



# ***NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr CG Whiting MP (Chair)  
Mr PT Weir MP  
Mr DJ Batt MP  
Mr JE Madden MP  
Mr BA Mickelberg MP  
Ms JC Pugh MP

**Staff present:**

Dr J Dewar (Committee Secretary)  
Ms C Furlong (Assistant Committee Secretary)

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL 2020**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**MONDAY, 10 AUGUST 2020**

**Brisbane**

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### **The committee met at 9.30 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we all meet today. Thank you for your interest and for your attendance here this morning. My name is Chris Whiting. I am the member for Bancroft and the chair of the committee. Other committee members here today are Mr Pat Weir, deputy chair and member for Condamine; Mr David Batt, member for Bundaberg; Mr Jim Madden, member for Ipswich West; Mr Brent Mickelberg, member for Buderim; and Ms Jess Pugh, member for Mount Ommaney.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. All those present should note that it is possible you may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

On 15 July 2020 the Hon. Leeanne Enoch, Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts, introduced the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020 into the parliament. The bill was referred to this committee for examination, with a reporting date of 28 August 2020. The purpose of this morning's hearing is to assist the committee with its examination of the bill.

**BROOKE, Mr Nick, Ocean Friendly National Coordinator, Surfrider Foundation Australia (via teleconference)**

**FOLEY, Ms Alison, Founder and Director, Ten Little Pieces (via teleconference)**

**CHAIR:** I now welcome representatives from Ten Little Pieces and Surfrider Foundation Australia. Alison, I invite you to make an opening statement and after that we will have some questions for you.

**Ms Foley:** I want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land from which I speak, the Gubbi Gubbi people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Ten Little Pieces is an education and empowerment movement for ordinary folks to make a big difference to the places they visit by collecting 10 little pieces of litter anytime, anywhere, especially with children involved. The simple act of collecting 10 pieces of litter, which is an easy mantra for even the youngest child to recite, opens conversations around conscious consumerism, circular economic thinking, systems theory and a rethinking and reframing of our concept of waste. We offer education programs from preschool through to school leaver level in the science of marine debris, environmental empowerment and solution based thinking in relation to the impact of plastic on our environment. We have grown from humble beginnings just 2½ years ago to now being a 5 Gyres Ambassador, a member of the Plastic Pollution Coalition, a partner of the United Nations Environment Program the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, and in January this year we were honoured with a Sunshine Coast Council Australia Day Award for environment and sustainability. Central to our philosophy is the unfaltering belief that individual actions, when combined, can make a huge impact. Recognised also is the wicked interconnection of the factors that contribute to marine litter and plastic pollution. Our message is simple: every little piece makes a difference.

Where I live, beach walks are a common luxury and it is impossible to visit any stretch of coastline with my children without collecting single-use plastics like straws, cutlery, food wrappers, soy fish, polystyrene, juice boxes, drink containers, lollipop sticks, bread ties, the ubiquitous cigarette butts and, if you look closely enough, microplastics. Where I live is also home to 300 endangered, threatened and vulnerable species including the endangered loggerhead turtles that nest on our beaches. Through my studies with the UNEP and the University of Netherlands last year for the expert stream on marine litter, I am familiar with the horrifying projections for plastic pollution entering our oceans and I wholeheartedly support the restriction and redesign of any products or packaging that has a life hundreds of years longer than its usefulness, with disastrous environmental and health impacts.

The urgency of the transition required has been highlighted by the Pew Charitable Trust's Breaking the Plastic Wave report released just a few days ago, on 23 July 2020. In it there is a revision of the current estimate of how much plastic is entering our ocean—11 million metric tonnes a year. The report also states that, without action, the annual flow of plastic into the ocean will nearly triple by 2040 to 29 million metric tonnes per year, or the equivalent of 50 kilograms of plastic per metre of coastline worldwide. Eighty per cent of this comes from land based sources.

Not all plastic is bad. It is cheap, versatile, flexible, durable and wonderful in many applications, but we need to rethink the origin and destination of the goods we consume and the packaging they come in, especially single-use plastics. If it is not produced it cannot be distributed and if it is not distributed it cannot be littered. Plastic never breaks down. It only breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces. It never goes away. Once debris leaves land, it is carried on ocean currents to accumulate in one of the five oceanic gyres, the largest of which is 1.6 million square kilometres of swirling plastic soup in the north Pacific. That is nearly as big as Queensland.

I am also an optimist. When we share this with children, show them photos of entangled turtles and whales, baby chicks with their beaks full of plastic by their parents and photos of Cape York beaches smothered in plastic debris, they take that knowledge on board and they change their behaviour. They revise what it is they want versus what they really need. They push for re-usables in their homes and in their school canteens and they do not want cheap plastic toys anymore. They begin to write letters to local cafes and businesses encouraging change and they design solutions, alternatives and end-of-product-life resource capture options. This gives me hope.

Queensland has a rare opportunity now to lead the way and effect lasting change by implementing plastic-free initiatives in schools particularly. By doing so you will directly educate over 800,000 students, their parents, families and the broader community, creating sustainable habits and guaranteeing savings for the governments of the future. I believe rapid and immediate change away from single-use plastic is not only possible; it is also imperative for the survival of our oceans, and I am convinced that this will come from a combination of factors including education and policy to restrict single-use plastic production and distribution.

I am also motivated to encourage anti-littering education and anti-littering law enforcement whilst single-use plastic is still in production, and I am particularly focused on cigarette butts. Last year I orchestrated a cigarette butt reduction initiative on the Sunshine Coast. This work has been widely endorsed by national and international organisations and the recommendations are due to be heard by the Sunshine Coast Council shortly. I chose to focus my research on behaviour change regarding the most commonly improperly discarded single-use plastic item in the world—cigarette butts. I believe a copy of the report is on record. Littered cigarette butts for me are symbolic of our attitude to individual responsibility and collective consequence, especially in relation to our natural world.

Earth Overshoot Day is on 22 August this year, in 12 days time. This marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what the earth can regenerate in that year. We will literally be on borrowed time. The production of plastic is from fossil fuels, highly polluting in their extraction and, according to the Centre for International Environmental Law, toxic at every stage of its life cycle. For me this message UNEP and the ambitions of the world to meet the sustainable development goals is that we have no time to waste. We must begin significant interventions right now from every sector if we are to preserve remaining biodiversity and achieve a livable planet for future generations. Thank you for your time.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Alison. Nick, I invite you to make a brief statement and then we will have some questions for you.

**Mr Brooke:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land from which I speak, the Gubbi Gubbi people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you for the opportunity for me to speak about Surfrider Foundation and the work we do with regard to source reduction of single-use plastics and harmful effects on our fragile coastal environment. I am Surfrider Foundation Australia's Ocean Friendly Program Manager. At the Surfrider Foundation we are dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's oceans, waves and beaches for all people through a powerful activist network. We do this through our model of care—conservation, activism, research and education. We have 18 branches and over 2,000 members across Australia. These branches are made up of highly passionate, driven volunteers who deliver our national campaigns on the ground and advocate on local, current and emerging coastal issues as well as participate in local projects that make a difference. For example, our Sunshine Coast branch holds an annual event called Clean Up Double Island where volunteers, family and friends join their local branch for a three-day weekend event where 300 participants collect,

analyse and weigh rubbish along a 42-kilometre stretch of beach just north of Noosa Heads, Queensland. At the last event in 2019, the participants collected, analysed and weighed over 1.5 tonnes of plastic rubbish over the three-day event.

Beach clean-ups like these serve a purpose. They encourage people to take action, they generate public awareness and participants become aware of the impacts of waste related pollution while actively reducing marine litter but, more importantly, the waste collected during these beach clean-ups contributes to pollution research and helps influence legislative change. The most commonly collected items during these beach clean-ups are cigarette butts, EPS foam, plastic beverage bottles, plastic bags, plastic straws, plastic forks, knives and spoons, plastic cups, plastic takeaway food containers and also plastic packaging. As we all know, plastic pollution is suffocating our oceans and the many animals that call it home. Researchers estimate that there are at least 5.2 trillion pieces of plastic in the ocean, with 11 million metric tonnes being added each year from land based sources. This pollution is negatively impacting our marine ecosystems and the wildlife including seabirds, dolphins, whales, fishes and turtles. Plastic fragments are even displacing plankton as the base of the food chain.

What is the best way to combat this global epidemic facing our oceans? It is simple. We have to stop the problem at the source. The Surfrider Foundation's Ocean Friendly program does just that—one business, one consumer at a time. It increases awareness, drives change in behaviour and ultimately creates a scalable impact to reduce our plastic footprint. Our Ocean Friendly program helps businesses become coastal defenders in their communities, all through the establishment of a program that is clearly recognised by their consumers, communities and the public.

After reading the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020, there are a few items that are not included in the amendments that need to be addressed, and they include the banning of polystyrene foam or plastic takeaway containers used as single-use items as well as the exemption for schools. EPS foam is very cheap to manufacture and cheap for businesses to buy but wreak havoc on the marine environment. EPS foam is not biodegrading in our lifetime. It may photodegrade or break down or break up into small pieces if littered, which is harder to clean up. EPS foam is typically made from a non-renewable source of fuel and synthetic chemicals that will leach over time especially when in contact with hot, greasy or acidic food. Although inexpensive to buy, EPS foam is expensive to clean up. Since they are so inexpensive, polystyrene products are often thrown away or littered as single-use items. EPS foam recycling is not economical and most of it ends up in landfill. Very few communities have access to polystyrene recycling. This form of plastic pollution should be addressed at the source instead of relying on the more trash cans and end-of-the-line type solutions for capturing and removing litter.

As we are shifting to more sustainable practices, environmentally friendly practices and legislative changes are what is needed to ban single-use plastics. What message are we sending to our future generations and leaders of tomorrow if schools are exempt from the protection of our environment? With school students accounting for just over 10 per cent of Queensland's population, it cannot be ignored and needs to be addressed. Programs, initiatives and incentives are needed to transition our schools and our education system into more economically sustainable practices. The Ocean Friendly program has been applied to a number of schools in Sydney with great success. These schools are implementing plastic-free recycling and environmentally friendly practices, bringing awareness, education and behavioural change to our future generations.

It has been an amazing experience to work with the Surfrider Foundation and the Ocean Friendly program. We have been working with volunteers, consumers and businesses with the reduction of single-use plastics but, ultimately, the greatest impact that can be made at this time is through legislative changes. With Queensland leading the way, changes in policies and legislation are really going to be the major shift we need to ultimately save our oceans, waves and beaches.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Nick and Alison. Through this bill we will have a date when those items in the first tranche are banned. That date is 1 July next year. Does that give you both educational opportunities now that you have some definite dates? How will that change how you educate and how you talk to people once you have a date when those will be banned?

**Mr Brooke:** As for our education, it will not change. Until these policies are in place and we can see a tangible difference that is scalable, our plastic education and the source reduction will continue. In fact, we are revamping our Ocean Friendly program and implementing more cafes and restaurants involved, as well as schools. This model has been applied to the US and we have over 700 establishments in the US, across the eastern and western seaboard, implementing the Ocean Friendly program.

**CHAIR:** Alison, how about you?

**Ms Foley:** I think it provides a shining light to say, yes, government is aware of this and, yes, there is potential to develop incentives, especially for budget strapped schools, to say, 'Here is a program like Ocean Friendly or Eco-Schools.' There are a number of organisations that can guide the way forward. Providing a ban on these things, with exemptions for health or disability as outlined in the amendment, is good. I feel that more can be done. I think there are some items that are not included that very much could be, especially in a school setting.

**Mr WEIR:** My question probably goes to the litter side of it. Obviously the idea is that most rubbish gets caught in the system and what can be recycled goes through the recycling system, but what you are both talking about is items that are completely missed. It is litter that finds its way into the oceans. Do you think there has been enough enforcement done, either at a local government or state government level, in education and enforcement, because that is the only way you are going to stop the issues you are talking about?

**Ms Foley:** I do not believe that there has been adequate enforcement of anti-littering law, certainly not here in the Sunshine Coast region. It is something that the Sunshine Coast Council is taking under advisement. I understand that at the state government level the Lidar system, where items are thrown out of car windows, is much easier to enforce if it is reported, but it is grossly inadequate. I believe that funds need to be directed not just to anti-littering law enforcement but also to education around the environmental and health impacts of litter—all kinds of litter.

**Mr WEIR:** Nick, do you have any comment on that?

**Mr Brooke:** No. Alison has pretty much covered it. Alison and I have spoken at length about this issue.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you very much for making submissions today, Nick and Alison. Alison, I would like to begin by congratulating your group on being the winner of the Sunshine Coast Australia Day Award for Environment and Sustainability. It is an excellent award.

**Ms Foley:** Thank you very much.

**Mr MADDEN:** I want to talk about something slightly different. This bill is to do with banning certain items from sale. I want to talk about the issue of drains and stormwater. We were recently in Rockhampton, where they have introduced a system of trialling drain traps. They discussed what they call gross pollution traps. There is actually a gross pollution trap within about 100 metres of my office at Brassall. This issue of capturing plastic items in the stormwater system before it gets to the ocean, the rivers and the creeks is something that we really need to tackle and we should tackle that through local government town-planning laws. Has either of your organisations looked at this from the point of view of encouraging local governments to introduce those laws in their town-planning schemes?

**Ms Foley:** I have had some experience with that. In our trial area of the Cigarette Butt Reduction Initiative—you have a copy of the report—we analysed three gross pollutant traps in the trial area. The area itself about 3½ years ago had 25 gross pollutant traps that were removed for roadworks and were not reinstalled. In the Alexandra Headland area, everything that is littered then can flow, if it gets into those stormwater drains without the traps, directly onto Alexandra Beach.

It is a very complicated chain of events. Do we have enough bins? Are we providing education? Do we have law enforcement? Is there an absence of accumulated waste in the area? These are the four behavioural management tools that we can use—and this is scientific research—to modify littering behaviour. If it is not produced it cannot be distributed. If it is not distributed it cannot be littered. I absolutely agree that infrastructure or 'infrastructure' is a necessary point. If we talk about the precautionary principle, we know that this is doing harm. We know that litter that leaves land is entering waterways and has a detrimental effect on our environment. We have an obligation to take every necessary and possible step, whether it is mechanistic or education or redesign of that product, to avoid the litter leaving land. Gross pollutant traps are highly effective, but I think they form part of an overall strategy to educate our society as to the consequences of single-use plastic, littering that single-use plastic and where it goes. It is origin and destination of the lifecycle of the product, yes.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** Alison, you spoke about the importance of children driving change and how that is a game changer over the short term and the longer term. I am keen to get your thoughts in relation to the fact that schools are expressly excluded from this legislation. What message do you think that sends to students and to school communities?

**Ms Foley:** That is a great question. I think we have a massive opportunity. The children that I interact with take on board the knowledge and the effect of their purchasing and consumption decisions very quickly. If we do not lead by example and use the schools as a method of dominating and pushing through for a much more sustainable and ecologically sound operational environment then it feels hypocritical. It feels as if we are not leading by example and providing them with the best chance. What we see in schools is that the children drive the change. They say, 'We don't want soy  
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fish with our sushi. Can we have our sushi in paper bags? Can we have waste recycling stations within the school? Can we have composting facilities? Do we do litter-free lunches or plastic-free lunches? Kids are one of the strongest agents of change because they do not have the blinkers and the barriers to change that perhaps adults do. What we find is that we give kids information with the methodology and the best practice that is available to us. These changes are not difficult, but they can be led very strongly with messaging from the government that there is an alternative, especially if government is going to incentivise the transition away from single-use plastic in school canteens. It is a simple strategy, but my belief is that that will have enormous ripple effects.

**Ms PUGH:** Thank you both for your dedication to something that is a really important issue. I got involved in politics as a young person in large part because of issues like this. It is really good to be talking about this legislation today. I do not want to stigmatise smokers even further, but I noticed that both of you separately mentioned cigarette butts as the single largest source. I hope I am not misquoting you there, but you both mentioned that. Less than 15 per cent of Queenslanders are smokers. What do you think is the reason for this particular piece of litter, being that it does have additional dangers for the general population? We had a very large grass fire in Mount Ommaney last year caused by a cigarette butt. There are additional dangers there. I am just wondering if there is some additional education we need to do around that specifically as a piece of litter.

**Ms Foley:** Our research showed that education was an extremely powerful motivating factor. Litterers—rather than casting the brushstroke against all smokers, because all smokers are not litterers—of cigarette butts are unaware generally that cigarette butts are made of cellulose acetate, which is a form of highly fibrous plastic. They are also unaware that they contain over 4,000 toxic leachable chemicals. They are unaware that it is illegal to smoke particularly on our beaches here. It is deemed to be very personal and people are not often challenged for their littering behaviour. Historically it has been considered cool, as it were, to flick. One of the programs I have been working on is ReefClean with five regional councils up on the reef, with Tangaroa Blue to ‘ditch the flick’, which is one of the wings of that program, to educate on the harmful environmental impacts of this. Education is a huge part. It cannot change behaviour by itself; it has to be in conjunction with anti-littering law enforcement.

**Ms PUGH:** On the topic of behaviour management, bins and things like that, I have a friend who is a teacher and has designed their new senior space to have absolutely no rubbish bins, the idea being that you are responsible for your own litter. You bring it with you to school and you take it home. Is that an alternative to providing bins every however many metres? Should we instead be putting the onus back on people that it is unacceptable to litter and therefore people should be taking their litter with them rather than looking for the bin every 50 metres—litter is something that you take home with you and you dispose of it yourself—and perhaps put a bit more responsibility back on the individual?

**Ms Foley:** If you took a blanket approach like that—‘if bring it with you, take it home’—you would see extensive illegal dumping occurring. I think you would see a lot of things thrown out of car windows et cetera. In my patch, on the Sunshine Coast, we have enough bins. People are not using them. The question I am asking is: why not? For me, it is a lack of law enforcement and a lack of education. I think those two things in concert will go an enormous way to educating and helping people to rethink the consequences of their consumption.

**Ms PUGH:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate your honesty.

**Mr BATT:** The member for Buderim talked about schools being exempt, but under the bill there are other exempt businesses—hospitals, medical places et cetera. We understand why they may need to be exempt. When we were in Cairns, Plastic Free Cairns said that there are biodegradable home compostable alternatives for all of these products. If that is the case and we could use those types of products that are compostable, do you believe that any businesses should be exempt?

**Mr Brooke:** The word ‘compostable’ just means deteriorated with microorganisms over a certain period of time. ‘Compostable’ and ‘home compostable’ are two different classifications. If we look at the behaviour behind compostable, it is still a single-use item. There are companies out there that are using biodegradable or compostable but their products need industrial composters. Unless councils have the industrial composters and the facilities to do it and the behaviours changed around the single-use item issue, the whole bioplastic compostable is not a solution. That is where source reduction comes in, because, instead of giving them the single-use item as the lesser of two evils, we are actually changing that behaviour and that single-use mentality.

**CHAIR:** The time for this session has now expired. Thank you, Nick and Alison, for appearing via teleconference today. We really appreciate all the efforts you have made. Keep on working in your community.

**HUTCHEON, Mr Toby, Campaign Manager, Boomerang Alliance**

**CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome. We invite you to make an opening statement. After that, we will have a few quick questions for you.

**Mr Hutcheon:** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. The WWF recently did a scorecard on the performance of Australian jurisdictions on plastics. They rated and ranked Queensland as No. 1, the best jurisdiction, for dealing with plastic policies. That is a commendable achievement for our state. Whilst I do commend the government, I commend the opposition and every single party in the parliament for this achievement, because the last parliament unanimously passed both a plastic bag ban and a CRS, both of which have had a significant impact on the amount of plastic litter in Queensland. This legislation is the next step, dealing with the next range of takeaway plastics.

This is all part of a global agenda. We have identified that we have a huge problem globally with single-use plastics, both as waste and as litter. Of course, lots of broad statements are made that if we carry on like this there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050. This is a very scary thing that we have to start to deal with and step back from. There is a whole global agenda now that has been adopted by many governments and by many multinationals. In the packaging industry, the main suppliers of a lot of that packaging are now acting around a basic target of all plastic packaging being re-usable, compostable or recyclable by 2025. We are already seeing those sorts of things taking place. For instance, Coca-Cola now has a requirement that its plastic bottles are 100 per cent recycled, and it does not provide any of its retail outlets with straws anymore. When stores get a delivery of bottled water, Coke or whatever, they are not provided with straws. Similarly, McDonald's and others are phasing out all of these sorts of items as a response to dealing with single-use plastic.

It is also part of the national waste plan that we have to phase out all of this problematic plastic. This legislation sits very much within that whole context of jurisdictions moving to address these single-use plastics. Queensland, as I say, is No. 1 and we are, I guess, in lock step with the South Australians and the ACT government in terms of looking at legislation like this. New South Wales we anticipate will be following this year, as will Western Australia. We are nearly through all the jurisdictions acting in a similar way. Certainly, we will be following Queensland in this case.

We run Plastic Free Places, a program directly engaging with the hospitality sector to help it switch in the direction in which this legislation is pointing us. We quite often get a lot of questions about costs. I hasten to add that for most hospitality sector people that we work with cost is not really a big issue. They have recognised that there is a problem and they want to participate in that change. When we are asked about costs, we like to make it very clear that the cost to a supplier or a cafe and their customers is only a part of the issue, because downstream we have a huge cost, borne by local government, in terms of trying to pick up all this litter that we are generating. There is little information in Queensland about the cost to government. In New South Wales, the recent litter report published in February this year cited a report from 2016 in which local government in New South Wales estimated the cost of litter management in 2016 at \$180 million a year. That is just local government bearing that cost. It is a significant cost. It is also a significant cost, obviously, for local government in terms of managing waste. We have not even started on the impacts on the environment of all this plastic getting into our marine environment. There are lots of studies now emerging that show that we are potentially starting to eat plastic that we have actually discarded as litter. It is those sorts of issues that we have to consider.

The other issue is that some of these plastics have become excessively cheap. I will pick two items which are the main issue of this legislation—straws and cutlery. For straws, the alternatives cost about three times as much; for cutlery, it is about twice as much. Anyone going to a bar, cafe or restaurant nowadays just automatically gets given a plastic straw, even though they have not asked for it. We have been given endless plastic straws that we have never asked for, we do not want and we probably will never use, because they are so cheap. In our program, the first thing we ask restaurants is, 'Can you get rid of the straw?' The first thing we say is, 'Get it off the counter and do not automatically provide it.' The restaurants and cafes we work with then report that they see an 80 per cent decrease in the use of straws. That is across the board. If cafes are worried about the affordability of switching to a paper straw, they need not worry. If they can just not make it an automatic action to give their customers a straw, they can afford the alternative, because consumption will reduce by 80 per cent. Similarly with cutlery, takeaway cutlery in particular, I am sick and tired of opening up my package of takeaway food and finding a full set of plastic cutlery. I am at home; I do not need it. If they would just simply ask me, 'Do you want some plastic cutlery?' before I pick it up, it would change things. There is a whole range of different practices in the hospitality sector that will reduce the amount of plastics we are using and make all the changes affordable.

This enabling legislation is really about directing us to the most littered items in Queensland which are, broadly, plastic packaging. We like the fact that it is scheduled in a way that we start with straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery and then can add on things as we go. All in all, we are dealing with the whole thing. It is very much designed to change practice so that we start using less and, where we do use these things, they are compostable and can be collected and reprocessed in the future. We are very much supportive of this legislation. The phase-out date is 1 July 2021. We suggest that the second tranche of changes be in place by 2022.

I would like to pick up on one particular issue—expanded polystyrene. Please note my flat water bottle especially designed for briefcases; it falls over, though! Expanded polystyrene is a litter problem and a waste problem, and it is very expensive. There are alternatives available. Most places have already long ago abandoned it. We think it should be included in the first tranche of the legislation. We have presented a letter to the minister to that effect. I reference this letter in my submission to you. It is signed by most of the associations and the community organisations involved with all of this. We think expanded polystyrene—particularly cups and containers and potentially lids for coffee cups—should be included. If they are not, we will get flooded until we start to phase out polystyrene. I just encourage that to occur.

In terms of exemptions for disability, we have absolutely no issue with that. We very much support that. The other exemption, which is the 100 per cent compostable packaging, is great. This will set the benchmark standard for a lot of takeaway packaging. As you may be aware, there are very few consistent standards in this country, but Queensland, by doing this, is setting that standard. Everyone else, believe me, will follow. That is really what I would like to present, although I would like to put in your heads that I think it would be worthwhile Queensland starting to instigate more work on what we do about cigarette butts in the future, because they are the big item to which we are turning a blind eye, so to speak, right now.

**Mr WEIR:** You mentioned re-usable and compostable. They are two separate issues that keep coming up throughout these hearings. You talked about the banning of plastic bags, and I was on the committee that did that last parliament. That is fine, but a lot of submitters are talking about those items that escape and end up in our creeks, rivers and waterways. You mentioned cost to government, which interested me. You have not seen the cost to government in Queensland.

**Mr Hutcheon:** There are estimates. You would have to ask the department more about that. I am not aware of an accurate assessment of the cost to government of litter management where I am, from a New South Wales point of view. I can only conclude that it is going to be similar, if not more, in Queensland.

**Mr WEIR:** The other issue is on a broader scale and it comes to affordability. If we could get waste that could completely break down, would that have an impact on our neighbouring countries? We hear about the litter in the north of Australia. A lot of that is not coming from Australia; it is coming from our near neighbours. Do you think this is something that can reach into those areas?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Absolutely. At the last Commonwealth election, we proposed that the Commonwealth put some funding into what we called a Pacific litter project. That has now been funded by the Commonwealth. We have to understand that our neighbouring nations are not as advanced as we are in terms of litter management. If we could at least start with, I guess, investing in those local communities so there is collection and then recycling with that material, then a lot of it will not float over to Northern Queensland and Northern Australia. That would be a great start that we could make. No doubt, everything we do can then be adapted and adopted in those nations so we actually solve the problems, particularly of South-East Asia.

**Ms PUGH:** I do not think I have to declare this but when I was a really little girl my mum was in an environmental group which I think was called RAGE. I do not know what that stands for but they were determined to ban plastic bags in shops. She would be really excited to meet you because we have the Boomerang Bags in Mount Ommaney and they are very popular and I know that is a part of what you do. I asked a question earlier about cigarette butts and you have mentioned that. I am keen to know whether you have anything more to say about what we can do around education and preventing cigarette butts from being such a major source of litter.

**Mr Hutcheon:** It is a really difficult one. Part of it is about education and awareness, part of it is about getting people to comply with the litter laws and part of it is about working out how you might fund programs to make that change. I have deliberately not put in any suggestions about what that might be. I think it would be better for jurisdictional consideration of what are the best strategies to actually start to deal with these things. Whilst throwing away your butt is a littering act, often it is not being policed so people get away with it. I would just suggest that it is a whole package that we need to look at, and right now it is largely being ignored, even though it is the single most significant litter item.

**Mr BATT:** You mentioned earlier, and it is in your submission, the support of exemptions, including for people with a disability. When we were in Cairns, we heard from a lady from Plastic Free Cairns. She said that there are already alternatives out there that are biodegradable and home compostable. I asked the previous witnesses this as well. If that is the case, should we have an exemption for people to have plastic items when they actually do not need that exemption if we can give them biodegradable and home compostable items instead?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Plastic Free Cairns is actually our program so I hope you found it instructive talking with Helen.

**Mr BATT:** It was very good.

**Mr Hutcheon:** How can I answer this? Having the rule around compostability is important. I do not like the word 'biodegradability' because it has been watered down and confused. Having a compostable standard that is acceptable to the composter is the key for us because at the end of the day what you want is all of this product to get collected and go to a composter. Anything else, you could probably have it collected but it would not be composted properly; it would contaminate that compost stream. That is why it is very important that Queensland set that 100 per cent Australian standard.

There are other standards. Right now, unfortunately, any manufacturer can put a product onto the market and say, 'This is compostable,' even if it is not because we do not have that standard. That is the importance of what Queensland is now doing. If you are going to have this product, it needs to be compostable, and they have allowed both home compostable and commercially compostable. Obviously, home compostable is a better option but we will work our way towards that. I would suggest to you that it is having that standard to the Australian standard that is the important issue.

**Mr BATT:** While we were in Cairns we heard the difference between home compostable and commercial compostable. The Cairns Regional Council have said that anything that would be commercial compostable—and most councils will be the same—will still just go to landfill because there is no-one that can do commercial compostable in those regional cities and it is too difficult to send that to someone to deal with. What are your thoughts on that? Would it be better to just make it home compostable, or is that too difficult under these standards?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Home compostable is a preferred option because it is a better product. The reality is that if you are buying a takeaway coffee on the way to work you are not going to then put the package in your bag and take it home. This is the first step that we take: we actually change the packaging. We recognise that it is still not necessarily getting collected and processed but this will follow. Already on the Sunshine Coast there is now talk about having new composting facilities established to start to deal with this.

The other side of the coin is that the Queensland government is seeking to have organics out of landfill. That means that inevitably we are going to have a green waste collection service in all major centres in Queensland that will be taking it to a commercial composter that will have to be established. This actually piggybacks onto all of that. What we are doing is creating a demand and then when we have a demand the collection and the processing will follow.

**Mr MADDEN:** I am going to ask you a question I asked the previous submitters. It is not to do with items being banned; it is to do with capturing bad items before they get into our rivers, creeks and oceans. We do that through gross pollution traps and drain traps. Is your organisation looking at that from a point of view of putting pressure on local, state and federal governments to actually legislate this in town plans for cities—that they must have these traps when they put stormwater systems in new developments?

**Mr Hutcheon:** It is not something that we work on but I think it would be a very good idea. However, we are still dealing with the litter and how to clean it up. Yes, it is a very good idea but I would suggest that it is going to be more effective to stop it in the first place. We have a group of products here for which there is an alternative. There is an alternative practice and there is an alternative product. I would suggest that that is a far better and more effective process, as well as ensuring that we have gross pollution traps as part of planning regimes.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** My question is going to use Plastic Free Cairns as the example. It was evident, and correct me if I am wrong, that there is a strong partnership with council in Cairns to enable that program. I am keen to understand how that looks in other areas across Queensland. Are there areas where you get strong support, and who are those stakeholders, as opposed to areas where it is a problem?

**Mr Hutcheon:** We have deliberately liked the partnership approach so it is not just a community organisation going to a cafe. We like the association with a council because that allows us to have more credentials in terms of doing this. It is also better that we are not council, because cafes will go, 'I've got another council inspector to come and see me.' We are independent of that.

Yes, we have a strong focus on partnership with council, partnership with community organisations and partnership with the hospitality sector in particular. In Noosa, which was the first program, we had a very strong partnership with the chamber of commerce and with Tourism Noosa and that has led to a huge amount of achievement around that. In terms of other places, yes, we are inundated by inquiries now from other local governments. There are four currently wanting to consider this program here. We are also available and working in another seven around the country. We have recently been approached by every single state government looking at whether this program can be adopted in their own state.

I think people are recognising that, if the governments are moving in this policy direction, this represents one way of doing a transition because we are specifically aimed at the hospitality sector to encourage them and show them how they can shift. There is so much misinformation out there and we try to demystify all of that. Because we work with a cafe themselves and we work with their supplier and the manufacturer, we can ensure it is as easy as possible for them to switch over. In a nutshell, in terms of your question, yes, we are getting lots and lots of interest from a whole range of other locations in Queensland.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** You spoke in your opening statement about multinationals. We have heard in other areas in the inquiry about fast-food outlets, for example, and the preponderance of litter that has come from those sources. I am aware that McDonald's has a Clean Streets Program globally. I am keen to get your thoughts on whether or not franchisees, both locally and across Australia, actually participate in that at a local restaurant level. Does that support just extend to Clean Up Australia Day and sponsorship from that perspective?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Unfortunately, I cannot give you the information because it is not an area that we closely follow. I would hope that they are all participating comprehensively in all of this. In reality, the best thing they can do is change their packaging to make sure that they are using far less and that what they are using is the preferred option. The good news, as I see it, is that many of those multinationals are actually recognising this and switching. With the straws, it would be Coke recognising, 'This is a problem and it's probably an unnecessary product that we're providing to our retailers.' That is the sort of start that we want to see.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** I am aware that McDonald's made a commitment to remove straws by the end of this year. Is that on track, as far as you are aware? Is that something you are engaged with as well?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Yes. My understanding is that it would have been in place now but for the COVID situation. It is my understanding that it is still on schedule to be phased out this year.

**Ms PUGH:** I used to work in the restaurant sector and back in 2015 we installed a water system that basically filtered all of our water for us. Rather than selling mineral water in bottles by the bottle—there was not a recycling scheme in place for bottles—we adopted a recycled filter system where we filled the bottles ourselves using a filtration system that we installed. Obviously with the advent of the recycling system for bottles things have changed somewhat, but have you noticed a significant uptake in the hospitality sector when you have been talking to them about plastic straws and the other things that you work with them on?

**Mr Hutcheon:** Yes. This has been a relatively easy project for us. The hospitality sector has been really receptive to the whole thing. We have very few knockbacks. It is almost a case that they have been waiting for the advice and the engagement and the help. Our focus really is on recyclables. We prefer cafes, wherever they can, to switch to recyclable options because it is a better option. In relation to compostability, we recognise it might be impractical for a cafe to go to BYO cups or BYO containers so the compostable notion of it is the next best option and we obviously support and endorse them doing that.

In terms of water systems for the public, yes, it is part of what we suggest to cafes—that they, in fact, should become what we call a plastic-free champion. They have to have tap water available to their customers. Currently, of course, you cannot do that under COVID, but when things settle down we hope that that will be returned as an option.

**CHAIR:** The time allotted for this session has now expired. Thank you very much for your participation today.

**JOHNSON, Ms Ebony, Policy Project Manager, National Retail Association**

**STOUT, Mr David, Director, Policy, National Retail Association**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make an opening statement. After that we will ask you some questions.

**Mr Stout:** I am following Toby and I will keep it brief, but I appreciate that it might be a tough act to follow. The National Retail Association is one of the largest and most representative retail industry associations in Australia. We are a not-for-profit organisation based in Brisbane and we represent over 28,000 outlets from every category of retail including fashion, groceries, department store, household goods, hardware, fast food, cafes and services. Of these, over 5,000 are Queensland based outlets. We work with a majority of national chains, franchises right down to small to medium mum-and-dad businesses.

I think it needs to be said that we have a great track record when it comes to being proactive in bringing industry, government and community together, not only to protect our environment but also to deliver beneficial outcomes for all. Over the past few years the NRA and our members have been instrumental in some of the most significant changes for the environment in Australia. We were instrumental in leading the plastic bag ban in 2017, with a reduction of over three billion lightweight bags that were prevented from consumption throughout Queensland and subsequent jurisdictions.

The key for us is collaboration with key industry task forces responsible for rolling out container deposit schemes—and that is obviously some ongoing work—and voluntary stewardship schemes. I think we are heavily involved on a range of levels and, as Toby alluded to, there is a multitude of different initiatives across Australia with multiple jurisdictions looking at plastic reduction, container deposits and, of course, moving on now to single-use plastic reductions. We are involved in multiple states and, of course, we have played an integral role hopefully to standardise some of the approaches across Australia.

We do, however, want to congratulate Queensland. They have probably been the initiator of several of these initiatives, from container deposits through to plastic bag bans. The approach in Queensland has been one of a lot of consultation and collaboration between a lot of industry stakeholders and I think that needs to be congratulated and pointed out.

**CHAIR:** One of the issues is the exhaustion of current stock. We heard this when we talked to Plastic Free Cairns. There would be some cases where your members would have enormous amounts of plastic straws already in stock. Given that we have a date of mid 2021 when the ban comes in, would you start working with your members now to stop the supply so that come mid 2021 you do not have to then exhaust all your supply from then on? How are you going to approach that and how will you help keep things moving along to stop that surplus of straws?

**Mr Stout:** As with any movement, the first consideration is very clear and concise definitions so that businesses know what they are moving from and what they are moving to. The supply chains in Australia are quite complex and they are relatively border blind, so you have stock moving around the country. At the moment in COVID we have a lot of complexities feeding Australia because the distribution does not work border to border. Because of the nature of COVID, it has presented a lot of problems. The supply chains for fresh food are rather short. The customer is demanding very fresh delivered product on time with just-in-time deliveries and, of course, with the non-perishable goods you have extremely long supply chains which are international. It is a problem. You have not only supplies but also contracts with certain businesses globally, so you may have only three months worth of supply but you have an 18-month contract with someone somewhere to deliver this product.

The priority for us is to give our members clarity on the substitutions—what the alternatives are. Of course, we deliver a range of options for them: 'You cannot have this but these are the options you can have.' We are all highly competitive businesses, obviously with the nature of the work, so they go off and try to formulate a suitable solution for them. It could be anywhere between three months and three years, to be honest. Some businesses will just take the next best option. I have other businesses that are very closely aligned to sustainability and not only do they want to be compliant but also they want to be seen as cutting edge, so that necessarily puts them into a place where they are looking for solutions that are not available in Australia or maybe not available globally. They are looking for solutions that are not available yet so they have to consult with them. One of the two or three biggest members are looking for solutions globally which require a whole heap of standards and they need to be certified and backed up. In most cases they will probably need to go to those jurisdictions to confirm that is actually the case, that what they are asking for is actually being delivered. I think the biggest concern for us now with COVID and supply chains is that they cannot necessarily go globally and actually seek out and provide confidence that these solutions are being developed and made.

**CHAIR:** To help prevent excess stock, is it best that the alternatives are communicated? Would that be an essential part of a communications package?

**Mr Stout:** Definitely. We are working with the department to ensure we have the delineation with those standards and clarification. The benefit of going first is that if you want to exhaust your current stocks you can move them to other states. That is beneficial; that needs to be said.

**CHAIR:** You mentioned certification internationally. We have those two standards for compostable: commercially compostable, which is 4736, and home compostable, which is 5810. Do other countries have those standards? If we are sourcing straws from those countries, what are some of the issues with regard to certification?

**Mr Stout:** From what I understand, those standards are Australian standards and not ISO standards so I can only assume that they are not available internationally and therefore you would have to go internationally and ensure that those standards are being delivered at that point.

**Mr WEIR:** My question goes to the time frame and the commencement date of 2021. You talked about different businesses that would have stocks ordered and in the pipeline—obviously if they do not use them they are going to end up in landfill in any case—and the ability to replace these items that would be banned in that time frame. Are you comfortable with that time frame of July 2021 or can you see issues with the time frame?

**Mr Stout:** It depends on the business. If they are looking for a particular solution it is problematic because it does not allow enough time in the current environment because they cannot travel globally to seek out these solutions. The National Retail Association was integral and we conducted over 15,000 individual retailer visits across the state to help engage and educate through the plastic bag transition. Most of those retailers just want to know what the alternatives are and then, if they move to that alternative, whatever that solution might be, how they tell the consumer what that particular solution is and be comfortable to follow that particular solution through. For example, most of the major supermarkets went from a lightweight plastic bag well and truly over the legislation to a heavyweight plastic bag which formed the basis of a menu of solutions that they were providing, from paper to heavy woven bags right through to a 50- or 60-micron bag. It is good to know that they want a whole range of solutions. Small businesses are not necessarily that strategic and just want to know that the solution they are providing to their consumer is the right one and they can back it up with some substance.

**Mr WEIR:** You indicated there may be specific businesses that might struggle with the time frame. In the hospitality industry in my area I have talked to the cafes and they are generally progressing this way anyhow because they have seen this coming from a long way out. What sorts of businesses would you be anticipating might struggle with the time frame?

**Mr Stout:** We need to understand the strategy and the position within the market for certain businesses. It is quite easy to adopt them: just adopt the next best, so going from a plastic thing to a paper thing. That is an outcome. We strongly recommend to most businesses that they review the capacity to have that in the first place. Going to Toby's point, the best solution for business is also avoidance. If they can remove that particular item from the counter so it is not accessible then their outgoings plummet because they are not giving away something that the consumer expects for nothing. If we can help manage those expectations, that is very helpful. When they are replacing an item with something that is 200 per cent or 300 per cent more expensive but the demand goes down by 600 per cent or 700 per cent, they are in front. With other businesses, because of the nature and the focus of those businesses whatever they provide has to be very robust, it has to follow all of the standards and it has to be a solution that works not only in Queensland but also across all of Australia and potentially globally.

**Ms PUGH:** When we introduced the ban on the plastic bags there was a lot of feedback at the time, not all of it good in the short term. I think especially as people went to the shops for the first time and forgot their bags, there was a bit of aggravation. I noticed that went on for probably one or two months. I notice when I am outside the shops giving out bags that dads tend to still forget and they will walk out with no bag because they are not going to pay 15 cents. It is always the dads. I am sorry: I have never seen a mum do it. The point I am getting at is: I think no matter when we introduce this some customers are going to find it problematic in the short term and there is going to be some niggles and some pushback but eventually, like with the plastic bag ban, sooner or later we will get to a point where we cannot really remember what it was like beforehand. That said, if you feel that July 2021 is not feasible can you suggest what you think is feasible?

**Mr Stout:** To your first point, I think most of the people who may have forgotten their bag probably represent—I acknowledge that the hundreds of bags they do own are probably in another car.

**Ms PUGH:** That is exactly right: they are at home—and they are annoyed!

**Mr Stout:** They obviously do not want to invest that because of the bags they already have.

**Ms PUGH:** That is right.

**Mr Stout:** To your other question, it is very important that retailers are part of the change management process. If we did not appreciate the role of the retailer this time last year, with going through COVID and the essential nature of the work they provide, we probably should recognise the role that they play. They feel quite confronted about this change management process. It is something that the government regulates but, therefore, they have to sell in the interactions they have with the consumer. It is important that they understand; they can deflect some of the criticism. Once the consumer warms to the fact that it is not only them and that we are doing it for the right reason—they might forget it and get a little bit disgruntled over the first month or two—they are quite happy to move forward. If we go for the low-hanging fruit like stirrers and straws, those things would be relatively easy to accept in the short term.

**Mr BATT:** David, you mentioned earlier when you were talking alternatives that you would say, 'You cannot have this, but you can have that.' Is that part of the NRA's role for their members: once this comes in, you will be able to say, 'These things are banned, you can't have these, but here are three or four alternatives that you can use'? Is that how it works?

**Mr Stout:** We seek input from members and non-members alike, because it is very important for us to understand not only our membership but, more importantly, the widespread feedback from all of retail. The mum-and-dad operators are not necessarily engaging with an association, but it is also important to understand their particular views. Without the resources of bigger business, they have difficulty challenging the consumer and pushing back. We like to know their particular pain points so we can give them the advice that they need and offer a range of solutions.

The other thing is that this can be quite competitive. The single most confronting piece of the bag ban throughout the process was, 'If I do not give this away, my competitor across the way or down the street might; therefore, they will leave my business and go to them.' Retail is struggling at the moment. Every small variation in service or experience is noted. If a straw is important to you and you cannot get it there but you can get it down the road, it may be the precipice to shift from business A to business B.

**Mr BATT:** There are exemptions under the act for certain places. Because there are going to be only small amounts required for those exempted places, can you see there being difficulties for them getting that product? If they still need plastic straws but there are only a few places in Queensland that will need those straws, will it be difficult for them to get them?

**Mr Stout:** Are you referring to the disability sector?

**Mr BATT:** Hospitals, schools and places for disabilities that are exempted.

**Mr Stout:** The health sector speaks for itself. I cannot anticipate all of the questions in the health sector; it is not my expertise. I know from a retailer's perspective that providing plastic straws will be problematic for a couple of reasons. First of all, there is the cost. Because of the demand, the cost of that particular straw is going to skyrocket. That gives retailers a problem with the sector it would be difficult to have that conversation with, for want of a better term. I think the best solution we currently have is to move the health sector or the disabled sector towards the pharmacies. They obviously have the relationship with them currently. If the demand is not met, there is a possibility that those things can be subsidised through a lot of the health vehicles—NDIS and others. I really think that is a good solution. To expect retailers—that is a very broad brush—to have something in reserve just for you would be quite difficult. Then for the retailers to disappoint that person would be quite confrontational and emotional for those retailers, too, because they have put them in a particularly difficult spot. On the flip side, there is the issue of trying to police it: who is entitled and who is not entitled. You might be dealing with the individual themselves, someone who is deliberately malicious or you might be dealing with their carer. Realistically, what would happen eventually is, if questioned, you would just give them why. It is not a great outcome.

**Mr BATT:** We have heard there are these compostable alternatives for those products now anyway, so maybe we would go away from having exempted items in the first place.

**Mr Stout:** With compostability, it is confusing, it is technical and it does require standards to be adopted. It also requires the facility for those things to be composted. We have 77 councils throughout Queensland and they all offer different services. For the retailer to say, 'If you purchase it here, you can take it to your local council and get it recycled,' is not always the case. We cannot give them one blanket, simple solution. Composting is problematic. It is very technical. It is caught up in a

bit of greenwashing. A lot of people claim that these things are sustainable or friendly, and that just confuses the retailer. Rather than say, 'The alternative is to become a specialist or become part of this confusion,' the best solution is to either avoid it or go to something which is relatively simple—get out of plastic and go to paper—because we can vouch for that. This is just going to confuse you, if you cannot dedicate the time.

**Mr BATT:** You also mentioned that you can see issues with some of your members for those things that will be consumed out of Queensland but may need to be stored in Queensland. Have you had any feedback from the department as to whether that is cleared up?

**Mr Stout:** It has been clarified for us. The offence is sale, not transport. I mentioned border blindness earlier. All of the major DCs for Coles, Woolworths, Aldi and Metcash are based in and around Logan and they normally ship or drive within seven hours of that. They will drive as far as Tamworth south and probably Gladstone or Rockhampton north. It has complete disregard for the border as such. At least 25 per cent and as much as 35 per cent of any stock any day would be heading south across the New South Wales border. It is very important to them. Warehousing and moving stock is not an offence. Therefore, if we have a surplus of stock it is probably going to go to New South Wales.

**Mr MADDEN:** I want to talk about the aspect of industry being ahead of legislation. We visited the Blackbird coffee shop in Cairns. They are very much ahead of legislation. You rent a cup and they keep it there and so on. The member for Buderim talked about McDonald's wanting to be ahead of the game. I want to say this in a kind way. Retailers are always looking for an advantage. Do you see a future where retailers will be ahead of legislation—at least some retailers—and, perhaps just using this legislation as an example, some retailers adopting this in advance of July 2021? I am also confused about compostable and commercially compostable. Do you think we need a whole different vernacular to describe the future we have? There are two questions there: do you see some aspects of retailers being ahead of the game; and is there a need for clarity with regard to the words we use with regard to that future?

**Mr Stout:** My answer to the first question is definitely. Not all retailers are the same. They have different opinions all the way along from, 'I don't particularly care and why is government meddling?' to, 'I want to be six to 12 months in front of it and this is a very strong part of what we do and our core values.' You only have to look at Apple to see this: everything is recyclable and it is 100 per cent greenhouse energy. There are businesses that consider legislation a good benchmark but they have already well and truly surpassed it. It is more a part of their strategy, not necessarily their size. There could be mum-and-dad businesses that adopt that strategy—that is their point of difference—versus the others at the other end of the scale who barely comply and very begrudgingly move from X to Y. Some 80 per cent of them are probably in the middle and quite happy. Because their consumers want it, they will move—as long as they have adequate solutions and they do not have to do this two or three times. The last thing they want to do is have to do this again every six to 12 months.

To answer your second question, I think the complexities of recycling, recyclability and compostability are problematic. To see this you only have to look at the coffee cup in front of you, which presents about three challenges. This is no disrespect, but I do not think local government services have kept up. They are probably about five to 10 years behind. In most cases you will be presented with two bins and you think, 'That is landfill. That is recyclable.' You have to say that with caveats because, yes, it is, but that particular bin probably has to be delineated another five to 10 times to get to that point. I think we are oversimplifying it here. Retailers are caught up in that particular problem because when they mark something as recyclable and that gets to the bin, unfortunately it is not. They cannot make that claim; they will be criticised if they do. If it is too hard, they just will not, because they do not like being criticised to the consumers as they will leave and go somewhere else. Yes, it needs to be simplified.

There is a lot of work happening in packaging with APCO, with the ARL. They are developing things and working towards the future. There is a lot of good work happening with container deposits. I think that has motivated a lot of people to move in a particular direction. There was a lot of good work started with the plastic bag ban. I see this as a continuation, as Toby alluded to, but now we are getting to the point where in some of these cases the alternatives are not as obvious so we have to be more strategic in where we send them.

**Ms Johnson:** With regard to clarity of the terms, I think consumers are very confused. We were involved right throughout the bag ban campaign, from the start and through the campaigns with Mal Meninga. I think there is a really strong argument for consumer education as well as retailer education and tying that together. Retailers are often the educator of consumers at the point of sale. We found that was absolutely critical during the bag ban. This does need to be combined with some

really clear education. With the bag ban, we were even defining down to the thickness of microns. No-one knew what microns were. Now we are experts and we carry around micrometers to measure the thickness of a bag. It is just an education piece and you need to help particularly small retailers through that. The larger retailers are probably very well resourced and educated, but we will need to help a lot of consumers and retailers through this. It is very possible, but you just need to be prepared to put that in well ahead of time. It took about 12 months just to educate consumers and retailers before the ban even came in.

**Mr MADDEN:** I congratulate some of your retailers who are ahead of the game. Aldi never had lightweight plastic bags; that is how ahead of the game they were.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** One of the things we have heard in other areas—I have heard it again this morning—relates to the issue of polystyrene, particularly in relation to food ware. I was interested to read in your submission that you support expanding the ban to include polystyrene food ware. Some of the feedback we had received was that there were some limited alternatives and issues with alternatives. I am keen to get your views and sentiments with respect to that issue generally.

**Mr Stout:** As I alluded to earlier, we work across multiple jurisdictions. For a lot of retailers in this country it is important to have national consistency. The catalyst for this was South Australia. The majority of retailers now would not use expanded polystyrene. For us, it is a great opportunity to get Queensland to that point. There are a range of alternatives and we do not think this is problematic. I have here the summary of the current range of alternatives throughout every state. It is starting to become quite complex, so it will be better if we can align. That is the detail, if you have time to read 30-odd pages. It is starting to get a little bit more difficult.

**CHAIR:** You might want to table that single page.

**Mr Stout:** Yes, sure.

**CHAIR:** It is so tabled.

**Ms Johnson:** That very much shows the comparison between jurisdictions. In terms of national consistency, borders have really disappeared. Even ma-and-pa businesses trade across different council areas. It is very difficult for them to trade across state borders. Their supplier is often located in another state. We found with the bag ban that consistency is really key, particularly for consumer education, because they will cross the line and find that bio is in one place and it is one micron more in another place. That all confuses consumers.

**Mr Stout:** If I asked somebody to get out of X and they chose expanded polystyrene as a solution, inevitably that solution would be chopped off in a year's time. If you were looking to get out of product A, I would not recommend polystyrene as solution B. I would highly recommend that those solutions are worked out now. I

**Mr MICKELBERG:** Given it has been banned in other jurisdictions and is increasingly being banned, if it is not captured in this legislation—we see a situation where we are exhausting stocks in Queensland presumably at a lower price because you are trying to get rid of the product—then we see potentially a worse case situation where products that are currently not polystyrene are substituted for polystyrene; is that a fair conclusion?

**Mr Stout:** Yes. It is definitely time to get out of the game. If you want to be recognised for having at this particular time the best developed policy, now is the time to include those particular things, especially expanded polystyrene. Look at all the majors. I cannot even remember when—probably when I was a teenager—the likes of McDonald's had things in expanded polystyrene.

**Ms PUGH:** The late eighties, yes.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for this session has now expired. We do not have any questions on notice. Thank you, David and Ebony, for appearing before the committee today.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.01 am to 11.15 am.**

**BRISBANE, Mr Peter, Government Partnership Manager, Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (via teleconference)**

**DONNELLY, Ms Brooke, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (via teleconference)**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make an opening statement, after which committee members may have some questions for you.

**Ms Donnelly:** Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. I would like to open by recognising the leadership the Queensland government has shown on plastics both within Queensland and nationally, in particular the successful implementation of the Queensland ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags, delivery of the Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan and support of the Boomerang Alliance's Plastic Free Places program. We also acknowledge the role that the Office of Resource Recovery in the Department of Environment and Science continues to play in leading and supporting many national discussions and collaborative processes on waste and product stewardship in Australia.

At the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation we operate and are governed as an apolitical and independent organisation working collaboratively with a diverse and complex range of stakeholders to address the longstanding and embedded problem of packaging. This is widely characterised as a wicked environmental problem in Australia and indeed globally. The object of the covenant is to reduce the harmful impacts of packaging on the Australian community. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight our response to some key areas of the bill.

APCO supports a ban on single-use plastic straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery. Banning these items is consistent with the approach being taken in other jurisdictions and represents a pragmatic and sensible starting point for the process of phasing out problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic items. We also support exemptions to enable the continued availability of products for people with a disability or healthcare needs. A failure to enact these provisions would cause unnecessary exclusion and hardship. At this time APCO also supports exemptions for single-use plastic items that are part of shelf-ready packaged products. Further work is needed to identify opportunities to phase out these applications and identify alternative products and packaging formats. We look forward to further discussions with the Queensland government on this matter, including setting time frames for phasing out problematic and unnecessary items over time.

We welcome the Queensland government's recognition of the role that compostable plastics can play in addressing single-use plastic items. In particular, compostable food packaging and food service items can assist in the recovery of food waste for composting with suitable consumer and business education, collection and composting systems in place. We reinforce the importance of the bill's reference to Australian Standards AS4736 and AS5810 as the standard against which claims of compostable plastics must be measured. We strongly encourage the Queensland government to establish a time frame in which it expects that certification to Australian Standards will be in place for all compostable plastic items and to communicate that expectation to the market.

In this area, we see a challenge that the Queensland government will need to address in implementing the exemption for compostable plastics with regard to the impact of litter. The conditions that occur in industrial and home composting systems do not correspond with conditions where plastic litter occurs such as waterways and highway verges, meaning that compostable plastic items will behave in just the same way as other plastic items when littered. These items will not compost as they would under certified conditions; therefore, additional measures may be needed to address litter in some contexts such as public and business education and support for the design and uptake of non-plastic items when there is a high propensity for littering. Coverage and business education will be critical to ensuring that the ban is not only successful in relation to the identified items but also contributes to broader behavioural change that will lead to greater impacts over time in relation to a broader set of items. APCO would welcome the opportunity to work with the Queensland government on this and other education projects.

APCO is currently working with government agencies and other stakeholders towards a national approach to public education on waste issues. As the co-regulatory organisation charged with the responsibility for managing sustainable packaging pathways in Australia, APCO has a unique insight, ability and indeed responsibility to support the objective of the Queensland government to phase out problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic items. We look forward to working with the Queensland government and our other stakeholders to ensure its objectives for single-use plastic items are achieved both in relation to those items already identified and those more complex and challenging items that will be considered over the coming years.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Brooke. I have your submission in front of me. You talked about a time frame in which you expect certification to Australian Standards. You said there are two Australian Standards that relate to commercially compostable and home compostable but the chief executive may require certification in relation to these. Your submission states—

We encourage the Queensland Government to establish a time frame in which it expects that certification to Australian Standards will be in place ...

Looking at the explanatory notes, I thought it would be from the time this comes in, on 1 July. Can you expand a bit more on what you mean or what you see as a potential problem?

**Ms Donnelly:** There tends to be a propensity in the space of compostable packaging for what is commonly referred to as greenwashing; that is, organisations make claims that their material is compostable when it is not. The only way we have to address that is to ensure that those materials are then manufactured to Australian Standards and are certified under that standard. It is a recommendation that we make to all brands and organisations looking to work in the area of compostable packaging to ensure there is an industry standard and certainty around the quality of the material and that people who purchase compostable packaging actually get what they are paying for and not what would be commonly referred to as greenwashing. The only way in which we can do that is to make sure that those products and their packaging have been manufactured and certified to those Australian Standards.

**CHAIR:** I note we have representatives from the department here today. We will perhaps clarify that issue about the timetable.

**Mr WEIR:** My question goes to education. You talk about the need for both consumer and business education. There seems to be a lot of confusion around what is compostable and what is not. It would seem that there needs to be some very clear labelling. I live within the Toowoomba Regional Council area and we have three rubbish bins: a green bin, a recyclables bin and a waste bin. Cross-contamination is a huge issue because people still do not understand what is recyclable and what is not. Would you be looking at industry and state and local governments, or how do you see this education program being driven?

**Ms Donnelly:** The need for education goes across all tiers of government. APCO currently has a two-year program, the National Consumer Education Program, across a whole range of areas in sustainable packaging. Compostability is a great example of where the need for education is really important, not only for consumers but also for industry. When I spoke a moment ago about the propensity for greenwashing in the compostable space, that is really a significant issue and it is one that needs to be addressed. That is why about three months ago APCO brought out compostable guidelines, a wonderful interactive document that sets out all of the questions that you should be asking around compostable packaging before you implement it. Tools and resources like that are publicly available, and we encourage and work with various tiers of government to implement those tools and resources.

There is also a need to talk about consumers. Consumers sometimes misunderstand how compostable packaging works. There tends to be a propensity to think it is magic packaging and it just disappears if you drop it on the ground. That is the danger of compostable packaging sometimes: making sure people understand that compostable packaging has to be composted in a certain way. It has to be composted with organic material and it has to reach certain temperatures for a certain period of time. That is why there is a difference between what happens at home in your backyard and what you can achieve in an industrial composting facility. There is a real need for education—at government, industry and consumer levels—about how to manage compostable packaging in your home composting; for example, making sure that it is going into the right bin and then making sure that when industry purchases these compostable formats they are truly compostable to the Australian Standards we mentioned earlier.

**Mr WEIR:** The comment you make about dropping it on the ground and thinking it is going to compost is interesting. Are you saying that people may think they do not need to be so careful with their waste with that branding?

**Ms Donnelly:** That is one of the dangers, and that is why education surrounding the implementation of this work is really important. People will generally look for the simple solution and believe that it will just magically disappear, and it does not. It needs to be with organic materials and, as I said, at the right temperature et cetera. That is the litter issue that comes up that we need to address. The best way to address that is to educate people as to how it operates when you drop it on the ground—just like any other piece of rubbish.

**Mr WEIR:** Litter is litter.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thanks very much, Brooke and Peter. I want to ask you about the two standards for compostability: AS5810, home compostable; and AS4736, commercially compostable. What are your thoughts about the long-term effects of this legislation basically treating these two forms of compostability the same?

**Ms Donnelly:** They are actually two separate standards for a reason: they operate differently. When you talk about home compostable, you are talking about somebody having some type of drum or container in their backyard or a pile of compost, and that will get to certain temperatures and behave in a certain way. It may actually take longer for a compostable piece of material to break down in, say, home composting. If you have industrial composting, you have a larger volume. You may also have different methodologies as to how you process that; that is, how often it is turned et cetera. It is a much more prescriptive process, obviously being within a commercial business, so it might compost more quickly in that. The reality is that you have to have reference to both standards because, depending on which process you put that material into, it will behave in two different ways. Usually, it is impacted by the length of time it takes for that material to break down.

**Mr MADDEN:** Is there a sense that people might get a false sense of security by assuming that commercially compostable waste is compostable at home, when in fact it needs 50 degrees temperature to be compostable?

**Ms Donnelly:** Absolutely. That is one of the concerns. The guidance that we give when educating around compostable is to be very clear in your communication and your labelling as to where and how it needs to be composted, either in industrial or home composting, because you will get two different results.

**Mr BATT:** In your submission you mention supporting exemptions for shelf-ready packaged products like the juice boxes we have all heard about in the last week or so. How far along are we in looking at alternatives for those products for the next phase, which will be coming up in 12 months time, for those type of products?

**Ms Donnelly:** We are doing a lot of work right now with organisations to work through alternatives. It is one of the challenging spaces, especially given that there are some things that could be considered, I suppose, easier to phase out than others. As an example, the spoon that is under the lid in the yoghurt might be less important than, say, the straw that is attached to the popper when a two-year-old child is screaming to have their popper right now. There are different impacts in terms of things that are more palatable from a consumer perspective to shift away from, but this is a really important part of the work that the Australian Packaging Covenant does in the design area in terms of redesigning packaging.

When you are thinking about things like that, it is also about how you prevent them from becoming litter and all those kinds of issues which is one of the key things we have here. If you are talking about straws, a first-phase response to that could be: instead of having a straw in a plastic sleeve on the outside of the packaging, can it in some way be contained or designed so that it is within the package and you pull it out from the inside of the container? It is a phased approach. It does take time and we do have to work through alternatives. There are not simple alternatives for everything, so that is why we are doing this work. It is really important that industry and government work very closely together to come up with a plan on how to phase it out.

Part of the work the Australian Packaging Covenant does with the 1,600 organisations that work with us is: this year we have a plan included in their annual planning phasing out certain materials. It will happen over the coming year, and the work that you are doing with this bill is important to validate and amplify that work that is already happening within the industry. It is very actively happening and it is just working through the process. Some of it is easier than others, but there are some technical challenges in maintaining the functionality of the packaging format—protecting food and protecting medicine—and also shifts away from those single-use plastic items.

**Mr BATT:** This is not just about whether it is a straw or spoon attached. Also as part of this bill is the compostability. We know now that the packaging for those poppers or milks, even though they can go and get the 10 cents for them, is not actually recyclable. There is no use for them at the moment and they are just sitting there. Is that a big part of what you are looking at for the future in terms of what they are made out of, as well as not having a straw or a spoon with them?

**Ms Donnelly:** Absolutely, yes. A fundamental part of the work is that, and it is not that there is a single solution here. It is not just recyclability, re-use or compostability; it is a combination of all of those types of activities. That is why it is important to keep in mind that compostable packaging will be part of the solution; it will not be the entire solution. Neither will recyclability. It will be a combination of those things with new systems as well to ensure we have the most sustainable packaging structure and environment that we can have.

**CHAIR:** We have talked a lot about EPS, expanded polystyrene, during this hearing and I note that you published a list in December about priority materials and kinds of packaging to be phased out, with a priority given to EPS. Could you expand on that, because we seem to have had fairly consistent feedback from all of our stakeholders about the desirability to phase that out?

**Ms Donnelly:** Yes, absolutely. This is a very big piece of work that we have done around single-use plastic and the problem about an unnecessary format. Throughout that whole process of all the materials we talked about and of all the packaging formats we talk about, essentially nobody puts the argument forward that we should keep EPS for food and beverage service containers or EPS packaging fill and things of that nature. It is not a contested issue whatsoever. In our December priority list it was clearly up-front and forward in terms of 'we just should not be using these materials in these packaging formats'. That is one of the ones where there are very easy alternatives and alternatives available today so that brands, organisations and businesses can move away from EPS immediately.

**CHAIR:** You talked about alternatives, and we saw some of this previously when we were in Cairns. Sometimes the argument is advanced that an alternative is not yet available, but from what I have seen and heard an alternative is readily available, and that is going to be the key to retailers. Would that be the case?

**Ms Donnelly:** With EPS, yes.

**CHAIR:** Enough to fill large commercial contracts?

**Ms Donnelly:** Absolutely. There are many alternatives for EPS materials now, especially in terms of food and beverage containers and in EPS packaging fill as well. There are lots of great alternatives out there—alternative materials, alternative packaging formats. That is not one that is difficult to make the transition away from. There are some materials that, as you correctly state, there are not clear alternatives for and it is a bit of a technology challenge in terms of working through what is going to be the alternative. EPS is not one of those. For EPS there are alternatives available and readily available.

**CHAIR:** Also in the list in your submission you talk about EPS packaging fill. For example, if you go to Ikea you get a flat pack and it is often wrapped in a sheet of what I am assuming is polystyrene. Is that more of a challenge than, say, EPS food clams? Would that be harder to police?

**Ms Donnelly:** Yes. If you are looking at the packaging fill, mostly EPS packaging fill is what people refer to as those little foam peanuts, balls and things like that—that is, the foam that packs around certain products in a box. In terms of that material, there are alternatives available to that now. There are alternatives in terms of a weaving kind of cardboard material that is made into a fill material. There are lots of different ones and some organic ones as well. There are alternatives to EPS fill in lots of different ways, so it is one of those ones that you can move away from. We absolutely encourage and promote to all organisations that they should move away from EPS food and beverage containers and EPS packaging fill.

**Mr BATT:** I refer to the 2025 national packaging targets and the 100 per cent, 70 per cent and 50 per cent. The issue that we have found—and we have already discussed it here this morning—is around the words 're-usable', 'recyclable' and 'compostable'. Is part of getting to that target about getting those words or phrases set in stone like we have with our Australian Standards to be used for the words 're-usable', 'recyclable' or 'compostable'?

**Ms Donnelly:** Yes. The terms in the 100 per cent target—that all packaging will be recyclable, re-usable or compostable by 2025—are already embedded in the National Waste Policy Action Plan. That objective is there. It is embedded in the large organisations and smaller organisations that we work with as well. It was 2018 when that came out and it is a very important part of the work. We benchmarked the progress towards that 100 per cent target last year. If we look at packaging formats across the range of whether they are recyclable, compostable or re-usable, currently 88 per cent of their packaging on market is able to fall into one of those categories. We do have this 12 per cent of packaging formats that we refer to as the pointy end of the work that we are doing in the physical space, and single-use plastics that are problematic and unnecessary fall into that category.

There are a lot of small items that have traditionally been made as a disposable item that we are looking to shift away from. This is where some of the work in this space is going to take a bit of time to do, because we do not have the technical alternatives at this stage, but you are not talking about it being 80 per cent of the packaging market or the packaging volume; you are talking about it being part of that 12 per cent. That gives you some kind of context in terms of the volume of material that we are talking about. We have the majority. Australia has done some great work over the last Brisbane

20 years to really get mostly recyclable packaging formats and now we are at that pointy end where we are working through the difficult and more technical kinds of applications to get through. That is where it is important in that the work that the Queensland government is doing now with this bill really sharpens the focus for industry on addressing that final 12 per cent and working through those. We are very pleased to see the work that the Queensland government is doing in this space and on this bill especially.

**Mr BATT:** What I was more getting at was even just the word 'recyclable'. We heard in the last week on our tours about things that have the recyclable logo on the packaging but there is just no way it can be recycled and so much of it goes to landfill because they just cannot be recycled currently because of contamination or whatever it is. Looking forward, nationally we have to be able to deal with that rather than just say, 'We've got 100 per cent of stuff that says it's recyclable but we're still putting 85 per cent of it into landfill because it can't be.' That is what I would hope we are trying to look at.

**Ms Donnelly:** That is your classic challenge of the difference between something being recyclable and something being recycled. If you look at the overall packaging material stream in Australia across all packaging—across paper, plastic, glass and metal—88 per cent of it is recyclable and 49 per cent of it is recycled, so there is a very big gap between what is able to be recycled and what is actually getting recycled. Twelve per cent of that rests in that design area, because you have material that is not able to be recycled; 18 per cent of it rests in collection; and about 30 per cent rests in the recovery process. That is then overlaid by the fact that those materials may have low or no value, so that does not drive the marketplace in the pull effect that we are looking for.

One part of the work is achieving recyclability and then there is a second part of the work which is about achieving recycled objectives as well, and those are two things that are interdependent. You obviously cannot recycle something that is not recyclable, but you can also create recyclable packaging formats that then need to have the systems and the education to support them in terms of their collection, recovery and market use as well. It is not a simple proposition. It is a complex proposition that has many interdependencies in it and the reality is that you need to get both of those working together. You need to create things that are able to be recycled and then you need to have the systems and the education to drive the uptake and processing of those materials into recycled materials.

**Mr BATT:** Thank you very much. That is great to hear.

**CHAIR:** As there are no further questions we thank you very much, Brooke and Peter. We do not have any questions on notice. Thank you very much for being a part of our committee hearing today.

**Ms Donnelly:** Thank you for the invitation. We appreciate the time.

**O'BRIEN, Mr Mark AM, Chairman, Container Exchange (QLD) Ltd**

**VINER, Ms Glenda, General Manager, Corporate and Community Relations, Container Exchange (QLD) Ltd**

**CHAIR:** I now welcome representatives from Container Exchange. I invite you to make an opening statement, after which the committee will have some questions for you.

**Ms Viner:** Further to our submission, Container Exchange is interested in most things plastic in terms of the containers that we recycle—beverage containers that we cycle—but we also recognise that the perception in the community is that all plastics are the same. From a practical point of view, Container Exchange is interested in reducing the contamination of the containers that we recycle and refund. The contamination can occur through straws being left in the containers. It makes it very difficult for us to have a clean stream of materials to recycle, reprocess and then sell on our auction portal, so we are interested in seeing those straws come out of the material stream.

Secondly, we recognise that we have been quite successful in driving behaviour change for people in previously seeing containers sold as waste now being seen as a commodity. It is really important that we use the platform that we have raised over the last 18 or 19 months. We have changed people's behaviour from treating it as waste to treating it as a commodity, that it is worth something. Because we have been able to do that, we have actually developed other ways of influencing people to come together to see it have cultural relevance in terms of this material and to change the behaviour for other plastics.

We have delivered the Wave of Change program to 50 schools. Over the next semester, towards the end of the year, we will be able to see how that has changed children's behaviour not just in primary schools but also in secondary schools. We have invested in that program from Plastic Oceans Australasia to link up those schools with a container refund point in their area. Also, it is nationally endorsed curriculum that plugs into their school and through a whole lesson plan can raise the awareness of plastic in their schools, communities and households. Through that loss aversion, it allows their schools to raise money by using the container exchange program but also raises awareness about the other plastics associated with litter. Through promotion of that awareness, we hope to get more schools aware of why it is important to treat plastic that is a commodity in one way and treat litter differently. The reduction of plastic in the litter stream is the outcome of the Wave of Change program.

**CHAIR:** You have highlighted that what we propose here will be of cost benefit for you because it will lead to reduced contamination and therefore makes production of the product more attractive; is that correct?

**Ms Viner:** That is correct, yes.

**CHAIR:** Are there any downsides of this cost-wise for your organisation?

**Ms Viner:** We cannot see that. Most people are aware. Once they come into a container refund point, we are very hands-on in telling people, 'Lids off, straws out' and why it has to be clean. People are very proactive in doing that. For us, I cannot see a downside.

**CHAIR:** What you said about it being a commodity is very correct. In previous hearings councils have said that they would invest more in resource recovery if they did not have to truck the end product all the way to Brisbane to be processed. It costs them \$70 a tonne to move it up there. In terms of a commodity, what is a supply chain that works for you—from, say, the resource recovery centres onwards to where they go? Can you outline the supply chain that you work with?

**Ms Viner:** I will outline the Containers for Change supply chain. At the primary level, containers are taken by customers to the container refund point. There are 307-plus container refund points across Queensland. They actually separate and count the containers into material type. We have a logistics arm that collects those and takes those to processors. We have a processor in each of the regions that we operate. Those processors then bale up the containers by material type. They hold on to those while the materials are put onto our auction portal for sale by accredited recyclers. Material recovery facilities also put that material that is a commodity up onto the auction portal for sale or through their own already organised contracts. We have an infrastructure scheme that supports our scheme. It is not waste that we have an infrastructure scheme for; it is a commodity.

**CHAIR:** Those commercial processors bid for, get and process that. As part of that, is it melted down and reproduced into products?

**Ms Viner:** It depends on what material it is, but plastic is usually pelletised or flaked and turned into another bottle or used in other materials. It can be a couple of steps removed, so the recycler might onsell it to a manufacturer. Because the material is so clean—it has not been in mixed bins—it is quite well chased after. It does not require washing, per se.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We are a little off track in terms of the bill, but it is certainly allied to that.

**Mr WEIR:** One issue we hear a lot about is litter that does not go through the system. With container exchange, you do not see many bottles and cans in litter anymore because they are actually worth collecting. In terms of the container exchange scheme, one of the items we hear about is poppers. We are hearing that they are not worth much money by the time they are processed. If they were excluded, would it be of benefit to your scheme? Is there another home we can go to with those items?

**Ms Viner:** Container refund points still refund on those. From an auction portal perspective, they are probably more difficult to sell than plastic, aluminium or glass. In effect, they still are treated in the same way. I would say that over time we will see the beverage manufacturers change the material, because that material needs to be sustainable. I think that over time you will see beverage manufacturers change the material they use, and that is where the pressure should be applied rather than taking it out of the scheme. If it is in the scheme, it should be treated in the same way.

**Mr WEIR:** You think the market forces themselves are already pushing in that direction?

**Ms Viner:** I think so. The beverage manufacturers take their responsibilities quite seriously. They are actually paying for the scheme. It is their money that we charge to manage the scheme. By default, that investment in sustainability comes from those organisations that have to pay for it, from those beverage manufacturers, so the market will see those things change, I believe.

**Mr WEIR:** Do you have any idea of the recovery rate since the scheme was introduced in those item categories?

**Ms Viner:** I do not have the material breakdown in front of me. I can provide that to you. Overall, we are seeing a 65 per cent to 67 per cent recovery rate in containers.

**Mr WEIR:** It would be interesting to have those figures if you are able to provide them to the committee.

**Ms Viner:** I can.

**Mr WEIR:** Great, thank you.

**Ms PUGH:** Over two billion containers have been recycled in Mount Ommaney since the scheme started. It has been a tremendous success. One of the things I have noticed in the last few years in my schools is that pretty much every school in my community is involved in one way or another. They have also implemented supplementary programs around waste in a variety of ways, which is fabulous. Do you know how many schools throughout Queensland would be involved, either directly or indirectly, in the program?

**Ms Viner:** About 300 schools in Queensland—that is a quarter of schools—are registered for a scheme ID. We are pretty happy with that 18 months on, but it needs to be all schools. We know that all schools have containers coming into their tuckshops et cetera. They can recognise that that is a value they can get back. It is not to say that they are not doing it, because they could still be doing it and getting cash but just not registered. Some teacher might be collecting all those containers, taking them down, getting the cash and putting it back into the tuckshop. Having a scheme ID provides transparency and traceability of knowing that whatever is coming in is going back into the school.

**Ms PUGH:** Fantastic. I think a lot of schools are also doing it indirectly. My children's school does it on an ad hoc basis, so I doubt they would have a number. It is really good to know that a quarter are directly registered.

**Mr BATT:** In terms of the auction portal, you mentioned that juice box material is more difficult to sell. From what I have heard, they are not selling at all and are basically being stockpiled by whoever is the processor. Are they selling?

**Ms Viner:** They are selling. Recently, one was sold and went to a manufacturer overseas. They are re-using them for tiles for houses, from a building perspective. They are not necessarily stockpiled. We do not actually see a stockpile of any material from the scheme, because they have a value because they are so clean. They are being sold. Because they are such a small amount of material going through, it is also a small amount of material being put into the scheme. Glass, aluminium and plastic are the big ones. When it gets to a certain size, it is actually of value for somebody to transport. It is the value in the transportation. It cannot be a small amount. If you are going to pay for transportation, it has to be something significant. That is what we are seeing.

**Mr BATT:** We had a good look at the MRF in Cairns. They have a lot of glass stockpiled there. They are now dealing with it locally, which is good to hear, but they do have a stockpile of glass because it is difficult in this market with costs.

**Ms Viner:** We are involved in the trial of glass use in roads in Cairns. The Department of Transport and Main Roads has gone out to tender for a trial of glass in roads, to increase the amount of glass used in asphalt. They are doing it in a DTMR road rather than a Cairns City Council road. Using it locally will reduce the carbon footprint of shipping that material around. Now that the material is of such a high-quality content, opportunities to use it in ways that suit the specifications of those engineers is really important. We are looking at that. Glass has been a problem regionally because of the cost of moving it around. We are looking at all those ways we can use it more generally.

**Mr BATT:** To keep it in the region rather than having to transport it because of the cost involved?

**Ms Viner:** Exactly, and not use the virgin material that is in that region. Not using virgin sand for the road is important, too.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you very much for coming in today. This whole area is fascinating. There are so many questions I could ask you. I have to start by giving a guernsey to TOMRA in Ipswich, which is state-of-the-art reverse vending. It is such a good operation. The entire building is clear glass, so you can actually see the whole process. I wish there were more of those around. Did I get the message right: when we take products in there should be no straws, we should wash the container and take lids off?

**Ms Viner:** You do not have to wash the container. You can empty the container; that is great for us. If you wash the container that is a plus for the processor, but you have to take off the lid and take out the straw.

**Mr MADDEN:** I note your answer to the member for Condamine, that you are up to about 60 per cent to 67 per cent. That is important to know. That is not just recycling; that is re-usability. You spoke about the glass. What is the low-hanging fruit to get that percentage up, so that we have more recyclable or more re-usable?

**Ms Viner:** Hopefully, it is these education programs, like Wave of Change. The pester power of children is also powerful. Once you start a child recycling, they pester their parents and they get them to do it at home. It is also about understanding the materials. We have spoken to the Brisbane City Council. We have been driving people through container refund points because people get their money back. They get their 10 cents. For some people, the reward-effort ratio is not there. They think, 'I'm not going to line up to get a refund of \$1 back for my 10 containers.' It is making people understand that if they put it in the yellow-top bin instead of the general waste bin it means it will go through the MRF. We think there is a great deal of work we can do with councils, communities and schools. If people are not going to refund their containers, then they should put them into the recycling bin and they still get counted in that 67 per cent. We have a target we have to get to by 2022 and we are tracking really well.

**Mr MADDEN:** What is that target?

**Ms Viner:** It is that 85 per cent of sold containers are returned and recycled by 2022. We have a little way to go in that but we think there is great uptake. In our first-pass research, we think there is great uptake. If you are not going to go to a refund point, donate them or put them into a yellow-top bin—that is for those communities, of course, that have recycling.

**Mr MADDEN:** I might be showing my age here, but are we ever going to return to any sort of situation where glass beverage containers are actually re-used? Is anyone trying to push into that space?

**Ms Viner:** The craft brewers do it. Beverage manufacturers respond to what the public buys. The craft brewers do that type of activity. I think over time you might see people saying, 'I'm comfortable buying a bottle that has been filled previously.' I think there will be a time, but the beverage manufacturers are the people to speak to.

**Mr MADDEN:** I congratulate you on your great work. This is a wonderful thing we are doing.

**Ms Viner:** It is a great opportunity for the communities too and the community groups that can receive the funds.

**Mr MADDEN:** I know when I drive along the road and I see a can on the side of the road I feel like I should jump out and throw it in my car to give to my local school.

**Ms Viner:** Hopefully you are seeing less and less of them.

**Mr MADDEN:** Definitely, 100 per cent.

**CHAIR:** Just a note on that: with the refillable containers for craft brewing, you use your own. You buy what is called a growler. It is not other people's bottles.

**Mr MADDEN:** Like the cups in the coffee shops.

**Ms PUGH:** Or the SodaStream bottles at home when you make your own fizzy water. You have your SodaStream bottles and you just re-use them over and over again.

**Mr WEIR:** All the wine drinkers would like to be able to take their bottles in. Are there any plans to expand, not just for the sake of the wine drinkers or the spirit drinkers? We heard in Cairns about the contamination of broken glass with the recycled products and that a certain amount ends up in landfill because they are heavily contaminated with glass and so forth. Are there any plans to go down that road?

**Ms Viner:** I am sure the department will speak to it. The container refund schemes are throughout Australia. They were started, of course, in South Australia nearly 43 years ago. At that time, wine was a big industry in that location and that jurisdiction. As the container refund schemes have started in each state, we have just replicated what we started with. All those container refund schemes now have a working group which is under the packaging organisation. They are actually looking at what we can do to get harmonisation and look at expanding those opportunities. There is a lot of discussion going on around those waste streams currently—being wine bottles and those other excluded items—but it will take the jurisdictions to work together in terms of their legislation to make those other items available in the scheme.

**Mr WEIR:** It was just that contamination issue from broken glass that caught my attention up in Cairns.

**CHAIR:** There being no further questions, I will now close this session. Thank you for appearing before us today. We have one question on notice, which is a breakdown of recovery rates on different types of products. We will email that question to you, but we would appreciate it if the answer could be provided by 10 am on Thursday, 13 August 2020.

**Ms Viner:** We will do that.

**HUGHES, Ms Kylie, Director, Waste Policy and Legislation, Office of Resource Recovery, Department of Environment and Science**

**McNICOL, Ms Cara, Manager, Waste Policy and Legislation, Office of Resource Recovery, Department of Environment and Science**

**MENON, Mr Pravin, Executive Director, Office of Resource Recovery, Department of Environment and Science**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make an opening statement. After that we shall have some questions for you.

**Mr Menon:** I will keep this fairly brief. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today and to assist in whatever way we can in terms of this process and issue. I guess the first thing to note is that, from our perspective, the proposed legislation is part of a broader piece of work that we have been undertaking in respect of plastics. The Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan was successfully introduced late last year, and the ban on selected singular-use plastic items fits in with other work that has been undertaken by the department and actually serves to complement other things the Queensland government is doing, such as the plastic bag ban. In a lot of ways, looking forward provides an opportunity for additional materials to be included, based on appropriate levels of consultation and due consideration for impacts on the sectors that it relates to.

The process that we have followed I believe has been consultative in nature and inclusive and has been developed in conjunction with the stakeholder advisory group, many of whom have put in a submission and some of whom have spoken today as well. Finally, the legislation itself provides flexibility and opportunities for future development of industries within Queensland around resource recovery and lifting our recycling to a higher order process, which is really what is needed from a national perspective as well.

**CHAIR:** Probably the biggest issue is polystyrene—EPS foam. I notice that in a nutshell the first tranche is the implements—stirrers, spoons, forks, plates. The second tranche we are looking at is the containers themselves—containers with lids on, whether it be cups, takeaway containers et cetera. We have heard from a lot of our stakeholders and we have not had one yet who has not said to bring on EPS as a material within the first tranche. Did you want to expand on the reasons it is not in the first tranche or perhaps why we should include it in the first tranche?

**Mr Menon:** The first thing to note is that there is nothing that precludes the government from including EPS as part of this process. The reason the department did not put it forward in the first place was based on advice on those sorts of elements that we could include in the ban to begin with through the stakeholder advisory group, the sort of criteria that I am sure you are all familiar with now in terms of replaceable et cetera. This simply was not an item that was included. The department initially sought to obtain community feedback, and in the general feedback in terms of those four items we did find as a result of that there was considerable interest in EPS as well. It has not been included because, from a departmental perspective, if we have asked for four particular items, we did not want to be seen to be introducing any other items because we felt that would compromise the process. Having said that, of course, I think the committee has heard a lot of support for including EPS as part of the process and there is nothing that precludes that from occurring.

**Ms Hughes:** For those things that are currently banned by definition of 'plastic', expanded polystyrene items of forks, bowls and plates will automatically be banned because they are not a compostable plastic. For that range of things, EPS will be included in the first tranche of bans under the bill.

**Mr Menon:** That is possibly a little confusing, because I think they were talking about clamshells particularly as their focus. What Kylie says is true: if they are not compostable, they will be part of that process regardless.

**CHAIR:** With reference to the packaging covenant we have signed up for, I note that across jurisdictions 1 July 2021 is the date that a lot of those items will be banned. Is that date in the covenant or is that the date we are looking to have that ban implemented?

**Mr Menon:** 1 July 2021 was our proposed date for commencement of this ban. It was very much based on the feedback that we received; that is, business needs sufficient notice in order to modify their practices to take account of these things. That has been changed to 'no earlier than 1 July 2021', as you know, with the bans commencing upon proclamation. That is simply because we still do not quite know the full impacts of COVID as yet and how long that will actually require—not just in terms of bans on the businesses that use these products but also because, as I think one of Brisbane

the earlier speakers mentioned, organisations that seek to verify that the materials they are receiving are appropriate as substitutes sometimes see the need to travel as part of their verification processes. I guess it is recognition of all of these sorts of factors that we would like to provide that degree of flexibility in terms of the commencement date.

**CHAIR:** Are there other jurisdictions in Australia that have a similar time frame for the first part of their bans? I am looking at South Australia or the ACT. How do we align with them and what they are doing?

**Mr Menon:** I guess we had looked at it more in terms of consistency with the types of materials we are proposing to commence bans on, not just for the general public but also to make it easier for retailers—the large retailers, supermarkets and so forth—to know that they are consistent in what they are allowed to sell or will be selling in those jurisdictions. In terms of timing, Kylie or Cara, do you have any idea of when those bans will specifically commence?

**Ms Hughes:** There were some announcements in South Australia and the ACT late last year that were talking about ‘within 12 months’. Some of those time frames have moved a little bit because of some of the COVID restrictions. Some of the jurisdictions are also looking at similar to us—not earlier than 1 July 2021—to allow some of those business recovery models to be monitored and assessed, I guess to see what additional impact there will be on those businesses. South Australia is the only other jurisdiction that has a bill before their House at the moment and that is going through its legislative processes, similar to ours, at this point in time.

**Mr Menon:** In short, I think everybody is in a similar position in terms of ensuring the uncertainty around COVID can be taken into account before these things are introduced.

**CHAIR:** Have South Australia and the ACT included EPS in their first tranche?

**Ms Hughes:** South Australia has. There are some slight differences between what the various jurisdictions have announced as their rolling ones.

**CHAIR:** If we could have that confirmed as a question on notice that would be good.

**Ms McNicol:** It is actually in the consultation RIS that expanded polystyrene is included for both South Australia and ACT.

**CHAIR:** That is in the CRIS?

**Ms McNicol:** Yes, attachment B of the consultation RIS.

**CHAIR:** There is no need to take that on notice, then.

**Mr WEIR:** We have had a lot of submitters, as you would have seen and heard, from organisations that are dealing with litter that escapes the system and is in the environment. Obviously if it is compostable it will in time break down, but it is going to do damage in the meantime. With the littering, do you see spikes up and down when there is advertising or engagement or an awareness campaign or anti-littering campaign as opposed to when there is not? I can remember times it has been heavily pushed out in the media, but I am not seeing it so much now. It was one of the biggest issues that kept coming up.

**Mr Menon:** Do you mean in terms of the litter and actually preventing the litter?

**Mr WEIR:** Yes, stopping it in the first place.

**Mr Menon:** Yes, I think stopping the litter in the first place as a concept would make sense, not just in terms of litter. If you take this process of trying to ban an item so it cannot be littered, that is very much paralleled with other environmental areas—noise pollution, for example. The closer you are to the source, the more effective you are in taking care of the problem. A drop of oil in water spreads so quickly that if you can control it at the source you are far better off than if you are trying to pick it up from around surrounding areas. I suppose a ban on these items would mean that you would not need to worry about those items specifically being littered, and that is part of the philosophy behind this as well.

Councils spend an awful lot of money in terms of their responsibilities in terms of litter and gross pollutant traps and cleaning them out. Part of the problem around gross pollutant traps and council maintenance is that they spend an awful lot of time and effort in trying to program maintaining these facilities. The problem usually is that they cannot tell which of the facilities is full and overflowing, so they will both underservice those that are already full and overservice those that do not require servicing. There are products coming out onto the market that assist councils in this regard—a GPT type sock that captures the litter—but if these materials are not introduced into the environment to begin with that will save Queensland councils considerable money as well.

**Mr WEIR:** That is the thrust of my question. Does the department have any data that can show the result of advertising campaigns or anti-litter campaigns over a period of time—say, five years or 10 years or whatever? Does it actually reduce? A major issue all the way through is stopping it in the first place, so is there any data that you have access to that could show us that?

**Mr Menon:** We will come back to the committee with data we can find specifically in relation to the question that has been asked.

**Mr WEIR:** What period of time frame would you look at?

**Mr Menon:** I am not sure what time frame we would be able to provide, but we will provide what we can and try to ensure it is consistent, for comparison's sake, so that you are comparing like with like over a period of time.

**Mr WEIR:** That would be good. Thank you.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you very much for coming in today. The National Retail Association provided us with a very enlightening table as to where we are with all of the jurisdictions. There seems to be an inevitability about what items will be included ultimately as far as banned items go. These are the three that look like they are in the next tranche, if I can predict the future: plastic lined coffee cups, plastic cups and plastic takeaway containers. What needs to be done before they can be included in banned items? I am thinking about items such as plastic cups and plastic takeaway containers. Whenever I watch American sitcoms and they have Chinese takeaway, it is always in cardboard containers. They have been doing that for the last 30 or 40 years. There is no rocket science as far as takeaway containers are concerned, but there must be something stopping those three items from being included in the list of items to be banned as of 1 July 2021. Do you have any thoughts as to what is stopping those three items being included? I am not saying we should do it right now, but what needs to be done before they can be included?

**Mr Menon:** The bill does contain provisions for us to include additional items as part of this process. For that to take place, it is simply a case of undertaking appropriate consultation with the community as well as industry representatives so that any unintended consequences can be taken into account and to ensure that there are truly genuine alternatives that they can be substituted with. The banned items we currently have on this list were very much predicated upon items that could either be readily substituted or were not needed in the first place, like stirrers. In general terms, stirrers are not needed.

**Mr MADDEN:** I understand that one of the impediments with coffee cups is the liner. We currently do not have a liner. I thought we could just use wax. The fact that we do not have a biodegradable liner is holding up cups being banned. Are you aware that that is the case or is that beyond what I should be asking you it?

**Mr Menon:** No, that is okay. Biodegradable liners are in production in some areas, but it is not necessarily that it is widely spread at this point in time. I think that is probably the point of a ban like this: start with a couple of small items that signal an intent. That then builds demand and provides the community and business with the opportunity to look at whether an item is needed and then what is a suitable alternative. That creates demand and hopefully new business in terms of resource recovery within the state as well.

**Mr MADDEN:** I think it is amazing how these three states—South Australia, Queensland and the ACT—are leading the field from the other states. You should be very proud of your work. What we are doing in government is groundbreaking work for the rest of Australia. Thank you for your hard work.

**Mr BATT:** In relation to exempt businesses, we have heard quite a few of our submitters say that schools should not be exempt because children are going to be the leaders of the future and the ones who are going to stop plastics and all those sorts of things. Is there any reason schools are exempt in general terms, rather than providing an exemption if a child needs these items due to a disability et cetera? Generally exempting all schools is a fairly big jump.

**Mr Menon:** The primary reason was the needs of children who attend those schools that would require straws or some of those single-use plastics. That was the fundamental reason for its inclusion at this point. In terms of children leading the future, I note that most primary schools in particular have waste education programs. A lot of these are funded as part of their waste collection contract, which is massive. It would be a large contract over a long period of time where the collection contractor is required to put money back into waste education, which is then fed specifically back to schools to educate children. I think the profile of a ban like this will in itself start to provide some focus on these sorts of issues. Primarily, we did not include it because of the needs of the disability sector and we were advised that that is part of the schools thing as well.

**Mr BATT:** Many submitters have said it is good that something is there for those who require it. We also heard when we were in Cairns that there are now alternatives to all of these items that would be exempt that are compostable and even home compostable or whatever you want to call it. If those are available now, why is there a need for an exemption, even for businesses, hospitals, health care and schools, when they could just buy those alternatives for the people who need them, who have a disability et cetera?

**Mr Menon:** The issue of alternatives for that particular sector is probably very close to being resolved, but at the time of developing this legislation it had not been fully resolved. We received comments that there were alternatives, but there were also people from within the disability sector who suggested they are working on these sorts of things but they do not have a genuine set of products that they are comfortable with at this point. I believe over a period of time, as people trial alternative products to single-use products, that will come as well. That is certainly something the department and the government can look at introducing at a later point on the basis of evidential data to support that.

**Ms Hughes:** The advice we received during consultation was that a number of the alternatives are not fit for purpose. If you are replacing a plastic straw with a paper straw, the paper in itself can become a choke hazard. There is a bit more work needed to ensure we are not creating another problem by replacing something that is readily available and is fit for purpose in that sense. We are going to be working very closely with the disability and healthcare sectors to ensure there is a range of options available for them.

**Mr BATT:** Again, we saw that in Cairns. Plastic Free Cairns showed us six alternatives to straws. Some of them were made of paper and cardboard, but there were other alternatives as well.

**Mr MADDEN:** Tapioca.

**Mr BATT:** There was a food based product which is solid to use but then breaks down quite quickly afterwards.

**Mr Menon:** I think some of the comments we received were around that degree of hardness of the product, particularly in terms of straws, and how that impacts on the person using it. There is potentially a little bit of nervousness about changing products. As people trial these things I think that will ease as well. We are not at that point yet.

**Mr BATT:** The other alternative in my head is that you would exempt the person who needs that rather than a place—rather than saying that schools can have straws for half a dozen kids who may need them—so every other child can still get a straw when they go to the tuckshop. Is that how it works?

**Mr Menon:** In terms of dealing with the disability sector, there was a lot of consideration as to whether you require the person to self-declare their need for something. I think this is consistent in terms of ensuring that people do not have to prove they require an item and that the person supplying that item does not need to prove somebody needs that item. It would be spread across the school sector in that sense as well. I think those concerns would still be an issue within schools. Somebody would need to determine whether or not a child needed it. For those reasons they have been left out at this point.

**Mr BATT:** On the issue of industrial composting, home composting and every other recyclable type of thing, in Cairns we were at the MRF talking about how they sort the material. Under this bill, an industrial compostable cup or plate and a home compostable cup or plate are going to be available. When they are put into the system, put into a recycle bin, those people will not know the difference when they go through the process—a very clever machine may have to work out the difference—because there is no Australian Standard written on the item. Basically, everything is going to go into the one pile, whether it is industrial compostable or home compostable. From what they are saying, it is just going to go to landfill anyway, because there are no industrial compostability places that can take them. I understand where we are trying to get to, but when people buy something how will they know whether it is home compostable or industrial compostable? If I have a home compost bin and I want to buy a coffee cup like that or a plate or a bowl that I can put in it, how am I going to know whether it is industrial compostable or home compostable? Have we looked at commercially branding the item so that people understand?

**Mr Menon:** That is part of that process. If we step back a moment, the Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan talks very much about plastics at home and plastics away from home. I think at least one of the people who spoke earlier today was talking about the fact that most people are very unlikely to end up taking home a compostable item that they are left with after they have purchased something, like a cup of coffee, and composting it. We have made that distinction within the legislation for at-home

composting versus composting that is for industrial purposes. We recognise that part of this process will be the need to develop industrial composting facilities or suitable infrastructure of whatever nature it is. This creates the demand for it. From our perspective, part of the process of the awareness campaign prior to the commencement of the ban has to be education around composting and the differences there as well.

**Ms Hughes:** The bill also requires a supplier or a manufacturer to provide information to the purchaser about the compostability of the item—whether it is home compostable, commercial compostable—and the conditions and factors that are needed for that compostability. That information needs to travel with the item in the first place. The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation is also currently working on compostable packaging guidelines that will provide some of that additional information.

**Mr BATT:** There is nothing currently that shows a difference, other than that one will say AS4736 and one will say AS5810. When you sell that, you will be saying to the person buying it, 'This is home compostable,' and whatever the number is. Then they have to try to forward that on to whomever they are selling the product to in their coffee shop or cafe to say, 'Yes, that one is home compostable. This one is commercially compostable.'

**Mr Menon:** The idea of the Australian Standards is to make that message simpler—that it is an approved product and that there are two types of compostables that we are talking about. One of our requirements is education about this process. We need to ensure that people are well aware of those requirements. As a parallel, it is probably no different to Australian Standards in relation to many things like sunscreens or sunglasses. In this case, it is our responsibility to ensure that people are aware what those Australian Standards mean in respect of what they can actually do with these products.

**CHAIR:** That has been picked up in our examination of this bill. From a commercial point of view, they need to know about those differences in the standards. There seems to be a great hunger at a community level to know the difference between those standards. That is something that has surprised us and has been gratifying to see. One of the things we would be talking about and clarifying is: what exactly would an awareness or education campaign to the public entail in relation to those two standards? We might put that as a question on notice. It was gratifying to see and we got feedback that people want to know. Everyone wants to know. There is great curiosity about that.

**Ms PUGH:** I remember when McDonald's banned those polystyrene clams all the way back in the late 1980s, so more than 30 years ago now. I believe there were numerous replacements. They have been able to do that pretty seamlessly. They now use paper wrapping for their burgers. Would it be the generally acceptable position within the industry that alternatives to the polystyrene clams exist? I am not sure if they are more expensive.

**Mr Menon:** Firstly, many sectors of the industry are voluntarily moving to phase out problematic plastics regardless. I expect in that case there is a cost. There is a cost-neutral—that is a term I would like to use, but it is probably not quite true—alternative to many of these things. The other thing in terms of introducing a ban on materials that many manufacturers or suppliers are looking to phase out anyway is that the ban actually helps to maintain a level playing field for organisations that want to go down this path. A ban like this ensures that their competitors are operating in the same space and are subject to the same costs in their business operations.

**Ms PUGH:** This is a bit of a weird, left-of-field thing in relation to baby products. I had children 10 years ago and a lot of the items on the market today did not exist then. The amount of disposable, one-use baby products that exist today compared to just 10 years ago, let alone 20 to 25 years ago, is huge and in my view unnecessary; that is the real problem. We are talking about individual disposable nappy bags that are used when you are at home and you have a bin right there. It is things like that where you create this idea that those things are needed. What can we do to discourage the creation of these kinds of products? In my mind, it is almost like monetising disposability, which the rest of society is really moving away from, but when it comes to babies and infants we are almost moving towards it. It is something I have observed: for a few years in a child's life there is quite a lot of waste that is not really necessary.

**Mr Menon:** Again, I will go back to my opening statement that the ban, if nothing else, serves as a signal not just for the way the government wants to move but, from the responses that we have received, the manner in which society itself is moving. If we combine the bans with plastic pollution reduction, I think we are starting to see more members of society question where we use plastic. Not all plastic is bad, but people are considering whether they can re-use plastic or whether there are alternatives. I do not have an answer in terms of marketing per se, its influence on the community

and whether people feel obligated or the need to purchase items. However, I think they will certainly look more closely, due to initiatives like the ban, at how they dispose of items and what is going to be the end use of those materials.

**CHAIR:** I have raised this before, but I again raise the issue of bait bags, which we heard about at Yeppoon. They said that, outside of cigarette butts, that was the biggest item they were picking up. You may not have anything on that now; maybe you could provide an answer to this on notice. In terms of the tranches of legislation that we are bringing in, where would that fit in?

**Mr Menon:** They are an item that could definitely be considered as part of a future tranche. I would note that this is falling out from the Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan. The plan itself talks specifically about marine plastics, and part of that is bait bags or marine waste associated with fishing. The department is working with some of the local councils in coastal areas particularly to trial options for collection of that material. Based on that work, we will probably look to provide additional infrastructure if need be or assist the councils.

The first thing we need to do is study it to determine what the issues are and why people are disposing of that material in order to come up with a suitable infrastructure solution, should that be the way to go. As an alternative, if there is sufficient evidence, the government may wish to consider banning that as well under the bill.

**CHAIR:** We will probably have more discussion on that when we do our report. APCO talked about a timetable to bring in certification for compostable standards, which deals with greenwashing. As I said at the time, I think those certification standards would come in when those items were banned. Would that be correct? Is there a timetable for bringing in certification?

**Mr Menon:** At this point in time, the process that we would adopt for Queensland would be dependent on the bill because these things will be covered in the regulation as well.

**CHAIR:** What we found on our trip up to Cairns and Rockhampton was that there is great potential for future industrial development in the area, because supply chains mean that if there is more being processed locally it is more economical, we achieve less pollution and we develop industry. Is that something the department has considered or seen as an opportunity for future industrial development in regional areas as a result of this bill?

**Mr Menon:** We certainly support and very strongly work towards the principles of a circular economy, which is very much what you are talking about, where the waste products of one industry can be used as the feedstock for another. At this point in time the waste levy funds are used for the Resource Recovery Industry Development Program, and part of that process is to encourage these sorts of initiatives as well. The Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan and this bill fit part of that process because it is no longer single-use plastics that we are talking about; it is about genuinely recyclable materials that should be used as substitutes where they are appropriate, apart from those compostables that we are talking about.

**Ms Hughes:** One of the potential other benefits, particularly for regional areas, is that the majority of current single-use plastic items are imported. If you are looking at alternatives, there is an opportunity to develop local industries to manufacture those products. There has certainly been a fair bit of interest from some of the regions about looking at those sorts of opportunities as an economic recovery boost.

**Mr BATT:** I have a query on how it will work with commercial airlines that leave Queensland and fly to Sydney or Melbourne or fly in from there. Once we are all out of COVID and we are back working again, how will this work where someone is supplying something on a plane? Have we thought of how that would work?

**Ms Hughes:** A similar issue came up during the development of the container refund scheme. It has relied on jurisdictions working together. With the container refund scheme, it is about export arrangements and refunds for the manufacturers. This would be a bit of a similar case. There needs to be a recognition that when something that is onloaded here but offloaded in Melbourne, where there is not a ban—how do we address that under our legislation? If it is not part of an integrated or pre-packaged product it will be a banned item. We need to work with the airlines to make sure they have suitable alternatives as well, because they are not going to go back to metal knives and forks and china crockery.

**Mr Menon:** Equally, as with any other national supplier or national chain of any sort, they currently have the obligation to look at legislation in each state, notwithstanding the comments about the harmonisation process for bottles and so forth and I would imagine plastics as well. If the trends from the ACT, Queensland and South Australia are anything to go by, I would have thought that the airlines—

**Mr BATT:** Will make it national.

**Mr Menon:** That is right.

**Mr BATT:** We have talked about when people put words like 'biodegradable' and 'oxo-degradable' on products. They say they are biodegradable, that they break down, but they are just plastics that break into smaller plastics. Is that part of this, or is that another thing you will look at in the future with regard to ensuring they cannot put 'biodegradable' on packaging? When people see it they think, 'It's biodegradable. We can put it in the bin and it will break down.' But it is not breaking down into good stuff; it is breaking down into bad stuff.

**Mr Menon:** The bill talks specifically about compostables and oxo-degradables and also the penalties associated with false and misleading information. That, coupled with the focus on Australian Standards for compostables, is how we are looking to address that issue. There are penalties in place for false and misleading information. Without going into the specifics of a given case—because there is provision in there for somebody who reasonably believed they were providing the correct information—you would think that is what we would have considered sufficient to address those sorts of issues.

**Mr BATT:** I understand the items that are listed in this bill, but we are still going to have the plastic bottles that are not in this bill. They have a recycle symbol on them and a biodegradable symbol on them but they are not biodegradable. They are never going to break down back to the products they came from. How do we fix that? It says it is recyclable. I know it is not part of this bill, but is it something you are looking at in the future?

**Mr Menon:** I think it is broadly covered. Part of this bill and part of the COEX scheme is to obtain Queensland-specific data. We spoke a little bit about gross pollutant traps and things like that. The other advantage of doing those sorts of things properly is that we get a better handle on what is ending up in the environment and can use that to guide future works in terms of oxo-degradables or partially degradable. With cigarette butts, for example, it is probably as much about why people are littering. There are plenty of cases where people will have a bin within two metres and they still flick it on the ground. If we can work out the mechanisms, we can work out the most appropriate means of dealing with those sorts of things. Whether it is false messaging or whether the department has to provide better education, it is all part of the process we are dealing with in terms of plastics.

**CHAIR:** The time for this session has now expired. We have some questions on notice that we will email through. To clarify any of those, please feel free to liaise with our secretariat. We would appreciate it if the answers could be provided by 10 am on Thursday, 13 August. Thank you for appearing before the committee today to assist us with this.

That concludes this public hearing. Thank you to all of our witnesses for the information they have provided today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters and thank you to our secretariat. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's parliamentary webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 12.54 pm.**