



HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr AD Harper MP—Chair
Mr R Molhoek MP
Mr SSJ Andrew MP (virtual)
Ms AB King MP
Ms JE Pease MP
Mr ST O'Connor MP

Staff present:

Ms R Easten—Committee Secretary
Ms R Duncan—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE INTO THE WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 27 March 2023

Brisbane

MONDAY, 27 MARCH 2023

The committee met at 10.31 am.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing of the Health and Environment Committee's inquiry into the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I am Aaron Harper, the member for Thuringowa and chair of the committee. I would like to start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. With me today are Rob Molhoek, the member for Southport and deputy chair; Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; and Ali King, the member for Pumicestone. Joining us online is Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani.

On 22 February 2023, Minister Meaghan Scanlon, Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs, introduced the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 into the Queensland parliament and referred it to this committee for detailed consideration and report. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. The proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website.

BIDDULPH, Mr Mark, Head of Corporate Affairs, Cleanaway (via videoconference)

KUYPERS, Aziza, Policy and Communications Officer, Australian Council of Recycling (via videoconference)

RAPOLE, Mr Srikar, Remediation Engineer, Cleanaway (via videoconference)

TOUMBOUROU, Ms Suzanne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council of Recycling (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome and thanks for joining us. I invite you to make an opening statement and then we will go to any questions.

Mr Biddulph: Honourable members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee this morning in relation to the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. With me today is Srikar Rapole, who is a remediation engineer for Cleanaway. If there are any technical questions, Srikar is your person to ask. Just by way of introduction quickly, Cleanaway is Australia's leading waste management company with a national network of unique collection, processing, treatment and landfill assets. Cleanaway operates more than 250 locations and employs more than 6,600 people Australia-wide. Our philosophy is that waste is a resource and we aim to incorporate recovery, recycling and re-use throughout our operations.

Cleanaway congratulates the Queensland government for legislating the state's transition to a domestic circular economy. Achieving a domestic circular economy requires shifts in government policy, investment in technology and infrastructure, and a fresh look at how we design and deliver products and services. It requires governments, industry and communities to work together to overcome common barriers. At Cleanaway we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in recycling facilities throughout the east coast of Australia. The Circular Plastics Australia (PET) facility in Albury is a joint venture between Cleanaway, Pact Group, Asahi Beverages and Coca-Cola Europacific Partners. This joint venture reprocesses 28,000 tonnes of PET plastic into plastic pellets. These pellets can then be turned into recycling packaging. That is equivalent to one billion PET bottles a year. This is a great example of industry coming together, including competitors Asahi Beverages and Coca-Cola.

While the circular economy continues to develop along with technologies to support it, residual wastes that are currently unfeasible or uneconomic to recycle will remain well-managed engineered landfill that will continue to play an important role in managing society's waste for the foreseeable future.

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Moving to the clean earth amendment, the use of clean earth as daily cover for a landfill site is an essential practice used across Australia to manage emissions pathways and to provide a safe, effective and compliant landfill operation. Daily covers reduce leachate generation, odour, wind-blown litter and vermin and contain greenhouse gas emissions. Cleanaway notes that this practice is widely used throughout Australia as best practice. Cleanaway supports the policy position of removing the blanket landfill exemption levy for clean earth to encourage re-use rather than disposal. However, it should be noted that this will have a material impact on Cleanaway and other landfill operators in Queensland.

I do note that the bill provides an option for applying for a clean earth operational purposes exemption where the material, to quote from the legislation, is used for the good operation and maintenance of the landfill site. At present there is no information about what the parameters of the exemptions will be. Industry needs greater certainty of the exemption process, including time lines, to ensure a smooth transition working towards 1 July. The exemption for clean earth to be used operationally for daily cover would be ideally legislated by its certainty and avoid unnecessary administrative burdens and delays. Again, Cleanaway congratulates the Queensland government's circularity ambitions and I thank the committee for inviting Cleanaway to appear this morning.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mark. I do not know if there are any other comments from Suzanne at this stage from the Australian Council of Recycling?

Ms Toubourou: Not at this stage. I am happy to talk to the Australian Council of Recycling's submission and position at the right time.

CHAIR: Okay. We might move to some quick questions to Mark following your opening statement. With regard to Cleanaway, you noted the option for applying for an operational purposes exemption but raised concerns about the information concerning the parameters of the exemptions. Did you want to unpack that a little bit for us?

Mr Biddulph: Yes, sure. It depends on the classification of clean earth. Srikar, do you want to explain that further?

Mr Rapole: Yes. As a Cleanaway business we want to understand how that exemption process will work—whether it is a submission to the authority or what that will entail—and what requirements are to be met to get that exemption.

Mr Biddulph: I do note that in other states such as New South Wales the exemption is legislated, so there is not necessarily an application process for an exemption. In that legislation they categorise clean earth, and Srikar can talk to that a little bit more. What I mean by 'categorise' is that they look at the, I guess, contaminants in it and if it is of a certain level then it is regarded as clean earth and the company is able to use that just in their licence, rather than going through an exemption process. However, we do note that this commences on 1 July and we have to apply very soon for an exemption.

CHAIR: Yes, good point.

Mr MOLHOEK: I was going to ask a similar question to you, Chair. Could you elaborate a bit on the clean earth? You mentioned that there are different kinds of clean earth and that in the other states they have categorised clean earth, so I guess it would be helpful to understand the categories and composition of that.

Mr Rapole: I guess clean earth falls under clean fill/clean soil, so basically virgin soil that has been untouched and not undergone any industrial activity of contaminated but any contaminants as such. That is the key distinction between clean earth and other soils, which may be contaminated soils that are managed under a different framework. As long as there is clean earth or clean soils, they have various beneficial uses on our sites that protect various environmental risks and help with daily operations on our sites.

Mr Biddulph: Some of the things that clean earths are used for are erosion control, to contain greenhouse gas emissions, storm water management and just the general environmental duty of covering it.

CHAIR: Member for Pumicestone?

Ms KING: Thank you, Chair, but I think the latter part of that question answered my specific queries about the uses clean earth is put to in your facilities.

Mr Biddulph: It also contributes to leachate management—leachate being that if you look in your bin it is your bin juice, which can be toxic.

CHAIR: Good point.

Ms PEASE: I just have a comment with regard to the circular economy that waste management has become. It is really encouraging to see organisations like Cleanaway getting involved, and I am really fortunate to have a Cleanaway facility in my electorate of Lytton, so thank you very much. It is great to see the number of people who are employed throughout your organisation across Australia and look forward to seeing you keep on the good work that you do, so thank you.

Mr Biddulph: Thank you.

CHAIR: We might move to Suzanne from the Australian Council of Recycling.

Ms Toumbourou: Good morning and thank you. Just to open and reiterate, ACOR is the peak body for resource recovery, recycling and remanufacturing in Australia. Our membership as represented across the recycling value chain includes leading organisations in advanced chemical recycling processes, container refund scheme operations, kerbside recycling and recovered metal, glass, paper, textiles and e-products reprocessing and remanufacturing. Our members also undertake road recycling and construction and demolition recovery, so they range across a very broad range of resource recovery and recycling enterprises. Although there is often an integration between waste and recycling enterprise, they are also often distinct enterprises too. Waste management is a logistical exercise or an enterprise, and recycling is effectively a production enterprise.

Our mission as a peak body and as a sector is to lead the transition to a circular economy through the recycling supply chain, noting of course that recycling is not the circular economy but an essential link in that circular economy. We are very supportive of the bill as it has been proposed. Noting Cleanaway's comments regarding some of the elements that might need to be further addressed relating to clean earth, we are also supporting the proposal to remove the automatic exemption of clean earth from the waste levy.

Above all, our priority is to find a better way to define waste from recovered resources to ensure and support a much more level playing field between recovered resources and virgin and raw resources. Currently, not only Queensland's but every other jurisdiction's regulatory approach to recovered resources puts recovered resources, I would say, at a great disadvantage to virgin and raw, and measures them in a way that means there are many regulatory and, therefore, cost impediments to delivering recovered resources back into the market.

CHAIR: Thank you, Suzanne. Taking some of those comments about the other jurisdictions, I am trying to get a practical understanding of the impacts, particularly in the construction industry, of separating on site. Can you unpack what you are seeing in other states compared to what Queensland is aiming to do? Can you provide some more commentary around that, particularly on construction site disposal?

Ms Toumbourou: I think the first thing to keep in mind is that currently construction and demolition recycling, which in shorthand is referred to as C&D recycling, is where you get the highest yield of recovered resources across the three different types of material streams. One is commercial and industrial, the other one is waste and, of course, there is C&D. There is a huge potential to recover a lot, and probably a lot more, from construction and demolition. The first step—some of it would need to be undertaken at a regulatory level. The other aspect that needs to be better addressed is just at the general practice within construction and demolition to make sure that—there goes the screen now. I have gone down. It is just part of—

Ms PEASE: You have broken the technology. You are still there. You are not hurt, are you? How is your head?

Ms Toumbourou: I think I am okay. I'll let you know later.

Separation at source is a big priority. It makes such a difference in terms of what can be recovered and the contamination rates of what is recovered. I will provide a very simple example. If you are on a construction site the priority is speed, really, more than anything else. It is getting the material you do not want off the site as fast as possible. That could often mean that you throw things into a skip bin, which is typically on a construction site. You throw a bunch of things in together, many of which might likely be serious contaminants such as asbestos. Others will be materials that are actually just not recyclable or recoverable such as certain forms of plastic.

Ideally, separation on site means that if all the different types of materials—aggregates, PVC pipes, timber for example—are separated on site then you get a much better recovery rate, and you are able to ensure or support better outcomes in relation to contaminants as well. We see, for example, and I am talking nationally, when contaminants such as asbestos go into construction resource recovery you can contaminate tonnes and tonnes of recoverable aggregates just by putting a 10-square-centimetre fragment of asbestos in there. Separating that out is a major priority, as with

clean earth, making sure that those things are recovered separately as far as practicable to deliver high-value resource recovery outcomes. There have been, Queensland included, impressive C&D resource recovery facilities coming online, which effectively would do a lot of sortation on site. However, it is still a major priority to make sure contaminants, and hazardous ones, do not make their way in there.

CHAIR: I note we have Aziza online as well from ACOR.

Ms Kuypers: Yes, I am ACOR's policy and communications officer.

CHAIR: I am sorry, I did not introduce you before. That was a really well articulated response in terms of that particular part of industry. As a follow-up question, with the consultation you would have done with the people you represent, was there overall general support from the construction industry about where we are progressing? Conversely, were there any negative thoughts on this?

Ms Toumbourou: ACOR C&D members were specifically supportive of the proposal to remove the automatic levy exemption for clean earth. They see that as a major impediment to supporting resource recovery outcomes. The waste levy does play a really important role in diverting recoverable and recyclable material from landfill. In fact, when we were looking at the provision for chief executive decisions on resource recovery area declaration and payment to local government, there was a note in there about payments to ameliorate the effect of the levy. Our view is that ameliorating the effect of the levy also ameliorates the effect of diversion to resource recovery and also, therefore, weakens investment confidence in resource recovery and recycling.

CHAIR: I will open up to questions. Deputy Chair?

Mr MOLHOEK: I am fine. I have no questions, really.

Ms PEASE: I am not sure if you have had an opportunity to read some of the other submissions that people have made to the bill. Suzanne, have you had a chance to read any of the other submissions?

Ms Toumbourou: Not in great detail.

Ms PEASE: There was some concern that the levy would be a disincentive for organisations to undertake the clean earth initiative. What is your position on that? Do you believe there would be a disincentive for people to do that?

Ms Toumbourou: It would be hard to imagine how applying a levy that would therefore disincentivise material going to landfill would have the opposite outcome. We heard a moment ago from Cleanaway that applying that levy might make it difficult for the productive use of clean earth in landfills. Therefore, I am not sure of the logic that it would have the opposite effect.

From a recycling sector perspective, given the cost of recycling—and let's not kid ourselves: recycling is an expensive enterprise. It is expensive because of the regulatory framework, it is expensive because of the technologies and it is also expensive because manufacturing in Australia is much more expensive than in many other countries and, I would say, all of our neighbouring countries. It needs to be supported by measures including waste levies that support investment confidence. As a recycler, you need to know that there are drivers there to support the diversion of materials away from landfill, and one of those key drivers is the waste levy. With apologies for the longwinded answer, I could not see what the logic would be in it having the opposite effect.

Ms PEASE: You spoke at length with regard to contamination of waste. How do you manage that? Do you have any suggestions on how to get around that?

Ms Toumbourou: This is probably a little outside of the bill. One of the things we are doing, for example, is looking at other regulatory approaches and specifically looking at the construction centre. In some jurisdictions you need a licence to demolish, for example. That licence is provided by the building regulator, whatever form that might take in different states. At the moment that seems to be a bit of a gap in jurisdiction between the building regulator and the environmental regulator whereby the building regulator is imagining that the environmental regulator is addressing this, but they only address it at the recycling facility; and the environmental regulator is imagining that the building regulator is addressing this. To an extent, my sense would be that our building regulators need to step in a little more robustly to close that gap and make sure that if licences are issued then they are also taking into account not just safety but also that whatever is going out of those sites is appropriate in the various streams it is arriving through.

Ms PEASE: I did know it was outside of the bill but I was interested given that you spoke about it. Thank you for that.

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CHAIR: This is more of a comment: ACOR also notes the payments to local governments to ameliorate, as you said, the effect of the levy on household waste disposed to landfill undermining the intended effect of the levy. The department's response is very clear and I think it is worth putting it on record. It states—

Payments to local governments meet the Government's commitment to ensure that there are no direct costs to households as a result of the levy.

I think the public needs to be reassured that this is the case. Do you have any further comments around that?

Ms Toumbourou: Yes. I think as we scale up recycling and resource recovery across the country and in New South Wales, the exercise will become more cost-effective. As we improve markets for recovered resources and as we support a circular economy through that and through the entire supply chain, we should see the cost of recycling reduce, markets improve and, therefore, more equitable outcomes across the community too. My understanding is that the Queensland government is applying a trajectory in terms of the levy in Queensland. We agree that there need to be equitable outcomes but we also understand that if we do not find really meaningful drivers away from landfill and away from waste then, I guess, we are on a pretty unsustainable path.

CHAIR: Fair point.

Ms KING: Thank you for being with us today and for your insights. I note the inclusion in your submission of some remarks about the Recycle Mate platform. Can you explain to us a little about what that does, how it works, how it was developed and what its purpose and goals are?

Ms Toumbourou: Thank you for asking. Recycle Mate was supposed to be a simple thing. It was supposed to be a program or a tool that provided householders with the answer to the question, 'Which bin does this thing go in at end of use?' The fact is that the answer is a very complicated one given that we have a great diversity of material recovery infrastructure across the country and we have a diversity in terms of what local governments identify as being recoverable through their comingled collection systems—we call it the yellow bin. It is not just that, but there are, I would say, an exponentially growing array of other collection opportunities to deliver recovered resources to recycling outcomes.

For example, you asked the question, 'Which bin does my battery go in?' Batteries should not go in any household bin but there are many places where you can drop them off so that they can be recovered and recycled. The idea of Recycle Mate is that it provides that very granular, geolocated information to householders. If they change from one local government area to another, it will identify where they are, what their bin system is and how they might best access resource recovery outcomes or at the very least accurate information about where they might dispose of things.

Underpinning that is where the real value lies for Recycle Mate. In order to get that information, what we have had to do is create a comprehensive database of all the local government areas and their attached recovery systems across the country. That is over 500 different systems across the country and innumerable different bin-lid colour configurations. I won't even go into that! Alongside that, there are over 40,000 drop-off points for other forms of recovery and collection, including charitable donations, recycling opportunities and pilot schemes. For example, for child-safe car seats there is a pilot underway at the moment to identify how they might be recycled. We have identified the drop-off options there as well, so anyone who has nearby access to that can know where that is.

The data underpinning Recycle Mate is a really useful tool for policymakers to understand what the access points are for the collection or drop-off of certain material. In Queensland, for example, where there might be consideration of a ban on e-waste to landfill, there are areas in Queensland where Recycle Mate has identified that there is a gap in terms of where people might drop things off. The nearest drop-off point would be hundreds of kilometres way and, therefore, they have no options. The back end of Recycle Mate, the national database, is also extremely helpful to inform policy decisions and also infrastructure decisions.

Ms KING: Thank you. That is a really thorough and helpful answer. As somebody with family members who save every empty toothpaste tube and send them off in a bag to somewhere or other, it is interesting to know what is out there and that there is a central database where these questions can be asked, so thank you.

Ms Toumbourou: Pleasure. Could I point out one of the other things that Recycle Mate does and does not do? Firstly, we are not the police. We do not decide what gets recycled and what does not. What we do is seek the truth. The other side of supporting what we call recycling right is giving the community confidence that if we tell you to make the effort to do a thing, to take your item to be

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recycled, then you can trust that that is actually happening. Insofar as that is a priority, there are a whole lot of drop-off options that Recycle Mate currently has not listed because we have not been provided with the recycling outcomes. If something is missing there, it might be that we genuinely have missed it or it might be that we still are awaiting evidence of a real recycling outcome.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Suzanne, and also to Mark from Cleanaway. Thank you for staying online. We do appreciate it. Suzanne, that was very well articulated. You have informed the committee greatly and we appreciate your time this morning.

HUTCHEON, Mr Toby, Campaign Manager, Boomerang Alliance

CHAIR: Welcome. Would you like to start with opening remarks before we move to any questions?

Mr Hutcheon: Thank you very much for the invite to appear. I represent the Boomerang Alliance. We are a not-for-profit community organisation very much involved with waste and, in particular, plastic reduction issues. Historically we have been very much involved in plastic bag bans and the establishment of the Queensland Container Refund Scheme and now increasingly around single-use plastic reductions and phase-outs. First of all, I would like to congratulate the government on bringing forward this bill. It is good to see that Queensland is continuing to progress in these areas. Our view would be that we hope the bill will pass but it just needs some strengthening, shall we say, before we think it would be more effective.

I have raised four particular items that are in the bill, rather than all of them, and I will quickly go through them. Yes, we very much support a ban on lighter-than-air balloons. The fact is that it is littering and it has unfortunately been broadly ignored for many years. The imposition of a ban which will allow everyone to understand that this is an environmentally harmful activity will make a difference. We have just added that I think there is a need to control who is selling lighter-than-air balloons. There is an industry group called the Pro Environment Balloon Alliance that actually will give advice to people on what to do about the balloons—not just that you cannot release them but also how you can recycle them. We think that is a means of controlling what actually happens to those balloons after they have been used.

In terms of council payments, the purpose of the waste levy is to reduce waste, and the decision to remove the household sector from that levy has meant the C&D sectors and C&I sectors have, since the levy was brought in, reduced their waste and the household sector has increased their waste. I think that is a problem that has to be dealt with. This bill covers a lot of the arrangements about payments. We would like to actually see a requirement and an expectation that council will actually do something about reducing waste as a result. What we do not want to see at the end of this 10-year process is that domestic and household waste is exactly the same as when we started. I think it is important that some sort of requirement be placed upon councils, who are receiving the subsidy, to present back exactly what they are doing about reducing household waste.

The third thing is on integrated packaging. This was exempted because many of these packages were put together before there was a ban in September 2021. This bill proposes to extend that exemption to December 2025. We wonder why. As far as we are concerned, if there is an exemption some suppliers will continue doing what they are doing. There was a major supermarket last year that was still putting plastic forks into fresh salad because it could. I raise the point about a popper, for instance, which has a plastic straw in it. I do not see why we have to wait until December 2025 to have that plastic straw removed. It can be quite easily done. I would presume that most parents would assume that the juice in here was not four or five years old. I think we can actually move that exemption forward and not wait until 2025 to have it cancelled.

The last thing is about the circular economy. It is really good that the department has included this in the bill. I think it is a really good step forward. My comment is that I would like to see more clarity around what is the principle of the circular economy. I think the way it has been expressed is inadequate and it will mean that Queensland will not actually be able to achieve it if we followed those rules.

The final thing is in describing what I would say is a life cycle process, what are the roles of various components in a life cycle. I think certain ones have just been missed out. There is no consumer reference in this bill. For instance, a manufacturer can make a phone to be recycled, but what am I as a consumer supposed to do? I need to be able to discard this phone in a way that it can be remanufactured or recycled or recovered. The consumer and the collector are pivotal to this, and I would like to see those sorts of components added in to any description of a circular economy. Thank you.

CHAIR: Just picking up on your point regarding the popper and when you would like to see it brought in, the department did respond by saying that a harmonised approach to other jurisdictions and agreed national targets provides consistency and reduces confusion for brand owners about the time frames they are working towards. If you are a supplier out there and one state has dropped it this year, there has to be some national consistency, I would imagine, if the target is what we are trying to aim for. The Victorian government legislation provides a time frame for January 2026 so I think trying to align it as closely as possible is entirely reasonable, but you might have a different view.

Mr Hutcheon: Yes. My view would be that the Victorian government and the New South Wales government have got it wrong. I think producers and suppliers can move a lot quicker. I think you will find that many of them already are. The problem is that if you have the exemption others will not. They will simply carry on providing these products as long as they are allowed to do so. Actually moving it forward in Queensland would probably prompt a national response, notwithstanding the position of the Victorian and the New South Wales governments.

CHAIR: Fair point. It is a shame the LGAQ were unable to be here today, but your discussion around the council subsidy, from a practical point of view—I am in Townsville. I get two bins, the yellow and the red lid. What are you trying to say to councils? Where do you want to land on this in terms of them taking greater responsibility in the household recycling space?

Mr Hutcheon: The general principle is: if you put a price on waste then as an industry or a sector you are going to move to try to reduce it. The problem we have now, as I see it, is that there is no incentive on the individual household to reduce their waste. I am in Brisbane. I pay exactly the same amount for my waste service as my neighbour, even if I have a quarter of a bin and they have a full bin. Where is my incentive?

I think, generally speaking, local government in Queensland has been a bit slow in the waste area to make those innovations. I think it is very important, therefore, to use the subsidy of the levy that is being provided to encourage councils to be more innovative and to actually move towards strategies that will change things. I can give a simple example in Brisbane. I have had a voluntary green waste collection for 10 years. Half of my street has it but the other half does not. Why do we have to wait so long for an obvious service that could dramatically reduce landfill?

CHAIR: My view was more separation of household domestic waste. I see purple bins and other coloured bins in other jurisdictions. I do not know where it all ends. We will have 10 bins out the front.

Mr Hutcheon: Could we? I suppose the most effective households probably have six at the moment, if you are able to include the soft plastics collection which is no more. We just have to get to that point of understanding that we do actually have to have more than two or three bins and we need to be able to practise all of that so that we can stop waste and build resource recovery.

CHAIR: Fair point, Toby. Thank you.

Mr MOLHOEK: You make a valid point. I know when I used to visit my aunt in Holland 20 years ago I think she had five or six different bins and would meticulously sort everything every week because that was just the expectation. I want to ask you to explain more fully your concerns around the definitions in respect of the circular economy. I read the commentary, but what does it mean in practice if that definition changes?

Mr Hutcheon: I think it is important when you are putting something in a law that the definitions and principles are accurate. The problem with the current one is that it really fails to express the generic international standards. There are three broad standards of what is a circular economy: an economy that has eliminated waste and pollution; an economy in which products and materials circulate around that economy to their highest resource value; and it restores nature by reducing virgin resources and, I guess, mimicking natural processes. It is those sorts of principles that I would like to see in this bill. That is our ultimate goal. It is not to circulate products and materials in the economy for as long as we can or as long as we consider them to be useful; it is just a principle and an ideal we need to aim for. If we could strengthen those, I think it would be a great benefit towards the government introducing a circular economy that functions in this state.

Mr MOLHOEK: The three principles are in your submission, but I guess your comment is that the wording within the proposed legislation does not reflect that. How would it better reflect that?

Mr Hutcheon: In the way that I have suggested. It would simply be a case of either adopting some of the wording that I have in my submission or having a look at international practice in terms of how that is expressed. It does not have to be detailed; it is simply really clarifying the principles. I guess the main problem I had with the current one is the line 'for as long as they have value or remain useful'. It is a very subjective term. I think those are the things that need to be removed, because it is a principle and it is an ideal that we are aiming for.

Mr MOLHOEK: What would you replace that with?

Mr Hutcheon: I would replace it with the general universally held principles I have outlined—effectively, the elimination of waste pollution, the circulation of products to their highest resource value and the restoration of nature. They are very simple principles which encapsulate a circular economy. To give a practical example, I will go back to my phone. As a consumer, I need to know how to use

this phone effectively and how to use it in a way that prolongs its life. When I want to discard it, I need to know, to its highest resource value, how to discard this phone. If I have decided I do not like the phone and it is a year old, it can be part of the second-hand market. If it is five years old, maybe it can be recycled for its components. If it is 10 years old, maybe it can be recovered for its base materials. I need to know what my choice is. If I have that choice and I have the service to make that choice, I can ensure that this phone, when it is discarded, is never going to be wasted because everything is going to be re-used and recovered. That is the sort of thing that I think it is important we look at, and those sorts of principles that I have outlined start to cover that practical aspect.

Mr MOLHOEK: In looking at the legislation as drafted, I guess they are sort of saying that there comes a point where there are no more options—that the cycle ends. If it cannot be sold and it has to be completely recovered, as long as it has value or remains useful, that is the point where they kill the phone off and melt it down.

Mr Hutcheon: Sure, but if it is genuinely recovered then nothing is being wasted. That has been made of base materials, and if we get right down to it then nothing is wasted. The point is: I think there is a difference between the principle and the practice. We may not be able to achieve that yet, but from the point of view of a bill to describe what we want to achieve I think it is important that we maintain that.

Ms KING: You mentioned the need to encourage local councils to innovate in their measures to reduce household waste. Looking to other jurisdictions, can you point to any particular approaches that have proven effective elsewhere?

Mr Hutcheon: Absolutely. I do not know why I have a 240-litre general garbage bin. I came to this state 21 years ago and it astonished me that I still had one in Brisbane. I came from Sydney, where I had a 140-litre bin and paid a reduced rate for it. These are the sorts of things that I would like to see offered and these are the sorts of things that incentivise households. If I am constantly putting out a bin that is a quarter full, I want to have that smaller bin and I want to have some sort of incentive to reduce. It is about being a bit more, let's say, sophisticated in terms of the waste bins that we offer and encouraging people to reduce their bins. Obviously, a reduced garbage bin would be a good step. A FOGO or a green waste bin for everyone would be a great way. Immediately, you will have a dramatic reduction in waste. Those are the sorts of things I would like to see brought in by all councils in Queensland.

Ms KING: Do those measures tend to lead to increased contamination, where some households choose not to play by the rules and fill their recycling bin with garbage et cetera?

Mr Hutcheon: It can happen. In other jurisdictions they would lose their recycling bin, and I think that is appropriate. A household is told that they have a problem with contamination. Many councils will actually go and talk to them and say, 'You have a contamination problem.' If it cannot be resolved, then take away the recycling bin and give them a general waste bin that they can put everything in. I believe that most people will observe those rules and understand them, particularly if they understand why it is happening.

CHAIR: Thank you for your feedback.

NUCIFORA, Mr Fred, Director, Pacific Engagement, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Branch, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. Thank you for your submission and the work you are doing to reduce marine debris as part of the aim of this bill. Would you like to make an opening statement before we move to questions?

Mr Nucifora: Thank you for providing the reef authority with an opportunity to speak with you today. I would like to start by reaffirming the reef authority's position statement on marine debris and that it is a major threat to the marine environment. It is responsible for the death of many marine creatures including turtles, dugongs, dolphins and seabirds. Collective action by communities, industry and government to choose sustainable options, minimise waste and undertake stewardship activities to reduce the impacts of marine debris on the reef is highly sought after. We see that the amendments proposed in this bill are very much aiming to do that.

The reef authority believes that the proposed amendments to embed the circular economy principles into the design, manufacturing and use of products and materials will minimise the impact of marine debris on the reef such that these changes will reduce one of the many cumulative pressures facing the Great Barrier Reef and help preserve its outstanding universal values for all Australians and the global community to enjoy. I will stop there and take questions from the committee.

CHAIR: Are there any elements of the bill that raise concerns with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority?

Mr Nucifora: No. As our submission stated, we are in general support of the bill and the amendments proposed within it.

CHAIR: In your opening statement you spoke about the many animals affected including turtles and dugongs. Can you unpack that a bit and give us a practical example of what you are finding out there?

Mr Nucifora: Certainly. I know that the chair knows of my previous work here in Townsville. I have previously been the director of Reef HQ Aquarium, the national education centre for the Great Barrier Reef, and we operate a turtle hospital in that facility. I have seen firsthand the impacts of plastic pollution and marine debris on marine wildlife such as marine turtles. I have seen plastic bags that are impacting the gastrointestinal tracts of turtles. I have seen turtles with their flippers wrapped in discarded fishing line. I have seen plastic bags tangled around their bodies. Working in a facility like Reef HQ and seeing firsthand the impacts of marine debris once it reaches our environment is very sobering. This bill and the amendments within it to reduce the amount of marine debris that reaches our marine ecosystems are very positive.

CHAIR: Well said.

Mr MOLHOEK: Thanks for appearing today. In your submission you talk about the different plastics, as in macroplastics and primary microplastics. We see online and in the media some pretty horrific scenes of rubbish being cleaned out of the oceans in other parts of the world. How much of it is an issue in Queensland? Should we be alarmed, or do you think we are making good progress towards educating people about plastic bags and all sorts of other things that end up in the ocean?

Mr Nucifora: I think here in Queensland, because of the beautiful place that it is for us to live and enjoy, we certainly do take our stewardship of our place quite seriously. There are significant issues in other parts of the world with marine debris. One of the programs that I have to deal with in my work here with the marine park authority is the high-standard tourism operators program, where those operations are going above and beyond what is legislatively required of them to operate in the park and to operate sustainably. Those industries have been at the forefront of minimising the use of plastic and waste in general. There is a perfect example of an industry here in Queensland that has been on the sustainability journey for quite some time, and we hope this bill and the amendments within it encourage more in industry to do the same.

Ms KING: Thank you for the work you do and for your continued advocacy for marine wildlife. Much of the footage and photographs we see of the impact of particularly plastic pollution on marine ecosystems is to do with macroplastics—that is, the rings that hold beer cans together and all those kinds of things. Can you talk to us about the impacts of microplastics in the marine ecosystem?

Mr Nucifora: I must preface these comments by saying that I am not a marine biologist—I am an educator—but I certainly have read the scientific papers that have recently been produced by our colleagues at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, which is showing plastic being found in the

tissues of corals on the Great Barrier Reef. That plastic is of a size that is small enough to be ingested by corals as part of their heterotrophic feeding patterns. Whilst microplastics may be out of sight, they are certainly not out of mind when it comes to protecting our marine wildlife.

Ms PEASE: Thanks for talking to us today. Like my colleague, I would like to thank you for the great work you and your organisation do. All of the members who are in the room today have coastal electorates, so we all see firsthand the damage that marine waste can have. You spoke about how industry has been quite effective in getting involved in maintaining and improving their services. Can you give some examples of that commitment to reduce the waste that might go into marine areas?

Mr Nucifora: Certainly. I am speaking primarily of the marine tourism industry. The example that I have seen most recently within the marine tourism industry is the full phasing out of any form of plastic in any form on their vessels, particularly the vessels that operate out in the marine park. There is also a commitment to recycle pretty much everything they bring back to shore as part of their daily operations. I know the Queensland government was quite strong in that regard in banning single-use plastic bags et cetera.

Can I say for the committee too that we jointly manage the park—that is, the Commonwealth and us and the state. There are tourism operations that are going above and beyond what is legislatively required for them to operate. Those sustainable practices are things like recycling all the materials that they are using out on the Great Barrier Reef and the things that are being brought home, and now completely phasing out plastics throughout their business operations. I did say earlier that I was an educator, and they are really strongly committed to raising awareness and encouraging behaviour change within the guests they are taking out to the Great Barrier Reef on a daily basis so as to reduce their use of plastics and to recycle more generally.

Ms PEASE: You would have seen that we are introducing some bans on lighter-than-air balloons or some restrictions around that. Given that Cairns, around the reef and Townsville are very much tourist destinations where there would no doubt be lots of celebrations that would potentially involve balloons, how do you imagine that will go down? Can you comment? I know I am asking for an opinion here, but do you think that will be well received? I know that you have said that industry are likely to receive it well, but can you give me some ideas around the impact that balloons would have on the marine park itself?

Mr Nucifora: Yes, I can certainly give you my thoughts and opinions on that. As I have previously mentioned, I have actually seen a balloon inside the gastrointestinal tract of a turtle, binding that turtle's intestines up and not allowing it to process any food. What happens then is that gases build up inside the turtle's body. It essentially becomes a balloon itself. It floats to the surface. Whilst it is floating—that is why it is called floating syndrome—at the surface it cannot dive for the seagrass that it needs to eat, so it slowly starves and when it is at the surface it is more prone to predation. I have seen the impacts of balloons firsthand. Whether there would be a degree of unhappiness from people who were not able to use lighter-than-air balloons as part of celebrations, I just think—and this is my personal opinion now—that people in general are becoming more in tune to being able to find other ways to celebrate. I have just recently had a celebration myself where bubbles were used rather than balloons, so there are many ways to celebrate significant events in our life histories and I do not think balloons need to be one of them in the future.

Ms PEASE: Thank you for that, and I am sorry that you have to see such tragedy. That is a terrible thing to have to witness. I have not used balloons and do not use balloons at all in any part of my life for that very reason, because of where I live and generally. Thank you for your dedication.

Mr Nucifora: Thank you so very much.

CHAIR: Well said, member for Lytton. As there are no further questions, Fred, thank you very much for informing the committee and for the great work that you are doing, particularly in our part of the world. We look forward to Reef HQ being rebuilt soon and getting our turtle hospital back up and running. Do you have any idea when that will be finished?

Mr Nucifora: I believe we are at the construction and design phase right now. There are some very impressive pictures on paper at this point in time, so we are looking to transition them into reality which is going to be really exciting. Yes, the turtle hospital is going to be a significant component of the offering once we open again.

CHAIR: Yes, 100 per cent. Just taking on the member for Lytton's comments, I think most Queenslanders would be in tune with what you are saying after hearing the damage that they can do.

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Mr Nucifora: I do not want to waste the committee's time too much further, but we do also work very closely with 19 councils along the GBR coast as part of the Reef Guardian Councils program. There are now 300 schools along the GBR coast participating in the Reef Guardian School Program, and that reef guardian program that has been so well supported by the Queensland government through government schools and through local government has been a really important step forward in our sustainability journey as a state, so thank you to you as well.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The LGAQ was going to appear next but could not come today due to illness, so we will finish up this public hearing now and resume at approximately 12 o'clock with the department for a briefing. Thank you very much, Fred. We appreciate it. I declare this hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.34 am.