



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Tuesday, 4 September 2007

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.33 pm): I rise to support the legislation but also to raise a number of issues that are included in it. In our environment today, with petrol stations with rubbish bins and indeed even on the highway a lot of pull-off places that have rubbish bins, there is no need for people to throw rubbish out the window. Just a shopping bag kept in the car while people are travelling is a more than adequate way of collecting the rubbish while driving and disposing of it when they reach their destination or indeed part way through. Throwing rubbish from a car is unnecessary and certainly unsightly. I have had an experience myself where a passenger in a car coming in the opposite direction threw a beer can out and I lost the windscreen.

Mr Lawlor: He might have known who you were.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: No, this is a few years ago. It is really unsettling and dangerous. There have been incidents of other objects being thrown from car windows and oncoming traffic being disadvantaged because of it. There is no excuse for cigarette butts. If there is one thing in our dry climate that is unforgivable it is fires started because someone has thoughtlessly thrown a lighted cigarette out of a car window and it has rolled into the verge. Often it is fairly safe because it only takes a slight amount of moisture on a road surface to run off and keep the verge green. However, we have seen a number of years of protracted drought and that certainly has made the areas around roads tinderboxes just waiting for somebody to thoughtlessly throw out a lighted cigarette. I do not think that people will have any problems with the legislation in relation to cigarette butts.

Anyone who thinks about it knows that there is no excuse for throwing rubbish out of the car. There is no excuse for people dumping rubbish illegally, either. In my electorate at different times councils have introduced dump fees and at the introduction of each of those there was an increase in the amount of waste that was thrown in illegal dump sites—small and large amounts. I am not condoning what they have done, but sometimes the fee structures for local authorities can be significant in terms of the cost of taking rubbish to the tip.

Mrs Sullivan: It is \$5 a tyre at the Caboolture dump, which is an impost.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: It would be, too. Not everyone has a refuse service so they have to go to the local dump. It depends on the regulations and how stringent the rules are as to how big the temptation is for people living in a community to avoid going to the local tip. As I said, I am not condoning rubbish being dropped indiscriminately, I am not condoning people throwing a bag of rubbish out the window of a car; but I am saying that there is cause and effect. If a family is finding it difficult to make ends meet there would be a great temptation on their part to perhaps try to dispose of rubbish in an illegal manner.

In relation to the issue of dangerous litter, I commend the minister for making these distinctions. Dangerous litter may include throwing a lighted cigarette into dry grass during extreme fire danger conditions, smashing a bottle and leaving the broken glass on the footpath, leaving a hypodermic needle in a garden bed or near a children's playground or throwing an item from a car at another road user or a pedestrian. I have had my own experience in the playground where some mongrel—and that is the only

word to describe them—broke a bottle and left it in the sand at the bottom of a kids' slippery slide. It was very fortunate that my kids were too young to go down on their own and I had to be down the bottom to collect them so I saw it, but there would be a lot of older kids using the slippery slide who could have had quite significant injury caused to their feet which could have lasted a lifetime. It is important for those people who are unthinking and uncaring to be reminded that these are dangerous actions, that they will not be tolerated and that there will be an avenue available to prosecute them if they are caught doing it.

The only other issue that I wanted to raise was not an issue of concern in the sense that an unpaid fine will be referred to SPER but that there are a number of people in the community who, for varying reasons, may not have received their infringement notice because it goes to the last known recorded address and then some time later they find that that infringement notice has incurred additional costs.

SPER, I believe, has acted very poorly in the last year or so. It was given retrospective powers in relation to—or perhaps it was responsibility for—infringement notices. Right throughout the community people were suddenly getting notices from SPER to say that they had an unpaid fine from 10 or 15 years ago. It all happened at a particular point in time when legislation went through this chamber, but it just seemed odd that neither the police nor anybody else had followed through with these fines and yet SPER was able to find the resources to follow up on fines that were well and truly old and buried and people usually had no hope of even remembering the incident. SPER does a good job. I am just saying that that appears to me to be an anomaly in the work of SPER.

I support this legislation. I would hope that there will not be overzealous officers who perhaps spoil the intent of the legislation; that no authorised officers or others will see it as a way of generating income by perhaps using their powers unwisely. But I believe the majority of people do not want to see our roads, our towns and our countryside littered unnecessarily. I would think that they would support the legislation, as I said, provided that it is administered in a responsible and transparent manner.