



Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (4.43 pm): I rise to speak to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017 as a member of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. This bill was introduced into the House by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, the Hon. Dr Steven Miles, on 14 June 2017. The committee recommended that the bill be passed with one amendment. The committee received 63 submissions and held briefings with the department and public hearings in Brisbane and Yeppoon.

The objectives of the bill are to introduce a lightweight plastic bag ban and a container refund scheme in Queensland and also an end-of-waste framework where products are used as a resource. The plastic bag ban applies to single-use bags with a thickness of less than 35 microns including degradable bags. These are bags that are largely used in grocery and convenience stores where you collect your fruit and vegetables, for example. The ban does not include thicker single-use plastic bags your shopping may be placed in—for example, if you went and purchased an item from the likes of a Myer store. Barrier bags are also not included in the legislation, these being bags such as a loaf of bread may come in or prepackaged fruit or deli products. Nappy bags and other similar packaged items are also not included. Whilst these bags are not included in this legislation, the bill provides for regulation amendments to be included in the ban if the review finds that slightly thicker single-use bags are being provided as an alternative to the single-use lightweight bag. Penalties apply to retailers that do not comply with the regulation that will commence on 1 July 2018.

The proposed ban has received widespread support, not only from wildlife and conservation groups but also from local government and the wider general public. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland stated that about one billion plastic bags are used in Queensland every year and it is estimated over 16 million become litter. The majority of the rest end up in landfill. The Wildlife Preservation Society stated that these bags by their nature are easily picked up by the wind which allows their escape from landfill, shopping centres and public places. I think we have all seen that. Their movement in the breeze means they can easily get into rivers, creeks and the marine environment. It is here that they are exposed to the many birds, animals and reptiles who get entangled or mistake them for food. The Local Government Association of Queensland stated that the proposed ban would assist councils to reduce windblown litter at landfills, reduce litter in public places and waterways and reduce stormwater network blockages reducing the cost of repairs and maintenance.

Degradable and biodegradable bags have not been included because, as heard by the committee, these can take up to two years to decompose, by which time they are broken into smaller pieces and are often consumed by wildlife. The Norman Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee noted that if a better biodegradable bag was invented it appears that the legislation will permit this to be used. The Master Grocers association expressed some concern as to the cost that retailers may be exposed to. They stated that the government should supply retailers with posters and flyers to assist them to overcome some of the problems that they will undoubtedly encounter.

The beverage container refund scheme is also another litter-reducing scheme. The legislation will cover beverage containers that contain a liquid for human consumption and apply to containers between 150 millilitres and three litres and includes all glass, aluminium, plastic and liquid paperboard. The legislation does not include milk and fruit juice containers, wine and spirit bottles or takeaway coffee cups.

The scheme would be run by a board made up of an independent chair approved by the minister, at least two directors with financial and legal qualifications, one director with community interest approved by the minister and the remaining positions to be from the beverage industry. The committee recommended that there be a representative from the recycling industry on the board.

The bill states that the refund price will be 10 cents per container. This would be managed at various collection points around the state and returns would be scanned using a barcode rather than weight as there would be less likelihood of exploiting the scheme. It is believed that there would be about 307 of these locations across the state. The scheme is designed to fit in and work with the current recycling scheme or kerbside scheme that we all know today. As we have also heard, this could be of benefit to not-for-profit groups. We all remember years ago the Scouts used to enter the bottle recycling scheme on a fairly large scale. This will again give not-for-profit groups that opportunity.

The Local Government Association and the Brisbane City Council stated that they had some concerns around the appropriate planning provisions made to control a licensed community group's involvement in the scheme to ensure odour, noise and public health are adequately controlled. A lot of work will need to be done with local government on how the depots are maintained. During the course of the investigation—and the member for Greenslopes commented on the group that he works with—it became apparent the work that those groups do and we have to admire them for it. From my experience, plastic bags and bottles are a greater problem along the eastern seaboard than inland, because wind-blown bags end up in creeks, mangroves and oceans where they cause problems to wildlife.

The bill proposes the introduction of the end-of-waste approval application and provides opportunities for an approval classification if the resource can be used without any environmental harm. In my area on the Darling Downs, that is already being done with some human waste being used as fertiliser to grow grains and cotton. We support those amendments. We support the legislation with the recommendation that a representative from the recycling industry sit on the board.