

**Opposing argument:** "We should ban single-use plastics because they harm the environment. Plastic bags, straws, and bottles take hundreds of years to decompose, and they end up in oceans, killing marine life. The science is clear, and the harm is well documented."

**Rebuttal:**

My opponent's argument is built on three claims, that single-use plastics harm the environment, that they take hundreds of years to decompose, and that the science is clear. I will address each in turn, and show that the policy proposed does not follow from the facts presented.

First, the harm claim. Yes, plastic in the ocean is harmful. But the proposed ban is on consumer single-use plastics, which account for less than ten percent of ocean plastic. The remaining ninety percent comes from fishing gear, industrial waste, and a handful of polluted rivers in countries with poor waste management. Banning straws in our country does not address ninety percent of the problem. It addresses ten percent of ten percent.

Second, the decomposition claim. Plastics taking hundreds of years to decompose is true, but it is also true of glass, of aluminium foil, and of much of what we replace plastic with. The lifecycle analysis on plastic bag bans consistently shows that the cotton bags that replace them have to be reused over a hundred times to break even environmentally. Most are not reused that often. The replacement is worse than the thing being replaced.

Third, the science is clear claim. The science on the harm is clear. The science on the policy response is not. There is no peer-reviewed evidence that consumer plastic bans, in countries that have tried them, reduce ocean plastic by a measurable amount. If the policy were as effective as my opponent claims, that evidence would exist. It does not.

I am not arguing that we should not act on plastic pollution. I am arguing that we should act where the evidence says action will work, on fishing gear, on industrial waste, on the rivers that produce most of the problem. Banning consumer plastics feels like action, but the data does not support that it is.