




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (5.03 pm): I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017. Plastic is a ubiquitous part of all of our lives, but it has also become a silent killer. Millions of tonnes are clogging the world's oceans and devastating sea life. This bill will implement a generational change which will have far-reaching positives for our children and grandchildren, for our wildlife, our beautiful beaches, our waterways, our environment and the Great Barrier Reef.

Shortly after I was elected in 2015 I met with Jo Stoyel, Flavia Santa Maria, Rolf Schlagloth and Paul Bambrick from Plastic Bag Free Livingstone—a local, grassroots community campaign group which has been working for years to see a ban on plastic bags and also the introduction of a container deposit scheme. Plastic Bag Free Livingstone evolved from a small community group to a game-changing voice, harnessing public and business support to drive these legislative changes to ban plastic bags and introduce a container deposit scheme in Queensland. Plastic Bag Free Livingstone began the campaign after watching turtles choking, suffocating and dying from ingesting plastic bags and having them wrapped around their heads.

In September 2015 Plastic Bag Free Livingstone and I ran a parliamentary e-petition for the ban of plastic bags in Queensland. The petition received over 1,600 petitions from across Queensland. I was proud to stand in this place on 15 September 2015, the day that the petition was tabled in the parliament, in support of the ban. In September 2015 I also tabled a copy of the nonconforming change.org petition started by Emma Kent, also in 2015, which had almost 30,000 signatures in support of banning single-use plastic bags in Queensland. I am extremely proud that I have the opportunity to speak again today in this place on this issue, but now in support of a bill before this parliament which will see our vision for a plastic bag free Queensland and a Queensland container deposit scheme become a reality. Plastic Bag Free Livingstone and I subsequently ran a parliamentary e-petition for a container deposit scheme in Queensland, which was tabled in this House in February 2016. This petition received almost 800 signatures.

I was shocked to learn that Queenslanders use over one billion plastic bags every year. In fact, we are the most littered mainland state. The material which represents the greatest volume of litter in our state was plastics which break down and can also attract toxic chemicals, devastating marine life through ingestion and potentially entering our food chain. In a single day Australians use over 10 million plastic bags. The average plastic bag is used on average for only five minutes yet can take up to 1,000 years to break down in the environment. Multiply that by the number of shoppers and the picture is clear: plastic bag use in Queensland is an environmental epidemic.

I am very proud to say that, shortly after being informed about the benefits of going plastic bag free by Plastic Bag Free Livingstone, I decided to make the change and go plastic bag free in my household. It has made an incredible difference. It is very empowering to go to the shops and know that each time I take my re-usable bags and do not use plastics bags I am helping save the environment.

Marine plastic pollution is devastating to wildlife and the environment. It must be stopped. Plastic bags suffocate, disable and kill thousands of marine mammals and seabirds worldwide each year. Studies in Moreton Bay have found the ingestion of plastic debris was responsible for about 30 per cent of all turtle deaths. Thousands of seabirds also die along the coast.

A recent Commonwealth study showed that 43 per cent of seabirds were found to have plastics in their gut. When the animal dies and decays, the plastic bag is free again to repeat the deadly cycle. Globally, it is estimated that 100,000 marine mammals and turtles and one million seabirds die every year from ingesting or becoming entangled in marine debris.

States like South Australia that have a cash-for-container scheme and a single-use plastic bag ban have considerably less plastic litter than other states like Queensland. Like South Australia, there are bans on plastic bags in Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory. Over 25 countries have either banned the bag or imposed levies. These actions have all drastically reduced plastic bag use.

South Australia has had a ban on single-use plastic bags since 2009, and it is estimated that this ban removes over 400 million bags from the economy every year. It remains a popular ban, with nine out of 10 South Australians taking their own re-usable bags to the supermarket. Banning plastic bags in Queensland would immediately reduce the number of bags in circulation in Queensland by approximately one billion bags every year. With a little bit of change in our routines and help from re-usable bags like the ones that I brought into this place and showed members in 2015, we can eliminate the problem.

We know Queenslanders want plastic bags gone. In fact, the recent discussion paper on plastic bags received more than 26,000 submissions, with more than 96 per cent of these supporting the ban. Banning single-use plastic bags in Queensland will not only help save our environment but also opens the door for replacement industries such as cloth—cotton or canvas—bags, paper bags and green containers or cups. This could help grow jobs and establish Queensland as a leader in sustainable industries like re-usable bags. I am very keen to work with local entrepreneurs in Keppel to establish sustainable industries in our local area as a result of these changes and for our local area to reap the economic benefit of this important environmental change. This would be a win-win—creating jobs whilst also saving the environment.

I congratulate Jo, Flavia, Rolf and Paul for their passion and ongoing dedication to protecting our environment and banning single-use plastic bags in Queensland. The team has worked tirelessly, holding stalls and clean-up days, talking with local businesses and promoting the cause on social media. We were also lucky enough to have environmental warrior Bob Irwin Senior to come on board with our campaign. He travelled to Yeppoon last year for a beach clean-up day to draw attention to the amount of plastic on our beaches.

I always knew it would be a long battle, but here we are passing legislation in the Queensland parliament to make this dream a reality. I also thank Toby Hutcheon from the Boomerang Alliance for all of his advice and wisdom throughout this campaign and the Livingstone Shire Council for supporting the campaign to ban single-use plastic bags in Queensland. I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the House.