

Northern Ireland carrier bag levy annual statistics 2017/18

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Key points

- During the fifth year of operation, 98.8 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 1.1% lower than the previous year, with 1.1 million fewer bags dispensed.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2017/18 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 5 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 67.1% compared to the baseline.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2017/18 totalled £4.9 million, a decrease of £0.1 million (2.0%) from the previous year.
- Since the introduction of the carrier bag levy in 2013 there has been a reduction of an estimated 1 billion bags in circulation in Northern Ireland.

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An Official Statistics publication

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Contact

Statistics and Analytical Services
Branch, Department of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs
Room 816, Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast BT4 3SB

Statistician: Terry Johnston

Telephone: 028 90 378346

Email: env.stats@daera-ni.gov.uk



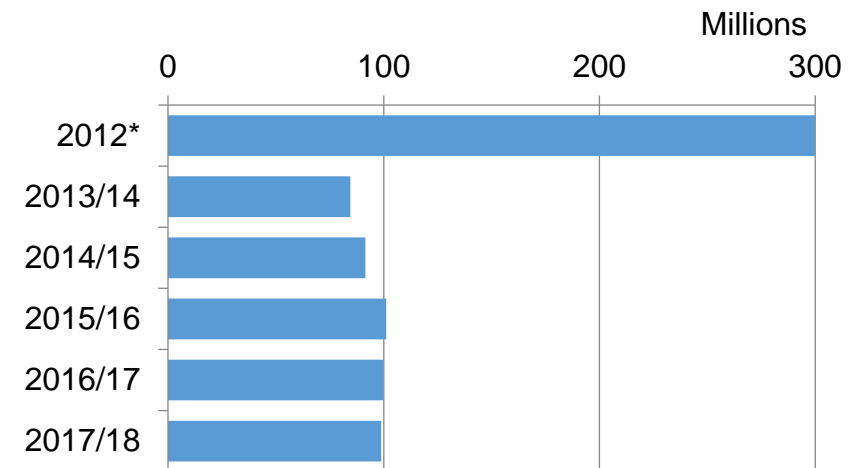
Introduction

The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed in Northern Ireland in the financial year 2017/18. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2018.

Overview

- During the fifth year of operation, 98.8 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 1.1% lower than the previous year, as 1.1 million fewer bags were dispensed.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2017/18 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 5 of the 5p levy saw a reduction in bag numbers of 67.1% compared to the baseline figure which meant approximately 201.2 million fewer bags in circulation.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2017/18 totalled £4.9 million, a decrease of £0.1 million (2%) 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.
- The fifth year of operation marks a milestone for the carrier bag levy as the reduction in the number of bags in circulation across Northern Ireland is estimated to have reached 1 billion bags since the levy was introduced.

Figure 1: Carrier bags dispensed
Northern Ireland, 2012 to 2017/18



*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. However, in 2017/18 the number of upper rate bags has increased with an average of 5.1 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. A total of 72% of respondents in the 2017/18 survey reported to be very/fairly concerned about environmental issues, this is an increase over the 2016/17 figure where 69% reported to be very/fairly concerned about the environment. Although there has been an increase in environmental concern it is still below the 2008/09 figure in which 82% of respondents were very/fairly concerned about environmental issues. The survey also showed that most respondents reused plastic bags. In the 2017/18 survey a total of 82% respondents claimed to reuse plastic bags which is slightly less than the 2016/17 figure of 83%.

Seasonal variation and trends

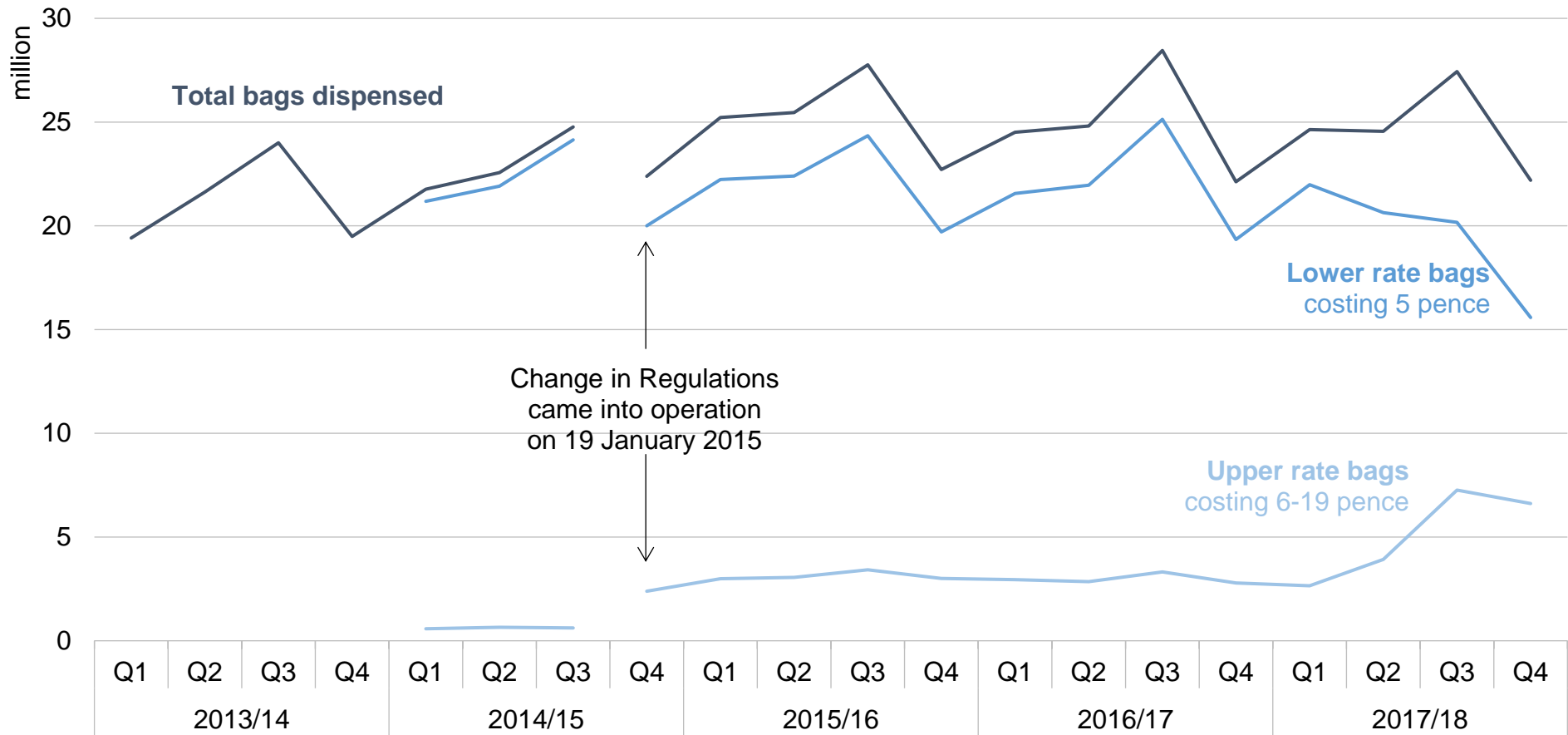
In 2017/18 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 24.6 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2017), 24.6 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2017), rising to a peak of 27.4 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2017). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2018) reduced to 22.2 million. 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.

The majority of bags dispensed in Northern Ireland are lower rate bags, 78.4 million, compared to 20.4 million upper rate bags.

When the number of bags dispensed in 2017/18 is compared to 2016/17, an overall decrease of 1.1% is recorded equating to 1.1 million fewer bags dispensed. Lower rate bags decreased by 10.9% (9.6 million) whilst upper rate bags increased by 71.8% (8.5 million) compared to 2016/17.

Looking at the change across quarters since last year, quarters 2 and 3 showed reductions of 1.0% and 3.6% respectively, whilst quarters 1 and 4 recorded increases of 0.5% and 0.3% respectively in the total number of bags dispensed. Lower rate bags increased by 2.0% in quarter 1 and decreased by 6.0%, 19.8% and 19.4% in quarters 2, 3 and 4. Upper rate bags decreased by 10.0% in quarter 1 and increased by 37.4%, 118.9% and 137.5% in quarters 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 2: Number of carrier bags dispensed by rate
Northern Ireland, Q1 2013/14 to Q4 2017/18



Tables

Table 1: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Quarter	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	19,413,991	21,762,851	25,221,730	24,508,122	24,635,285	127,163	0.5%
July to September	21,627,272	22,566,479	25,456,122	24,811,653	24,557,005	-254,648	-1.0%
October to December	24,004,619	24,763,376	27,764,032	28,452,320	27,432,279	-1,020,041	-3.6%
January to March	19,486,003	22,388,990	22,711,746	22,121,782	22,194,900	73,118	0.3%
Total	84,531,885	91,481,696	101,153,630	99,893,877	98,819,469	-1,074,408	-1.1%

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 2017/18

Quarter	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	21,183,724	22,232,690	21,559,154	21,982,429	423,275	2.0%
July to September	21,915,163	22,400,970	21,960,217	20,638,358	-1,321,859	-6.0%
October to December	24,143,674	24,341,474	25,134,753	20,169,355	-4,965,398	-19.8%
January to March	19,999,702	19,707,583	19,337,101	15,581,097	-3,756,004	-19.4%
Total	87,242,263	88,682,717	87,991,225	78,371,239	-9,619,986	-10.9%

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, 2014/15 to 2017/18

Quarter	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Difference in latest year	Percentage change in latest year
April to June	579,127	2,989,040	2,948,968	2,652,856	-296,112	-10.0%
July to September	651,316	3,055,152	2,851,436	3,918,647	1,067,211	37.4%
October to December	619,702	3,422,558	3,317,567	7,262,924	3,945,357	118.9%
January to March	2,389,288	3,004,163	2,784,681	6,613,803	3,829,122	137.5%
Total	4,239,433	12,470,913	11,902,652	20,448,230	8,545,578	71.8%

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 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/publications/carrier-bag-levy-annual-statistics>.

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 fifth year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2017/18. The Department intends to publish 2018/19 figures in August 2019. 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 2,575 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2018. 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 between 1% and 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/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.
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>.