



Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.

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Monday, 3 July 17

Committee Secretary

Agriculture and Environment Committee

Parliament House

George Street

Brisbane Q 4000

Sent via email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

RE: Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017

On behalf of the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, I am writing to express support for the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017.

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) is the peak environment organisation for the region from Cardwell north to Torres Strait and from the coast west to the Gulf of Carpentaria. CAFNEC is a non-profit, community organisation that has been operating for over 30 years with the aim of encouraging the community to value, protect and restore the natural environment.

CAFNEC have advocated for a ban on single-use plastic bags since 2011. Two years ago, our volunteer group, the CAFNEC Marine Response Team, decided to embark on a community campaign to raise awareness about the issue of plastic pollution in our oceans. The group has started three marine debris community initiatives, the Cairns Drain Stencil Project, Cairns Boomerang Bags collective and Plastic Free July FNQ.

The Drain Stencil Project was launched in 2015 and aims to raise awareness of the direct flow of urban pollution into the oceans through the stormwater drain system. The project has engaged approximately 250 people, 7 schools, and stencilled more than 125 drains in 10 suburbs within the Cairns Region. Countless volunteer hours have gone into facilitating this project. The success of the project lies in bringing together volunteers who are passionate and knowledgeable about the issue with community members new to the issue to have conversations over a very interactive stenciling session.

The Marine Response Team only started the Boomerang Bags collective at the start of this year but has engaged more than 50 volunteers – it has grown so large the Marine Response Team has had to convene a separate organising committee for the project!



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The team also brought Plastic Free July to the region last year, and this year, interest in Plastic Free July has grown exponentially. As part of this initiative we recently held two screenings of 'A Plastic Ocean' both of which sold out.

Having worked consistently on this issue in the community for the last 2 years, we have seen the change in the community's response. Growing community participation and interest in these initiatives is clear evidence that the community in Cairns is concerned about plastic pollution and its impact on our oceans - they care enough to give up their time to come to events and volunteer.

With Cairns being located on the coast next to the Great Barrier Reef, our community is made up of people who care about and work in the marine environment. In fact our livelihoods depend on it. Most of us spend time at the beach, dive, snorkel or sail our oceans and reef on a regular basis. Many of us have seen firsthand the devastating impact plastic is having on our environment, particularly as many of us have either been to the Cairns Turtle Rehabilitation Centre or participated in beach clean ups.

When the plastic bag ban and container refund scheme were announced, the overwhelming response the team received from the community was that both initiatives were a decade overdue, with many people citing success of such programs in other jurisdictions.

Despite the announcement of the ban, the Marine Response Team will continue with projects like those mentioned above because the issue of plastic pollution is much bigger than bags and bottles. By engaging the community as the team has done, community attitudes are shifting. The team hope that one day this change will lead to future legislation that tackles issues like cups, straws and excessive packaging.

Both CAFNEC and the CAFNEC Marine Response Team have partnered with Boomerang Alliance over the last 2 years to work on this issue. As such we offer our organisation's endorsement and support of the Boomerang Alliance's submission and add the following emphasis:

In relation to Plastic Bags

- We support a ban on single use plastic bags
- The bill proposes to ban lightweight bags up to 35 microns. This is consistent with other bans in Australia (SA, TAS, ACT and NT). However, we believe that bags up to 70 microns in thickness need to be addressed. The bill includes, in regulation, the option to increase the thickness of banned bags, should retailers seek to provide slightly thicker bags. We accept this as a compromise position but warn that should retailers provide increasing numbers of thicker bags that the Government must act quickly to increase the thickness of banned bags
- A voluntary retailer scheme to phase out thicker bags has been mooted. This needs to establish a schedule to target when these bags will be reduced.

- We support the inclusion of degradable and biodegradable bags and the proposal to begin the transition immediately by requiring retail to supply alternative bags on request
- A public and retailer education and awareness program to explain the reasons for the ban and alternative practices should be introduced ASAP
- The mass release of helium balloons should be included in the ban. Discarded helium balloons are a littering offence in QLD but only when they land. The offence should be changed so the deliberate release of helium balloons (in NSW it's more than 19) is an offence
- Bait bags are not included and should be. Bait bags should be replaced with reusable containers or a take-back scheme managed by bait suppliers
- Banning plastic bags is just a first step in reducing plastic litter. The Government should establish a Plastic Reduction Taskforce to identify other problematic, single use and disposable plastic items (I.e. coffee cups, polystyrene, straws, takeaway containers, plastic food water and water bottles) for future policy action
- Providers/retailers of plastic packaging should review all their packaging and eliminate all unnecessary packaging from use

Container Refund Scheme

- The scope includes all glass, plastic, aluminium and LPB beverage containers between 150ml and 3 litres, these will have a 10 cent refund applied. Milk, some fruit juice and health tonics are exempted. We question why beer bottles are included but wine and spirits are not included in the scheme. Wine bottles, in particular, are common in litter and their exclusion creates an unfair advantage over other alcoholic beverages
- The scheme should be world's best practice with a recovery and recycling target trending up to > than 95% and set in regulation. To achieve this target most collection points need to be situated at retail outlets where it is most convenient for people to return containers. Consequently the involvement of retail (above a certain size) should be mandated.
- The use of barcodes should be the primary means to verify refund containers on collection. We absolutely oppose the use of a weight formula to calculate container collections from public sources as it will inevitably be inaccurate and open to abuse
- All communities should have reasonable access to collection points to redeem refunds as defined by regulation. Collection points include, reverse vending machines at retail outlets, council and community drop-off centres, kerbside recycling bins and donation points run by NFP organisations



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- Beverage suppliers should pay the scheme Coordinator any required funds based on supply/sales (in advance) not on claims made by collectors, so that the scheme always has cash in the bank and is financially viable
- Any excess funds received by the Scheme Coordinator should be used to improve the scheme and community environment projects. They should not be returned to bottlers.
- All collected cans and bottles should be reused or recycled within a specified period (two years) or have refunds and handling fees returned
- The scheme should be regularly reviewed with improvements introduced, including an increase in the refund if recovery targets are not met and penalties on bottlers
- The Producer Responsibility Organisation should accurately reflect all small, medium and large bottlers as voting members, so the big bottlers do not dominate

We would also like to explicitly raise that regional areas and remote communities have in the past not had access to recycling solutions. We hope both schemes will be implemented in full throughout Far North Queensland.

We also champion the work and expertise of Tangaroa Blue in this field and offer our endorsement and support for any contribution the organisation makes to this committee.

If you would like any further information or would like us to put you in touch with some of our volunteers and supporters, please feel free to contact us at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Roz Walden

Director, CAFNEC