



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.58 pm): The Environmental Protection Amendment Bill is mainly about littering and endeavouring to come to grips with the issue of, at times, the substantial amount of litter on the side of the road that has obviously been thrown out of cars or trucks and dangerous littering where things like stubbie bottles or soft drink bottles are smashed and broken and are quite dangerous, particularly to kids. This side of the House is supporting this bill.

I doubt whether over the years people have been penalised or caught littering. In fact, if you look at the side of the road it is obvious that a lot of littering happens and people do not get caught. It just goes out the window of the vehicle and on they go. This bill is about introducing authorised people—that is, police officers, local government officers and EPA officers. The minister in her summing-up might like to expand on that in terms of what local government officers will be authorised officers and what EPA officers will be authorised officers. Is this just going to be on the off-chance when they are driving home from work that they see someone littering that they will take their numberplate and go through the process? In other words, is it a spasmodic, ad hoc process or are they out there in valuable work time patrolling the roads in terms of litter patrols? I ask these questions because all of these ideas are well and good in theory, but at the end of the day for the time and effort that has gone into the preparation of the bill and putting it through parliament and so on you would like to think that it actually works and reduces the amount of littering in Queensland.

Everything we want to do always has a cost to it. We cannot stand here and say that we support this legislation in order to reduce littering if we are going to complain about the costs. So there will be some cost to it. I would hope that as part of that process there would be some targeted advertising that endeavours to develop a culture in our state of not littering, because we should look at the state as our home. People would not throw rubbish in their lounge room—you would hope that they would not—or their kitchen, but people throw it on the side of the road and in parks. I have seen people drive away from a takeaway food store and leave all of their McDonald's bags on the ground beside the car and they think it is funny. That just makes the place unpleasant for everybody else and is not a good example for kids. I generally like to be careful with the pennies and with the budget and do not want to see budgets blowing out for more and more things that are brought in, but if we are fair dinkum about reducing litter then there should be good cost-effective advertising targeted here and there at different times of the year which endeavours to bring about this culture, because that is probably the greatest change we will get if people do care about our roadsides, care about our parks, care about our city malls and our streets and the places where we congregate so they can be nice places.

The other main aspect of this legislation is the system of actually seeing the breach, processing the breach and then applying the fine. In places like Singapore you hardly see one cigarette butt or a bit of rubbish anywhere. I am not sure what they do there, but obviously whatever they do it works. It has obviously got some effect. I think basically there is a culture there where they take great pride in their place being clean and enjoyable. I have noticed in places like Singapore that there is great happiness and enjoyment amongst young people. They enjoy their city and enjoy their cafes, shops and so on. That

culture is important—that is, to develop pride in our streets, our towns and our villages. I think that is one good avenue to pursue.

Amongst the various measures introduced under this bill is a reverse onus of proof in the way in which these authorised officers can take the numberplate and description of a vehicle—that is, through that reverse onus of proof the processing of the breach occurs. I do agree with that system; otherwise it would be virtually impossible for them to pull people up. If they see a loaded B-double going along and a Coke can flies out the window, who is going to pull up the B-double and say, 'Hey, mate, you threw a Coke can out of the window'? Under the system proposed by this bill, whether it is a truck or a car, they will see it and be able to process it. Sometimes the suggestion is made as to why just anybody cannot do this. I think that is fraught with danger. It does need to be only authorised officers who have had some training; otherwise there could be all sorts of mischievous reports and so forth. As I say, it is only going to be the EPA officer or the local government officer if they happen to be on the road at the time and happen to be behind a vehicle when the littering occurs. If there are a modest number of fines that occur, then a feeling will develop amongst motorists and people will teach their children and so forth that there is a chance and an enhanced chance that if they throw rubbish out on the side of the road they will get fined because there is a new system in place.

The other issue that is pretty important here is dangerous littering. I can remember taking our kids to a little swimming hole near Helidon but we could no longer go there. There is not much water around Toowoomba to swim in because it is on top of a mountain, but this little waterhole was down the bottom near Helidon. It was quite a popular little spot, but kids cut their feet and there were smashed beer bottles everywhere. Unless you wore sandals or joggers to go swimming, you could not go into the water. It is a tragedy that families and kids cannot enjoy an area where there are nice waterholes, nice river stones and so on. That also happens in parks. I heard a previous speaker in this debate talk about broken glass in a sandpit at the bottom of a slippery dip. Those sorts of things are just stupid, reckless, dangerous and almost virtually criminal. If this legislation can go some way to stop that sort of dangerous littering, then I think that the bill is of some good value.

The other issue that I wanted to speak about with regard to reckless littering relates to needles and needlestick injuries that can occur as a result. It is every parent's nightmare that that might happen to their children. I know it has been difficult to come to grips at times with the fact that there should be needle bins here, there and everywhere and that if there are people think that it is almost like an acceptance of something that is bad. But tragically we need to have those receptacles, particularly in public toilets and so on. Tragically, health workers, particularly community health workers, need to address this issue with people who are known drug users whilst endeavouring to get them off the habit. It is just facing reality to know that they have to try to get in place systems of safe disposal of needles while trying to get them off the habit and into a better way of life. This brings another means to try to make areas like playgrounds and parks safer. The other issue of course is lit cigarettes, and how many times have some of the fires we have seen around this state come about purely and simply from someone flicking a cigarette butt from a moving vehicle into dry grass on the side of the road? The wind of passing vehicles fans the butt and the next thing you know there is a fire and problems for everybody.

We are supporting this bill. I ask the minister to address those issues that I raised, in particular with regard to the authorised officers. I certainly hope this works and makes the environment of where we live, drive and play a lot nicer for everybody. I hope that in conjunction with advertising we can develop a real culture of pride in keeping our built, working and playing environments pleasant places.