



31 July 2020

Committee Secretary

Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee

Parliament House

George Street

Brisbane Qld 4000

RE: SUBMISSION ON WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL 2020

To Whom it May Concern,

As Central Queensland's Natural Resource Management Group, Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) supports all efforts to reduce the negative impacts of human activities on the natural environment.

With the Fitzroy region covering over 156,700 square kilometres and a catchment that flows directly into the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon, FBA has observed first-hand the destructive environmental impact single-use plastics can have on waterways, native species, and local habitats. In just 12 months an FBA supported project, Drain Buddies, saw over 27,191 litter items, 721 kg of pollutants and 13,828 cigarette butts removed from local streets, and stopped from entering our waterways. Almost all litter items were completely or partially comprised of single-use plastic.

FBA acknowledges that most people want to do the right thing, but convenience and/or confusion surrounding product composition and their correct disposal methods act as barriers.

FBA see many strengths within the proposed Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020, including:

- The banning of use and sale of problematic waste items (plates, bowls, cutlery, straws, and stirrers) will reduce the amount of these plastics making their way into the natural environment.
- Regulations ensuring information is clearly presented for consumers to understand what items are 'home compostable' versus 'industrially compostable'.

There are areas of this amendment that could be further improved. The inclusion of schools as an exempted business, weakens proposed Government action under Strategic priority 1 of Queensland's Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy (2019). The option to use single-use plastics in schools whilst simultaneously implementing an educational program about waste and recycling creates a mixed message to students, parents, and staff.

If "developing an education strategy to integrate waste and recycling behaviours into the education system" is to have the maximum effect, encouraging and supporting schools to adopt sustainable alternatives (bamboo cutlery, biodegradable bowls, paper straws, etc.) is needed. This will further strengthen education programs and reduce plastic pollution, resulting in a future generation less dependable on single-use plastic items. In the Fitzroy region there are many schools signed up under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardian program, and as such, many schools are already willing Reef stewards undertaking actions to reduce marine debris (including disposable plastics).

FBA notes that Stage 2 proposes a consultation process to include takeaway food containers (plastic, plastic-lined and polystyrene) and heavyweight plastic shopping bags. The quantity of these items that end up as marine debris is likely underestimated by the public, as plastic film remnants and hard plastic pieces—which may have originated from food packaging—were the fourth and first, respectively, most collected items in Queensland during beach clean-ups¹. As the initial plastic bag ban effectively resulted in a 70% reduction of plastic bag litter, FBA recognises that similar coordinated State action, including consultation with the community, would be valuable in raising awareness of human behaviours that contribute to problematic plastic waste and its impact on the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Other recommended items to be considered for Stage 2 or Stage 3 of the consultation process are cotton buds, lollipop sticks and plastic cigarette filters. Cigarette filters and butts are the second highest item collected through volunteer efforts in Queensland over the last five years², and the highest collected item from FBA's Drain Buddy project. A large proportion of society are also unaware that these items contain plastic. Whilst FBA acknowledge that cigarette butts and filters may be a more difficult item to tackle, there are companies that are creating sustainable alternatives³. Supporting the development and manufacturing of suitable alternatives in Australia will help the government deliver on creating jobs, something frequently mentioned within Queensland's Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan, and is especially important post COVID-19.

Regional waste facilities in Central Queensland have high operational recovery costs in relation to recycling due to required volumes and transport costs to freight recoverable items to appropriate recycling facilities. Waste contamination also continues to be an issue due to confusion on what products can be recycled and human behaviours of convenience. Reducing plastic waste will therefore also likely have a positive reduction in the financial impost for local government in managing plastic waste.

FBA is a strong advocate of a multi-pronged approach to the challenge including regulation, investment in innovation and community education initiatives to maximise the effectiveness of Queensland Government's action on waste.

Further discussion on this submission can be requested by contacting Rebecca French, FBA's Engagement Manager on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



Elyse Riethmuller
Chief Executive Officer

¹ <http://amdi.tangaroablue.org/sign-in> with date (28/07/2015 to 28/07/2020) and spatial (QLD) filters applied.

² <http://amdi.tangaroablue.org/sign-in> with date (28/07/2015 to 28/07/2020) and spatial (QLD) filters applied.

³ <https://www.green-butts.com/>