by septic systems.

"As a business, we have always accepted that Waiheke is its own ecosystem and is home to an environmentally savvy community," said Charlotte.

"We will look into providing options for reusable fruit and vegetable bags. Countdown also has a couple of trials underway, which will likely be rolled out in all stores."

One trial which began on 10 June is giving customers in 18 stores – including two in Auckland – the choice to re-use their own BYO containers at deli, meat and seafood counters.

"Part of our service will include training our team, making sure containers are clean and leak-proof, and ensuring they are weighed correctly to ensure



Extinction Rebellion's Robyn Bailey met with Countdown manager Brad Rossiter on Wednesday. Photo Sophie Boladeras

customers are only paying for the weight of the product they've purchased," says Kiri Hannifin, general manager corporate affairs, safety and sustainability.

"All of the feedback from our customers and team in these first 18 stores will be used to tweak our systems before we roll this programme out nationwide."

Charlotte says the supermarket chain is currently undertaking a packaging audit, and "on completion, we will look at where to make changes".

Also under way is the installation of misting systems to remove the need for plastic fruit and vegetable packaging and a partnership with three food rescue partners to minimise food waste.

Countdown and the Island Waste Collective have also installed a "hand-it-on-bags" stand at the storefront, which enables shoppers to borrow a reusable bag or two and return them the next time they shop.

Meanwhile, at June's local board

meeting, XRW representatives put forward several environmental initiatives including a local ban on plastic takeaway containers, electric buses and ferries and a ban on cutting down native trees more than three metres tall.

"We want to encourage the board to take a look at their own practices as an entity too, not just those that affect their ratepayers," says Robyn.

"We suggested the switch to plant-based catering at all council and local board meetings."

Auckland Council recently approved a Climate Action Framework, which sets out 11 key moves and a range of short and long-term actions to deliver reductions in emissions and resilience to climate change with public consultation opening soon. To get involved in local environmental initiatives visit Extinction Rebellion Waiheke on Facebook.

• Sophie Boladeras



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