

# Northern Ireland carrier bag levy annual statistics 2015/16

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## Key points

- During the third year of operation, 101.2 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 10.6% higher than the previous year, as 9.7 million more bags were dispensed. A change to the Regulations in January 2015 contributed to the increase.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2015/16 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 3 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 66.3% compared to the baseline.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2015/16 totalled £5.2 million, an increase of £0.5 million (10.8%) from the previous year.

**Coverage:** Northern Ireland  
**Theme:** Agriculture and Environment  
**Frequency:** Annual  
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**Next update:** Data for 2016/17 will be published in August 2017

**URL:** <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/carrier-bag-levy-annual-statistics>

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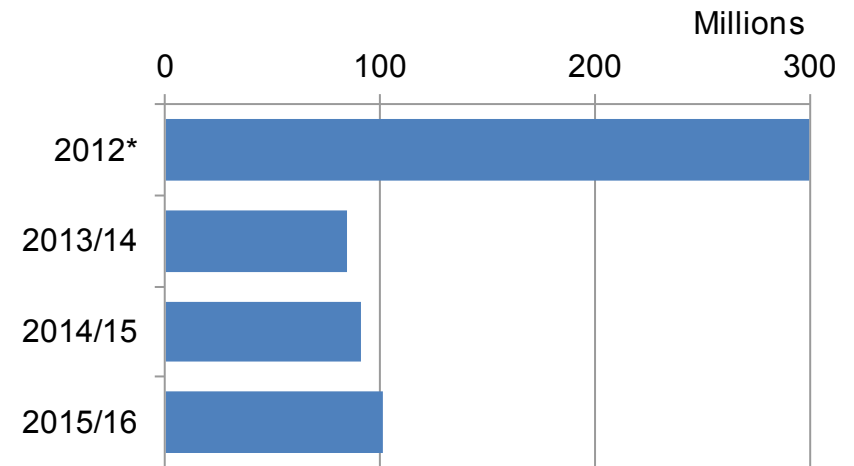
## Introduction

The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed in Northern Ireland in the financial year 2015/16. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2016.

## Overview

- During the third year of operation, 101.2 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 10.6% higher than the previous year, as 9.7 million more bags were dispensed. It is important to note that a change was made to the Regulations during the last quarter of 2014/15 and came into operation on 19 January 2015. This meant more bags fell within the scope of the Regulations and consequently additional bag usage being reported throughout 2015/16 than during the first three quarters of 2014/15. This contributed to the greater number of carrier bags dispensed.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2015/16 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 3 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 66.3% compared to the baseline figure which meant approximately 198.8 million fewer bags in circulation.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2015/16 totalled £5.2 million, an increase of £0.5 million (10.8%) 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**  
Northern Ireland, 2012 to 2015/16



\*estimated figure for 2012 calendar year

## Change 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 compared with 12% in 2015/16. 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. In each of the first three quarters in 2015/16 there were between 2.4 and 2.8 million more upper rate carrier bags dispensed than in the respective quarters of 2014/15.

The extension of the levy was the main factor in the large increase of 10.6% from 91.5 million carrier bags dispensed in 2014/15 to 101.2 million in 2015/16. The impact can be seen after the break in the time series in Figure 2. There was a smaller increase (1.7%) in the number of lower rate carrier bags dispensed, from 87.2 million last year to 88.7 million in the latest year. It is not clear what caused the increase in lower rate bags but one possible reason could be a level of indifference to the negative environmental impacts of carrier bag consumption after the large initial impact of the levy in year 1. The Continuous Household Survey observed a gradual decrease in the level of concern for the environment over the past six years from 82% of respondents very/fairly concerned in 2008/09 to 67% in the latest available year, 2015/16.<sup>1</sup> The same survey also observed no change in the past year in the proportion of respondents who said they reused plastic bags or used a reusable bag (82%).

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.

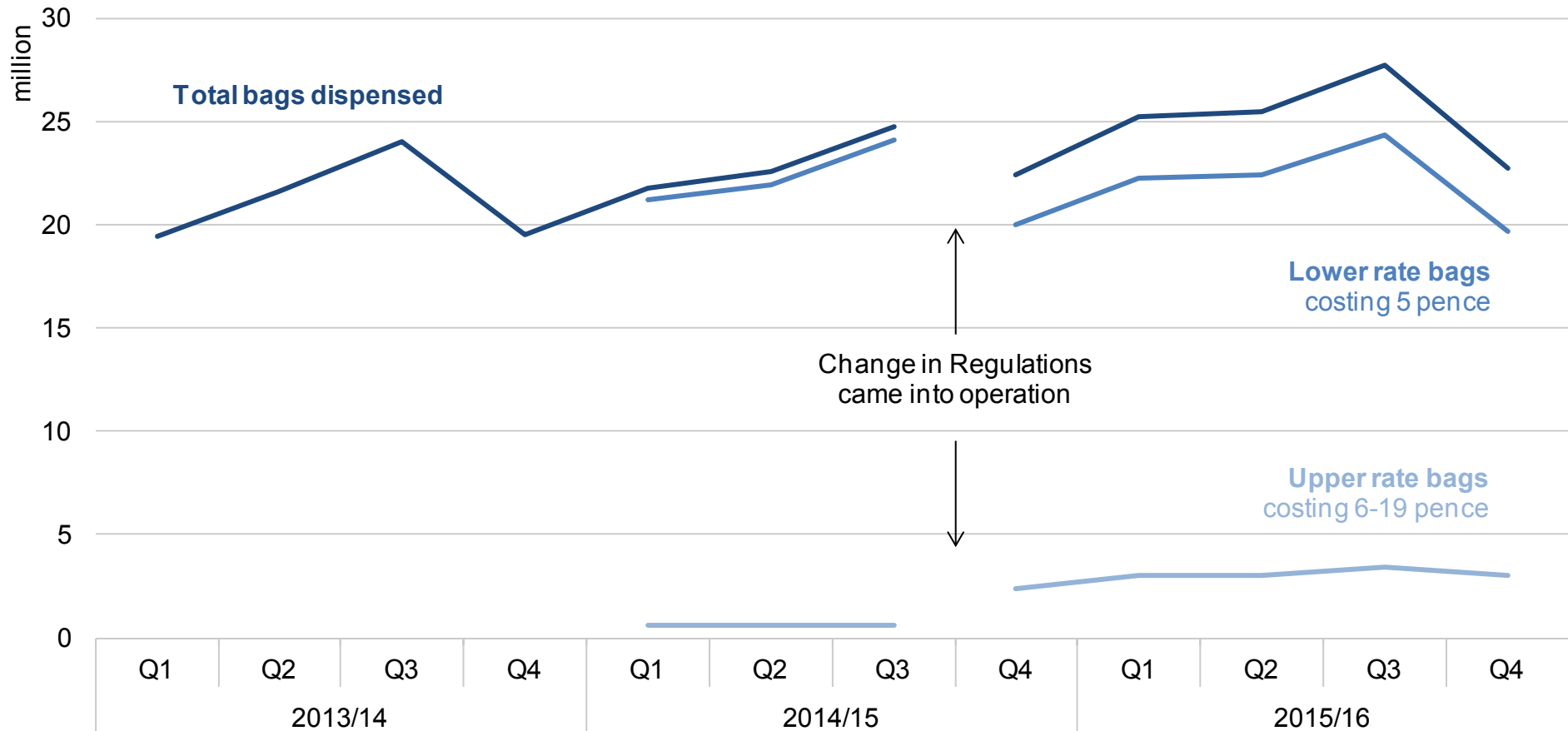
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<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey - environmental issues - [http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/CHS/results/CHS\\_results\\_6.htm](http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/CHS/results/CHS_results_6.htm)

## Seasonal variation

In 2015/16 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 25.2 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2015), 25.5 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2015), rising to a peak of 27.8 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2015). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2016) reduced to 22.7 million. The same pattern, in which more carrier bags are dispensed during quarters 2 and 3, can also be seen in the previous two years, as shown in Figure 2. This seasonal variation may relate to the summer and Christmas periods when there is likely to be a higher volume of tourists and shoppers.

**Figure 2: Number of carrier bags dispensed by rate**  
Northern Ireland, Q1 2013/14 to Q4 2015/16



## Tables

**Table 1: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year**

Northern Ireland, 2013/14 to 2015/16

Quarter	2013/14	2014/15*	2015/16	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	19,413,991	21,762,851	25,221,730	3,458,879	15.9
July to September	21,627,272	22,566,479	25,456,122	2,889,643	12.8
October to December	24,004,619	24,763,376	27,764,032	3,000,656	12.1
January to March	19,486,003	22,388,990	22,711,746	322,756	1.4
Total	84,531,885	91,481,696	101,153,630	9,671,934	10.6

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

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

Northern Ireland, 2014/15 to 2015/16

Quarter	2014/15*	2015/16	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	21,183,724	22,232,690	1,048,966	5.0
July to September	21,915,163	22,400,970	485,807	2.2
October to December	24,143,674	24,341,474	197,800	0.8
January to March	19,999,702	19,707,583	-292,119	-1.5
Total	87,242,263	88,682,717	1,440,454	1.7

*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, 2014/15 to 2015/16

Quarter	2014/15*	2015/16	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	579,127	2,989,040	2,409,913	416.1
July to September	651,316	3,055,152	2,403,836	369.1
October to December	619,702	3,422,558	2,802,856	452.3
January to March	2,389,288	3,004,163	614,875	25.7
Total	4,239,433	12,470,913	8,231,480	194.2

*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.*

\*From 19 January 2015 the levy was extended. See the Change to Regulations section for more information.

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

## Background information

1. This is the third year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2015/16. The Department intends to publish 2016/17 figures in August 2017. Reports from previous years can be accessed from <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/carrier-bag-levy-annual-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>

3. The figures are based on data supplied by 2,963 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2016. 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 is estimated that the number of bags notified by 30 June was around 3% lower than the actual total number of bags dispensed in that year.
6. These figures have undergone audit 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/sites/default/files/publications/carrier-bag-levy-enforcement-guidance.pdf>. 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.
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 on the front cover.
8. More information on the carrier bag levy can be found on nidirect at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carrier-bag-levy>.