

## Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

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## OFFICIAL

Mr Aaron Harper MP, Chair  
Health and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

10 March 2023

Via email: [hec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:hec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Chair

**Re: *Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 ('the Bill')*.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bill. The following submission is made on behalf of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Reef Authority).

The Reef Authority's [Position Statement on Marine Debris](#) identifies marine debris as a major threat to the health of the Great Barrier Reef and a source of mortality of marine life such as turtles, dugongs, dolphins, and seabirds. The Reef Authority encourages all levels of government to adopt policies and activities that stop marine debris entering the Marine Park.

Marine debris is defined by the United Nations Environment Program as any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of, or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment. Plastic is life-threatening for marine species and comprises more than 80 per cent of marine debris found in the Great Barrier Reef including:

- Macroplastics – plastic items greater than five millimetres in size – that enter the marine environment via urban stormwater discharge, wind, streams, severe weather events, community landfills, direct littering of beaches, international sources, and shipping and boating activities. This includes disposable plastic cutlery and packaging for shelf-ready food items such as yoghurt and salad;
- Primary microplastics – less than five millimetres in size – such as plastic resin pellets, microbeads from personal care products and microfibrils shed from synthetic clothing materials during clothes-washing;
- Secondary microplastics from the break-up of macroplastics. This would include the remnants of lighter-than-air balloons; and
- Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear from recreational and commercial fishing, including crab pots and fishing nets.

Marine debris, in particular plastic, causes environmental, economic, aesthetic, and human health impacts. Documented impacts of marine debris on the Reef and associated wildlife are numerous, including:

- ingestion of plastic bags and microplastics by turtles, cetaceans, seabirds, and fish resulting in gastrointestinal blockages or perforation, feeling of fullness leading to starvation, underdevelopment, and mortality;
- potential toxic effects on marine species caused by chemicals in plastic that leach out after being eaten. Contaminants associated with plastics may also accumulate in the tissues of marine animals over time;
- smothering and entanglement of corals by plastic, increasing the incidence of coral disease;
- loss of critical habitat for nesting turtles;
- negative effects on community benefits such as enjoyment, visual features, appreciation, personal connection, tourist satisfaction, and the aesthetics of the Reef; and
- negative effects on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage values such as totem species, stories, songlines, sites of particular significance, and important places for cultural tradition.

Given the documented impacts of marine debris on the Reef, the Reef Authority is broadly supportive of the Bill because it will contribute to removing marine debris from the environment and create an overall shift in behaviour towards a circular economy. The Reef Authority further notes that the proposed amendments align with, and support, the Australian Government's *Threat abatement plan for the impacts of marine debris on the vertebrate wildlife of Australia's coasts and oceans (2018)*, made under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)* and actions outlined in National Recovery Plans for threatened species such as the one for marine turtles.

The Reef Authority also supports specific amendments in the Bill including:

- the proposed definition of "waste" at clause 9, in the Bill as it includes substances and materials that become marine debris;
- the proposed expiry date of 31 December 2025 (or earlier if possible) for the current exemption from the ban for a single-use plastic item that is an integral part of a shelf-ready product.

The Great Barrier Reef is under significant pressure, as are all coral reefs worldwide. The 2019 Outlook report concluded that the health of the Reef is declining due to the cumulative impacts of multiple, increasing threats from climate change, coastal development, land-based run-off, and direct use, all of which require agile and adaptive management responses. Marine debris is associated with land-based run-off and direct use of the Reef and adds to the cumulative impact of other key pressures affecting the health and resilience of the Reef. The Reef Authority believes that the proposed amendments to embed the circular economy principle in the design, manufacturing, and use of products and materials will minimise the impact of marine debris on the Reef. Such changes will reduce the pressures facing the Reef and help preserve its outstanding universal value for all Australians and the global community.

The Reef Authority's A/Chief Scientist Jess Stella can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for further information.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Johnson  
General Manager  
Strategic Policy and Partnerships Branch  
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority



We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Great Barrier Reef Traditional Owners, as the custodians of the Great Barrier Reef. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.