




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (7.49 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017. As other members have said whilst the name suggests that this is about waste, what we do know is that it is really about implementing two LNP policies that were announced late last year and early this year around banning lightweight plastic shopping bags and instituting a container deposit scheme or, as the government has referred to it, a container refund scheme. This bill and its objectives will provide both a head of power and the framework for the introduction of a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban, as well as providing a head of power and the framework for the introduction of a container refund scheme for Queensland.

I think it is interesting to reflect on what has really been a journey for the state of Queensland and many of the participants in this realm. For many, many years—indeed, for decades probably—the environmental sector has certainly seen benefits in banning lightweight plastic bags, as it has in terms of having a container deposit scheme. It has certainly taken some time to convince some of the key players of the benefits of both of those opportunities.

I do recall that when I was first elected I got pulled aside by one of the owners of a local IGA in my community. He was basically pleading for some clarity, some direction, particularly around the plastic bag situation. He was very conscious that a ban was ultimately going to come—some would say it has possibly come a little later than many expected. He was seeking the support of the government to go that way many, many years ago. Some of his competitors were less conciliatory around the idea of banning lightweight plastic bags, but those competitors have since come around. I note that Australia's two biggest supermarket giants—Woolworths and Coles—have both announced plans to phase out single-use plastic bags over the next 12 months and have confirmed that from 1 July 2018 customers will need to bring their own bags or buy re-usable ones in store. It really has been quite a path for some of those market leaders to see the benefit in banning lightweight plastic shopping bags, but I think it is an extremely sensible outcome.

I remember during my term as the minister for environment spending a number of opportunities with Dr Col Limpus—whether it be out on Moreton Bay during the annual Moreton Bay turtle rodeo or at Mon Repos turtle sanctuary—discussing some of the scourges of turtle health in Australian waters. What is interesting and what should be pointed out is that, whilst lightweight plastic bags are a contributor, they are possibly not the main contributor. I suspect that there does need to be further work done around this space. What are possibly the main contributor are what Col would often refer to me as shards of plastic that came from things like Chinese takeaway containers that would end up breaking down in marine environments under the sun and UV and the salt water, causing these shards to splinter off—shards that looked very similar to juvenile jelly fish, which are one of the primary feeding sources for our turtles. Whilst the community, and indeed the retailers themselves, are now prepared for this plastic bag ban, I do think the environment department, the environment minister and indeed the community need to consider some of the other products that we are using that potentially do not have the same profile as plastic bags but do have a detrimental impact on our environment, particularly our turtle population.

I turn to the container deposit scheme. Similarly, there are a number of players in this space who have had a road to Damascus experience where they have seen the error of their ways and have decided that they will jump on the bandwagon of community sentiment around this. We have heard stories from both sides of politics about how people can recall in their childhood these kinds of schemes. I personally cannot. I do not know whether that is demonstrating my age.

Mr Walker: Some of us can.

Mr POWELL: I take that interjection from the member for Mansfield—some can and they remember it quite fondly. Again, there was a lot of consternation around the costs of this program, the benefits of this program and indeed some of the flow-on effects to local government operators in particular who are the primary responsible organisations when it comes to collecting recyclable waste, particularly here in South-East Queensland.

It is interesting to note some of the contributions to the committee's considerations on this bill—in particular, the Brisbane City Council, which does support both the ban on the use of lightweight plastic bags and the introduction of the container refund scheme but continues to express concern over the introduction of the container refund scheme because of the potential financial impact on the BCC's existing kerbside recycling program, which is funded through the sale of recyclable commodities. It also expressed concern that appropriate planning provisions are made to control or license community group collection points to ensure that odour, noise and public health are adequately controlled. Those concerns were reflected also by the LGAQ and, might I add, by some of their regional cousins including the Southern Downs Regional Council, which noted that councils and/or community organisations across its region would incur the capital costs associated with establishing infrastructure required to participate in the scheme.

I think that they are important points to make. This scheme will potentially come with a cost. It will come with a cost to councils, particularly those that do rely on recyclable product that they then onsell to fund the collection of those recyclable matters. It is interesting to note that even South-East Queensland councils have now come to a point where they agree that these bans are necessary and that this container deposit scheme is beneficial. I think that was a journey that the community needed to go on and that the community needed to take some of those councils and retailers on.

I acknowledge in the gallery Mr Toby Hutcheon and commend him for his long and dedicated campaign to see these bans and this container deposit scheme come about. During my term as minister for environment, Toby was with the Queensland Conservation Council. He is now working, I understand, with the Boomerang Alliance. I look forward to welcoming Toby to the Glass House electorate. We have a tentative date, I understand, for 19 October, when we are going to hold a community evening for not only members of the community but also businesses, to allow them to understand what has transpired here tonight in terms of legislative requirements but also the opportunities—opportunities whether they be small or medium or large businesses but also opportunities for community organisations. I know there will be community organisations like the Scouts groups around the electorate of Glass House that will be seeing potential benefits in what we pass tonight.

I do commend the legislation to the House. I do support the shadow minister in the LNP's support for this bill tonight. I do acknowledge that, for some, it has been a rather long and tortuous journey, but we have got there. I think the community will benefit but, more importantly, the environment will benefit too.