



Speech by


## Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Wednesday, 11 July 2012

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### WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1): DISALLOWANCE

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (8.43 pm): It is my great privilege to conclude by opposing this disallowance motion regarding the waste reduction and recycling regulation. I will start by referring to some of the comments made by members opposite. For starters, the member for South Brisbane referred to the LNP government as belligerent and unthinking. Let me focus on that word 'unthinking', because I think that is in the manifesto of the ALP. 'Unthinking' is when you are confronted with a problem and your only solution is a tax—when there is a problem, the solution is a tax. If there is a problem with waste, the solution is a waste tax. If there is a problem with—

**Ms Trad:** With the LNP, if there is problem, you sack them.

**Mr POWELL:** We'll get to that, member for South Brisbane.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Order! Those on my left will cease interjecting.

**Mr POWELL:** Before the member for South Brisbane gets too irate, I will say that I did agree with one thing she said—that is, we cannot go back. This state cannot afford to go back to a Labor government. This state cannot afford Labor—not at the state level and not at the federal level. It was our policy coming into the election to repeal this waste levy. We have delivered on that because that is delivering cost-of-living savings through businesses to each and every Queenslanders. We as Queenslanders cannot afford to go back to Labor government and Labor taxes.

The member for South Brisbane also correctly identified that this was a charge on industry at a time when the Labor government should have been working with industry to give industry opportunities to grow and offer incentives to employ more people. Did those opposite hear that word—'employ'? I know that those opposite like to say the word 'sack', but at a time when they should have been working with industry to employ more people they were putting their hand in their pockets, as the member for Mundingburra rightly pointed out, and making it ever harder for them to do so. The member for South Brisbane also referred to the waste levy as 'good Labor policy'.

**Ms Trad:** I should have said 'great'.

**Mr POWELL:** Not only is it by the Labor book in terms of yet another tax; but if 'good Labor policy' destroys jobs with no recognisable environmental outcome then your judgement of what good policy is is sadly lacking. It is here at the state level through the former Labor government bringing in this waste tax. It is mirrored at the federal level through the federal Labor government under Julia Gillard bringing in a carbon tax that, again, will destroy jobs for no environmental outcome. We cannot afford to return to that. We know that both taxes were not about environmental outcomes; they were about filling the state coffers and the federal coffers in the case of the carbon tax.

We committed from day one, when this levy was first mooted, to repealing it and we have done that. But in doing it we have acknowledged that we will protect some of the initiatives, particularly the environmental initiatives that the former government was going to fund as a result of this levy, because we see that they are important environmental issues. The member for South Brisbane mentioned the koala response strategy. Not only have we protected that funding; we have enhanced it by offering funding for vaccinations and funding for rescue and rehabilitation.

What we saw from the member for South Brisbane was yet more Labor hypocrisy. They bleat about Public Service jobs—and let me reiterate the words of the Premier and a number of other ministers over the last couple of days: we are fighting for Public Service positions and we are fighting for front-line positions.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr POWELL:** We are. If anyone thinks it is a light matter that we have 20,000 more public servants than we can afford and that we make these decisions lightly or even with jocularly, it is just not fair, it is not correct and it is not true. While the members opposite bleat about protecting Public Service jobs, they have no problem whatsoever with destroying private sector jobs. As the member for South Brisbane said, this was a charge on industry and it was destroying jobs in the industry. I made note when we first mentioned how we intended to repeal this levy that, in the time since the levy was introduced, seven miniskip businesses in South-East Queensland alone had already gone out of business. Seven miniskip businesses—in the short time between when the former Labor government brought this levy in and the time we put on the record how we intended to—

**Ms Trad:** Table it.

**Mr POWELL:** I am happy to table my documents. I am very happy to table them. There you go. I table my documents as per the request by the member for South Brisbane.

*Tabled paper:* Notes of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, Hon. Andrew Powell, for the debate of the disallowance motion regarding the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2012 [\[517\]](#).

Seven miniskip businesses have gone out of business. What do we hear from those on the other side? The only jobs they are interested in—

**Ms TRAD:** I rise to a point of order. I have asked the minister to table—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Order! I will hear the point of order.

**Ms TRAD:** He is referring to information regarding the collapse of seven businesses as a direct result of the waste levy. I am asking him to table the evidence.

**Mr Bleijie:** He tabled the documents.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** My understanding is that the minister—

**Ms TRAD:** The evidence, not his scrawl!

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for South Brisbane, I have heard your point of order. The minister tabled the document that he had in his hand. The minister is at liberty to refer to whatever documents he likes, but you asked him to table a document and he tabled the document that he was referring to. I am not aware of any other document that the minister has that he is referring to in order to table it.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Members will cease interjecting. The minister has the call.

**Mr POWELL:** The member for South Brisbane talked about private sector jobs created by the waste levy in Victoria. She called them green jobs. Victoria has green jobs not because of a waste levy but because it has already delivered the policies that this government has said we will deliver—that is, having a national parks system that people can access. That has created jobs—green jobs—in the environment by encouraging tourism through encouraging Victorians to access their national parks and the protected areas of that state. That is where green jobs lie and that is where we, through the work of the Minister for Tourism and through the work of the Minister for National Parks, will deliver green jobs for this state.

**Ms Trad:** What about brown jobs?

**Mr POWELL:** The member for South Brisbane also referred to the flood levy and said that, by definition, our opposition to all levies includes the flood levy. Let me put it this way: if the federal Labor government under Rudd and Gillard had saved for a rainy day, that flood levy would not have been necessary. If the Rudd and Gillard governments had not squandered the money put aside for them by the former Howard government, that flood levy would not have been necessary. At the end of the day, the underlying reason why this levy had to go was that it was a dog of a levy. There was barely anyone who could raise a positive thing to say about this levy. It was a levy where certain things were in and other things were out. If I recall correctly, at the time of opposing the original bill that is now the act I referred to—

**Mr Stevens:** The hokey-pokey.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you, member for Mermaid Beach; I referred to it as the hokey-pokey. It was a case of waste in, waste out, and that created an administrative nightmare.

**Ms Trad** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for South Brisbane will cease interjecting. In fact, I warn the member for South Brisbane under standing order 253A.

**Mr POWELL:** As I said, it was waste in, waste out. What the former Labor government created was an abysmal levy that passed on an administrative burden to each and every local government and each and every private contractor in the waste industry to manage so they could provide the necessary reports. We heard from the member for Morayfield—and I commend him for his contribution this evening—that for the Moreton Bay Regional Council alone that was going to cost the council \$800,000 each and every year simply to administer. As the Minister for Local Government pointed out, if it was so in favour of this levy, why did it cheer, why did it applaud and why has it since sent me letters of congratulations for removing the levy from the moment we made it clear that we would repeal this levy?

A number of members on the opposite side have also referred to the interstate dumping issue. This was the justification in the first place for the waste levy. I refer to my speech during the second reading debate following the then committee's consideration of the act where I raised specific questions about interstate dumping, because if it were such a crucial issue—if it were such a disastrous state of affairs—then surely we would have had the evidence to support those statements. When former DERM employees were asked about this, the response was—

It is somewhat difficult to quantify for materials that are not regulated. We do have information about regulated waste coming across the border. In relation to other more opportunistic decisions that are made, all we have is pretty much anecdotal information in relation to that.

As I said, at the time we had two opportunities to explore what this interstate dumping material potentially was. The first was regulated waste. What we were able to receive from the DERM officers, for which we were very grateful, was a table of regulated waste. What it showed was that it was predominantly soil and sludge coming from other states and as far away as Tasmania, but it was only 10,000 tonnes—hardly apocalyptic, hardly cataclysmic—of soil and sludge. The other area where it was suggested we should look for this so-called interstate dumping was anecdotal evidence from councils that border New South Wales in particular. For starters, the Goondiwindi Regional Council never wanted to be part of this waste levy. It never wanted to be part of the waste levy zone. If it had an issue with interstate dumping, surely it would have been asking the then government to be included in the waste levy zone, but it was not.

Let us turn to the other border council, the Gold Coast City Council. When asked, Mr Matthew Fraser, the then Acting Manager of Waste and Resources Management at Gold Coast City Council, admitted that the council was concerned about cross-border waste transfers and that it obviously needed to have systems in place to try to minimise that. He also confirmed that at that stage the Gold Coast City Council did not prohibit waste coming from outside the area. He also confirmed that there were far simpler solutions to this issue; namely, differential rates—that is, different disposal fees applying to waste from external to the state. He suggested that another simple solution would be the proof-of-residency approach which is currently employed by other SEQ councils. So the whole basis on which this waste levy was established—

**Mr Mulherin:** So once this is abolished will we see a reduction in waste charges in council?

**Mr POWELL:** No. I take the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's interjection. He asked if we will see a drop in council waste levy rates at landfill. You will certainly see some movement in that the \$35 waste tax is gone but in its place, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, is the carbon tax—\$23 a tonne on each and every tonne going into landfill. So whilst we have done our part for Queensland, for Queenslanders and for Queensland businesses and for Queensland councils, federal Labor has filled that gap by putting the carbon tax on waste heading into landfill. The Leader of the Opposition in her contribution this evening talked about the fact that domestic waste was excluded. I refer to the comments made by the Premier. That certainly was not the case, because each and every individual who called for a skip bin to deal with domestic waste on their site at their home was getting slugged this waste levy. As I said, as a result of the waste levy, seven businesses went out of business within the time it took us to repeal it.

In terms of domestic waste, no mention so far has been made of the aged-care sector. Because of the fact that aged-care facilities require commercial waste contractors to collect their residential waste, each and every resident at an aged-care facility was being slugged this business tax. Clearly those opposite did not care about some of our most needy. All of us would have a grandmother or great-grandmother or a mother or father who has resided at some point in our aged-care sector. Every single one of those people was going to be paying more for their day-to-day living through this waste tax. The Leader of the Opposition also referred to the opportunities that this so-called waste tax would bring. I think she was playing on the words of the member for South Brisbane with this idea that a waste tax would actually create a whole stack of jobs to replace the ones that it was destroying in the private sector.

Perhaps those in the long-established and strong waste industry in this state would take offence at the fact that this would create brand-new jobs. There are many people involved in the waste industry already. We heard from the member for Woodridge about one of them. On that note, let me add that some of the facts portrayed by the member for Woodridge are not true. My office and my department have been in regular contact with the Erhards—have sent numerous letters, have made many phone calls. We have bent over backwards for the Erhards, but the reality is that the Erhards have unfortunately made business decisions based on a Labor tax that from day one we have declared we will repeal. I am sorry for the position they are in, but they have made business decisions based on advice they have received from the previous government in the full knowledge that from day one our intent was to repeal this waste levy.

Let me conclude with a couple of comments in my opposition to this disallowance motion. Margaret Thatcher once said, 'Socialism is a great idea until you run out of everyone else's money.' Let me repeat: 'Socialism is a great idea until you run out of everyone else's money.'

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr POWELL:** Tax, tax, levy, levy. Those opposite will have you believe that the waste tax was about environmental outcomes. We can achieve environmental outcomes by working with the industry. We are working with the industry and we will deliver improved recycling rates and less littering. We will deliver it without a tax because at the end of the day those opposite brought in a tax not for environmental outcomes but as part of their socialist experiment of taking more money off those who generate the jobs in this state and as a result they were costing businesses and they were costing Queenslanders jobs each and every day. Like DERM before it the levy is dead, the levy is buried, the levy is cremated and I oppose this disallowance motion.