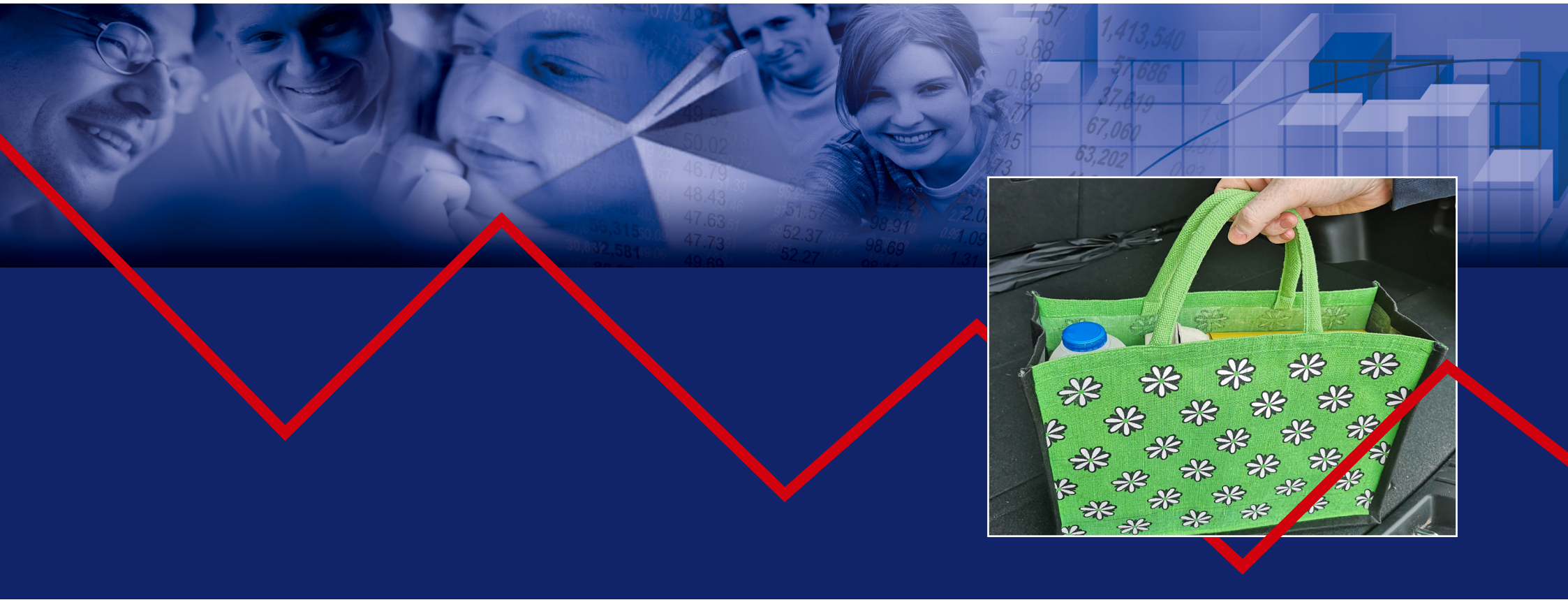


Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy, Annual Statistics 2018/19



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Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy Annual Statistics 2018/19

Date of publication: 22 August 2019

Key points

- During the sixth year of operation, 93.5 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 5.4% lower than the previous year, with 5.3 million fewer bags dispensed. This decrease can be attributed to a decrease in lower rate bags dispensed (22.9% decrease). The number of upper rate bags dispensed increased by 61.7% between 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2018/19 is still markedly lower than the baseline figure prior to the introduction of the levy, which was estimated at 300 million bags in 2012. Year 6 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 68.8% compared to the baseline.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2018/19 totalled £4.6 million, a decrease of £0.3 million (6.1%) from the previous year.

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Frequency: Annual

Reporting Period: 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, referred to as 2018/19

Next update: Data for 2019/20 will be published in August 2020

URL: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics>

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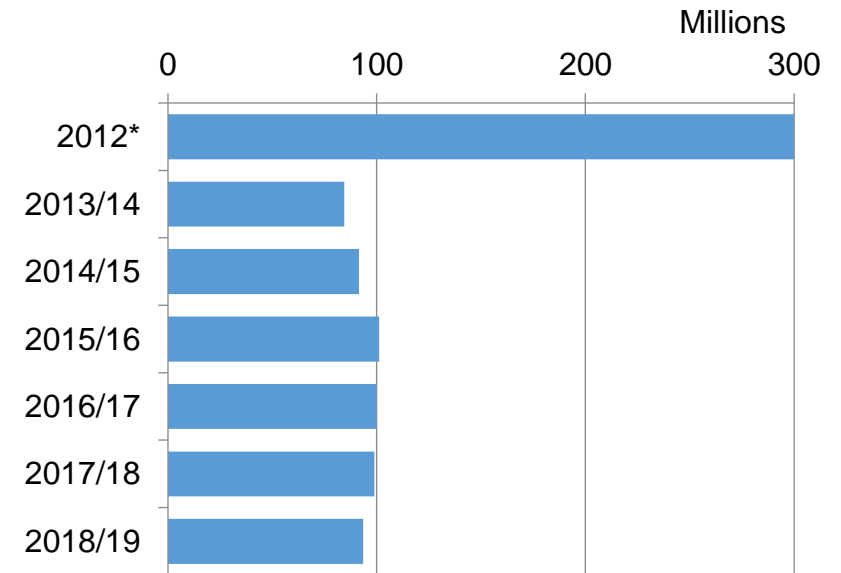
Introduction

The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed in Northern Ireland in the financial year 2018/19. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2019.

Overview

- During the sixth year of operation, 93.5 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 5.4% lower than the previous year, with 5.3 million fewer bags dispensed. This decrease can be attributed to a decrease in lower rate bags dispensed (22.9% decrease). The number of upper rate bags dispensed increased by 61.7% between 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2018/19 is still markedly lower than the baseline figure prior to the introduction of the levy, which was estimated at 300 million bags in 2012. Year 6 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 68.8% compared to the baseline figure which meant approximately 206.5 million fewer bags in circulation in 2018/19 and an estimated 1.2 billion fewer since the introduction of the levy.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2018/19 totalled £4.6 million, a decrease of £0.3 million (6.1%) from the previous year. Proceeds are taken from audited Departmental financial accounts and are not Official Statistics. They cannot be calculated from bag usage figures due to differences in timing and recording.

Figure 1: Carrier bags dispensed by year
Northern Ireland, 2012 to 2018/19



*estimated figure for 2012 calendar year

Note: The scope of the carrier bag levy was extended during the last quarter of 2014/15. This contributed to the increases shown in reported bag numbers after 2013/14.

Background to Regulations

The Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 were made on 15 January 2013 and came into operation on 8 April 2013. From that date, all sellers of goods in Northern Ireland had to charge their customers at least 5 pence (“the levy”) for each single use carrier bag supplied new. From 19 January 2015, the levy was extended to all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, whether they are considered single use or reusable.

- Bags at the **lower rate** are those costing the customer only the 5p levy.
- Bags at the **upper rate** are those which have had a price added by the retailer in advance of the 5p levy being applied.

Prior to 19 January 2015 the levy covered single use carrier bags, typically costing 5 pence. Retailers could charge more than 5 pence however this was uncommon with upper rate bags accounting for just 3% of total bags dispensed. After the levy was extended the numbers of upper rate bags increased as more bags fell within the scope of the Regulations. The extension specifically targeted all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, which included lower-priced reusable bags. The number of upper rate carrier bags dispensed between January and March 2015 i.e. immediately after the extension, was 2.4 million bags, approximately 1.8 million greater than each of the three preceding quarters. Following the change in regulations the number of upper rate bags dispensed ranged between 2.8 to 3.4 million per quarter in 2015/16 and 2016/17. However, in the latest two years the number of upper rate bags has increased with an average of 6.7 million bags dispensed per quarter. It should also be noted that a number of retailers, as part of their internal pricing policy, increased the price of their low cost reusable bags to 20p or above, thereby ensuring such bags were outside the scope of the levy.

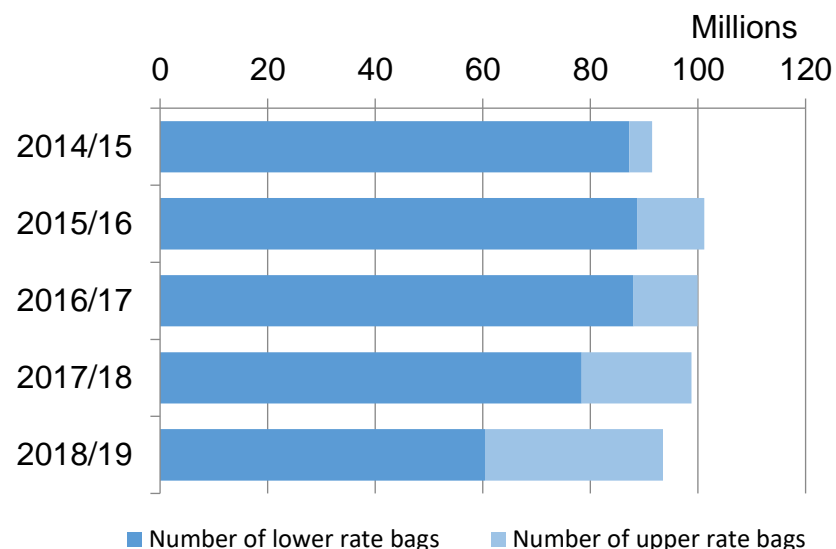
The Continuous Household Survey observed an increase in individuals who are concerned about the environment compared to last year. A total of 75% of respondents in the 2018/19 survey were reported to be very/fairly concerned about environmental issues, which was slightly higher than the 71% reported to be very/fairly concerned about the environment in 2017/18. The survey also showed that most respondents reused plastic bags. In the 2018/19 survey a total of 85% respondents claimed to reuse plastic bags which is slightly more than the 2017/18 figure of 81%.

Seasonal Variation and Trends

The total number of bags dispensed in 2018/19 was 93.5 million which is an overall decrease of 5.4% and equates to 5.3 million fewer bags dispensed since 2017/18. This decrease can mainly be attributed to lower rate bags which fell by 22.9% to 60.4 million bags but is offset by an increase in the number of upper rate bags by 61.7% to 33.0 million bags.

The majority of bags dispensed in Northern Ireland are lower rate bags, 65% (60.4 million) in 2018/19. However this proportion is decreasing as shown in Figure 2. The proportion of lower rate bags dispensed has decreased from 95% in 2014/15 to 65% in 2018/19.

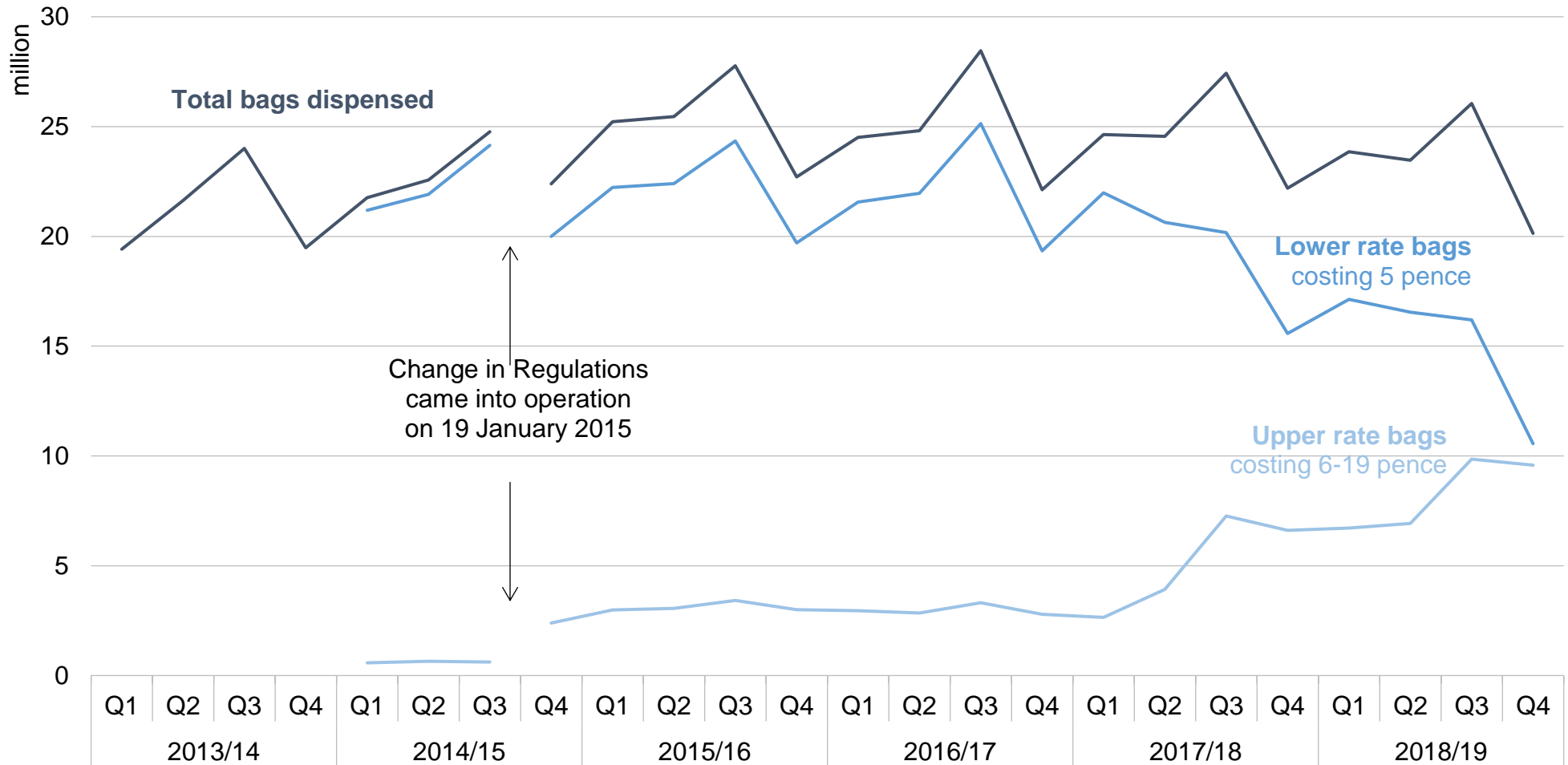
Figure 2: Carrier bags dispensed by rate
Northern Ireland, 2014/15 to 2018/19



In 2018/19 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 23.9 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2018), 23.5 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2018), rising to a peak of 26.0 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2018). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2019) reduced to 20.1 million. As shown in Figure 3, this pattern is similar to previous year's trends which show little difference in the number of bags sold in Q1 and Q2, sales rising in Q3, followed by a decrease in Q4.

Looking at the change across quarters since last year, all quarters showed reductions with the largest decrease in quarter 4 (9.3%) and the smallest in quarter 1 (3.2%). Lower rate bags followed a similar trend with all four quarters decreasing since last year. Quarter 4 had the largest decrease (32.2%) whilst quarters 2 and 3 had the smallest decreases at 19.8% and 19.7% respectively. Upper rate bags showed the opposite trend with all quarters recording an increased number of bags since 2017/18. The largest increase was in quarter 1 where upper rate bag numbers more than doubled since last year whilst quarter 3 had the smallest increase at 35.7%.

Figure 3: Number of carrier bags dispensed by quarter, year and rate
Northern Ireland, Q1 2013/14 to Q4 2018/19



Tables

Table 1: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2013/14 to 2018/19

Quarter	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	'000 thousands	
							Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	19,414.0	21,762.9	25,221.7	24,508.1	24,635.3	23,854.4	-780.9	-3.2%
July to September	21,627.3	22,566.5	25,456.1	24,811.7	24,557.0	23,466.1	-1,090.9	-4.4%
October to December	24,004.6	24,763.4	27,764.0	28,452.3	27,432.3	26,045.8	-1,386.5	-5.1%
January to March	19,486.0	22,389.0	22,711.7	22,121.8	22,194.9	20,132.6	-2,062.3	-9.3%
Total	84,531.9	91,481.7	101,153.6	99,893.9	98,819.5	93,499.0	-5,320.5	-5.4%

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

Table 2: Lower rate carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2013/14 to 2018/19

Quarter	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	'000 thousands	
							Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	n/a	21,183.7	22,232.7	21,559.2	21,982.4	17,134.3	-4,848.1	-22.1%
July to September	n/a	21,915.2	22,401.0	21,960.2	20,638.4	16,542.1	-4,096.3	-19.8%
October to December	n/a	24,143.7	24,341.5	25,134.8	20,169.4	16,191.4	-3,978.0	-19.7%
January to March	n/a	19,999.7	19,707.6	19,337.1	15,581.1	10,557.4	-5,023.7	-32.2%
Total	n/a	87,242.3	88,682.7	87,991.2	78,371.2	60,425.3	-17,945.9	-22.9%

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

*Bags at the **lower rate** are those only costing the customer the 5p levy.*

Table 3: Upper rate carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2013/14 to 2018/19

Quarter	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	'000 thousands	
							Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	n/a	579.1	2,989.0	2,949.0	2,652.9	6,720.1	4,067.2	153.3%
July to September	n/a	651.3	3,055.2	2,851.4	3,918.6	6,924.0	3,005.4	76.7%
October to December	n/a	619.7	3,422.6	3,317.6	7,262.9	9,854.4	2,591.5	35.7%
January to March	n/a	2,389.3	3,004.2	2,784.7	6,613.8	9,575.2	2,961.4	44.8%
Total	n/a	4,239.4	12,470.9	11,902.7	20,448.2	33,073.7	12,625.5	61.7%

*As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.**Bags at the **upper rate** are those which have had a price added by the retailer in advance of the 5p levy being applied.***Table 4: Proportion of upper and lower rate bags by year**

Northern Ireland, 2014/15 to 2018/19

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Lower rate bags	95%	88%	88%	79%	65%
Upper rate bags	5%	12%	12%	21%	35%
Total bags	91,482	101,154	99,894	98,819	93,499

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

From 19 January 2015 the levy was extended hence lower and upper rate didn't apply prior to this. See the Background to Regulations section for more information. The effect of this change on the numbers dispensed is discussed in more detail in the 2015/16 carrier bag levy report, available from <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics>.

These tables are also available in spreadsheet format from <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics>.

Background information

1. This is the sixth year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2018/19. The Department intends to publish 2019/20 figures in August 2020. Reports from previous years can be accessed from: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics>.
2. Bags which are exempt from the levy, such as those used solely to contain unpackaged raw food or hot foods / hot drinks, are not included in the data. Retailers are not required to record this information. The main exemptions are listed on carrier bag levy section of nidirect and the full list is available from Schedule 1 of the Regulations.
 - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carrier-bag-levy>
 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2013/4/regulation/1/made>
 - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/7/pdfs/nia_20140007_en.pdf
3. The figures are based on data supplied by 2,451 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2019. Note that this is not the number of actual premises at which carrier bags are dispensed, as one retailer can submit returns for more than one outlet.
4. The Department's estimate of the number of bags dispensed in 2012 (300 million) is derived from UK-wide Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) data for 2008. The data were adjusted to take account of reductions in bag usage as a result of voluntary retailer measures since 2008.
5. The figures presented in the release will not equate precisely to the total bags dispensed in the year due to the 30 June cut-off date applied for the production of Official Statistics. For each year reported it has been estimated that the number of bags notified by 30 June has been around 3% lower than the actual total number of bags dispensed in that year.
6. Company returns are audited by Carrier Bag Levy Team, which has responsibility for administration and collection of the levy and ensuring that sellers comply with the Regulations. Guidance on carrier bag levy enforcement is available from <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/guidance-carrier-bag-levy-enforcement>. Initial validation checks are carried out by Carrier Bag Levy Team with further validation by Statistics and Analytical Service Branch in DAERA. Any discrepancies are queried with Carrier Bag Levy Team. More information on the quality assurance of these statistics is available in the data quality report: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics-data-quality-report-administrative-data-source>.
7. These statistics are released according to the Statement of Compliance with the Pre-release access to Official Statistics Order (NI) 2009, <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/dard-statistics-charter-and-pre-release-access-statements>. Official Statistics are produced to a high professional standard. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced

free from any political interference. As we want to engage with users of our statistics, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication. Contact details are included on page one.

8. More information on the carrier bag levy can be found on nidirect at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carrier-bag-levy>.

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