



28 July 2020

TO: Committee Secretary
Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

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

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is the leading charity devoted solely to caring for Australia's oceans and their wildlife. AMCS has over 250,000 members and supporters in Australia who we represent and work with on key marine issues facing the nation. We work with science and conservation centres to support solutions that use best available science to deliver healthier outcomes for our oceans. One of our core focus areas is addressing the ocean plastic pollution crisis.

AMCS welcomes the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. This bill is a critical next step in stopping the flow of plastic into Australia's oceans.

If these laws are implemented Queensland will join South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory as leaders in tackling the scourge of plastic killing Australian marine wildlife.

The need to save Australia's ocean wildlife from plastic

Plastic pollution continues to flow into Australia's oceans at an alarming rate, entangling and suffocating or starving marine wildlife. Whales are washing up on our beaches dead, with stomachs full of plastic. Turtles are dying from entanglement, maiming or starvation caused by plastic pollution. Urgent action is required to end the shocking deaths of vulnerable marine animals.

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Best available research indicates there is already over 150 million tonnes of plastics in the oceans already, and that there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans by 2050 unless action is taken today.¹ Millions of seabirds die from ingesting plastic pollution each year, and over 100,000 marine animals as well.² Half of all seabirds and turtles have plastic in their stomachs.³

Plastic pollution has also been associated with disease on coral reefs. A recent study of the effects of plastic on 124,000 reef-building corals from 159 reefs in the Asia Pacific Region (including Palm Islands, Whitsunday Islands and Keppel Islands) found the likelihood of disease increases from 4% to 89% when corals are in contact with plastic.⁴

The study estimates 11.1 billion plastic items are entangled on coral reefs across the Asia-Pacific, and project this number to increase 40% by 2025.

While most Australians care about our beautiful beaches and our iconic marine animals, recycling efforts have failed to stem the tide of plastic pollution flowing into our oceans. Waste recovery and recycling is essential but it is only one part of the solution. With safer, non-toxic products available we have the opportunity to phase out the most dangerous plastics and clean up our oceans.

Prohibition of single-use plastic products

AMCS supports the prohibition of the single-use plastic products that pose the greatest threats to our marine wildlife. Single-use plastic pollution cannot be contained without arresting the supply of unnecessary or dangerous plastics.

We support the prohibition of single-use plastic straws, stirrers, cutlery, plates and bowls as proposed by the legislation.

However, the scale of the plastics crisis in Australia's oceans is fast escalating, and banning these products alone will not be sufficient to arrest the flow of dangerous plastics into marine habitats.

We urge the committee to consider amendments to include the following plastic products in the legislation, as opposed to waiting and including them via regulation:

- single-use plastic cups
- polystyrene products such as cups, bowls, plates and clamshell containers
- plastic fruit & vegetable barrier bags
- plastic lined coffee cups and plastic coffee cup lids
- heavyweight shopping bags
- single-use plastic takeaway containers

¹ World Economics Forum. (January 2016). *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*. Access at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf

² UNESCO (2017). Facts and Figures on Marine Pollution.

³ Schuyler, Q.A., Wilcox, C., Townsend, K.A., Wedemeyer-Strombel, K.R., Balazs, G., van, Seville, E. and Hardesty, B.D. (2016), Risk analysis reveals global hotspots for marine debris ingestion by sea turtles. *Glob Change Biol*, 22: 567-576. doi:[10.1111/gcb.13078](https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13078)

⁴ Lamb et al. (2018). Plastic waste associated with disease on coral reefs, *Science*

- balloons and balloon sticks
- plastic bottles and bottle caps.

The complete list of plastic products we propose for prohibition are those most lethal to marine life and most commonly found in litter or in our oceans. They are killing Australia's marine wildlife through entanglement or when they break down into smaller pieces and are ingested, leading to starvation or contamination.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society does not support exemptions for items like juice boxes with an attached plastic straw or prep-packed items with plastic cutlery included.

These items – including soft plastic straw coverings – are rarely recycled. They are highly likely to be consumed outside near waterways, where they are thrown away into general garbage bins or littered. Plastic food and drink packaging is one of the most widespread plastics in our oceans.

We also urge the committee seek amendments to prohibit oxo-degradable plastic content.

An ACCC ruling in 2019 found that these products are not compostable. There is no evidence that these products decompose, instead breaking up into smaller pieces that are easily ingested by marine life. They should not be permitted in recycled or compostable plastic products.

If the Government plans to allow compostable alternatives, these should be required to meet the Australian compost standards for this type of packaging (AS 4736-commercial composting or AS 5810-home composting).

The Australian Marine Conservation Society supports exemptions for provision of plastic straws for people with disabilities or a medical need, with restrictions.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society supports plastic straws being made available via particular outlets such as pharmacies and schools. This limitation ensures they are only given to those who have a genuine need.

We have concerns about any general venue being able to make straws available. There is a real risk that this would make the regulation significantly less effective at reducing plastic straw pollution, a major threat to marine wildlife.

Commencement

The Australian Marine Conservation Society urges the government to act with urgency to address the plastics crisis in our oceans. Retailers and suppliers have been made aware of the governments intentions and available replacement products currently exist on the market. As such, we believe 6 months is sufficient time to allow for transition.

However, given recent disruptions caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus we believe 1 July 2021 strikes an appropriate balance between time needed for transition and the urgency required.

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Concluding remarks

Tackling the ocean plastics pollution crisis is an opportunity, and an obligation. Public appetite for action has never been greater, as evidenced by the overwhelming support shown by public submissions on the Regulatory Impact Statement.

We encourage you to use this opportunity to save Australia's marine life, ensuring every Australian can enjoy the privilege of healthy oceans for generations to come.

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Plastics Spokesperson

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