



Committee Secretary
Health and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

13 January 2021

Email: hec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Submission on the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020

Dear Secretary,

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council (SCEC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. SCEC is the peak environmental body for the broader Sunshine Coast region covering from Cooloola to Caboolture and west to the Hinterlands with a membership of over 50 member groups and over 400 individual, family and business supporters.

Formed in 1980, SCEC continues to be instrumental in achieving many positive environmental outcomes for the Sunshine Coast region. We proactively engage with all levels of government and work with business for optimal environmental outcomes. A fundamental part of our mission sees us undertake extensive community education and events. Our largest annual event is World Environment Day Festival to mark the United Nations' World Environment Day on June 5th. The event is held at Cotton Tree Park, Maroochydore and attracts over 8000 attendees. The aim of the day is to showcase local environment groups and celebrate our natural environment whilst engaging with the wider public on key environmental issues facing the Sunshine Coast. The event is proud to be a plastic free event and works closely with all suppliers and vendors to ensure no single-use plastics are displayed, used or sold on the day, with a focus on 'bring your own' to reduce overall waste. Feedback from our vendor and public surveys indicates that everyone engaged agrees with and supports the plastic free element of the festival with a large percentage of vendors already not using single-use plastic items. Given the adaptability of vendors and enthusiasm by attendees, we strongly believe there is more than enough demand to ban single-use plastic production and consumption across Queensland.

The hospitality sector and their associations have not raised any major objections to this ban and, indeed, largely back the proposals. The success of the Boomerang Alliance Plastic Free Places program shows that many cafes and food outlets want to change practices, to reduce litter and to meet the expectations of their customers. A similar program has proven to be highly effective in the United Kingdom; the Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free Communities campaign has seen over 670¹ towns across the UK be awarded the Plastic Free Community status. This international concerted effort to reduce plastic pollution needs to continue with urgency and direct actions on a local level.

As an ally of the Boomerang Alliance, SCEC supports the introduction of this legislation and urges its implementation as soon as practical.

Specifically, we support:

- Enabling legislation to ban the supply of specific plastics products, starting with (1) plastic straws (taking into account the disability needs of people), stirrers, plates/bowls and cutlery

¹ <https://www.sas.org.uk/plastic-free-communities/>



and (2) following further analysis, regulation to include coffee cups, other plastics cups and heavyweight plastic shopping bags. We understand that these bans will be introduced in two tranches (1) and (2) as outlined above;

- The inclusion of expanded polystyrene cups and containers (e.g. clam shells) in the first tranche;
- Exemptions only for products that meet the Australian Compostable Standards (AS 5810/AS 4736), with a prominent education program and understanding that more industrial composting facilities need to be established;
- The banning of all oxo-degradable products, with no exemptions;
- The start date for the first tranche of products to be banned being July 2021, with no additional transition period. The retail, food services and hospitality sectors have been aware of government intentions to remove these products for some years and many have already changed their procurement practices and use alternative options. Most of these businesses support this legislation and its purpose to avoid further waste and litter as soon as possible; and
- The introduction of the second tranche should be within 12 months of the enabling legislation being passed.

In addition:

- We question the exemption for plastic straws, stirrers or cutlery in shelf-ready products (e.g., a straw with a mixed drink or fork with a pre-packaged salad). This is inconsistent with the legislation and will add to public confusion. Under this exemption, these plastic items will still end up as waste or litter. There are viable non-plastic alternatives available that should and could be used now.
- We also recommend that a specific list of products be identified by the Government for this second phase-out which includes coffee cups AND lids, other single-use plastic cups AND other problematic packaging used in takeaway or away from home (e.g., plastic wrappers, sushi packaging) and heavyweight plastic shopping bags (up to 70 microns thickness).
- We strongly recommend that further public education and awareness needs to be done on the difference of the various 'compostable' labelled products. The majority of these products can only be composted in commercial facilities which are not readily available, and many still enter and remain in the environment where they are having devastating effects on wildlife.

As enabling legislation, the bill can include other items in the future. We ask that the Committee make recommendations that the following problematic items also be included:

- condiment sachets and plastic wrapping;
- helium balloon releases of any number;
- the use of helium to inflate balloons;
- mylar balloons;
- plastic balloon sticks;
- plastic barrier bags;
- glow sticks;
- cotton buds with plastic sticks; and
- paper wipes (these also contain plastic materials).

The largest single item of plastic litter in Queensland is the cigarette butt and we urge the Committee to make recommendations to the Government on measures to reduce this. In Queensland the latest Clean Up Australia Report calculated that on an individual count basis that cigarette butt numbers represented nearly 20% of all litter. Butts contain toxins and other chemicals that are harmful in the environment including thousands of cellulose acetate fibres and take years to disappear from the

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environment. Cellulose acetate fibres, like other microplastics, are also a common contaminant found throughout the world's ecosystems that have been found to accumulate at the bottom of the ocean.

To address the problem of cigarette butts, we recommend that the State, working with other jurisdictions, identify policies that will reduce this litter and add these to the legislation in the future. These could include the removal of butts from cigarettes (these can be replaced by reusable filters), financial contributions for butt clean-ups or stricter and effective policing of cigarette butt littering.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Frost
Coordinator
Sunshine Coast Environment Council

