




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (7.31 pm): In the Bundaberg and Burnett region, local community groups and schools have really taken the lead in the protection of our environment. I take this opportunity to congratulate the various community groups that have been proactive in introducing initiatives to create a cleaner, greener environment for future generations. I cannot talk about positive environmental initiatives without mentioning the extraordinary work of Bargara local Carmen McEneaney and Boomerang Bags Bundaberg. Local businesses have declared a war on waste in a bid to protect the environment. Bundaberg and Burnett businesses, including Nana's Pantry, Learmonth's FoodWorks, Bargara Beach Bakehouse, SportsPower, IGA Burnett Heads, The Red Shed fruit and vegetable stall, the Kebab Shack at Bargara and the Last Stop Convenience Store in North Bundaberg stock re-usable shopping bags made from donated recycled fabric to reduce the use of single-use plastic bags in the community. The re-usable shopping bags have been handcrafted by local volunteers who have formed a group known as Boomerang Bags Bundaberg to cut back on waste. In fact, one amazing volunteer, Pam Twyford, has just finished making her 1,000th bag to contribute to the cause. Pam says that Boomerang Bags has given her back her love of sewing and that she is enjoying creating bags from repurposed material.

Every boomerang bag replaces about 700 plastic bags and it is estimated that 100 recyclable bags will replace two tonnes of plastic rubbish. I have been a proud sponsor of the Boomerang Bags Bundaberg initiative since its inception. I was honoured to stand beside that dedicated group as we officially launched the bags recently. The campaign will have a significant impact on our local environment. The boomerang bags are changing people's attitudes when they are out shopping and are allowing our community to take the lead on reducing waste and pollution.

The boomerang bag initiative makes us stop to really think about the impact each and every one of us has and to understand that the choices we make can and do make a difference to the health of our environment. It is encouraging to see local groups and businesses that are dedicated to discouraging the reliance on plastics to cut back on waste and rid the region of plastic pollution. I also congratulate the Bundaberg Christian College for their ongoing involvement in and support of this initiative. I thank those in the Discovery Coast area, especially Amber and Tanya from the Discovery Coast Environment Group, who are strong supporters of such initiatives. Theirs is a great group doing great work.

Another important local environmental initiative that has made an impact on our community is the implementation of the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Competition within our local schools. I was proud to partner with the Bundaberg Regional Council, Impact Community Services and A2Z Waste Recycling to promote the importance of recycling to our future generations. In schools across the region, those with little green thumbs have adopted a number of environmentally sustainable practices at their schools, including collecting food scraps for chooks, worm farms and compost bins, re-using paper for collage activities and establishing vegetable gardens. I was delighted to see local schools engaging

with students on waste and recycling issues to build a healthy respect and understanding for the environment. It is fantastic to see our school communities getting involved in fostering healthy habits for the environment.

We have had a great response from schools, including St Luke's Anglican School in Bundaberg, Sharon State School, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Bundaberg, Gooburrum State School and West State School, to this new education initiative. Next year I look forward to more schools taking up the challenge on this very important initiative. St Luke's Anglican School was crowned Bundaberg's most environmentally friendly school after taking out the competition following its impressive submission showing that the school had been actively involved in recycling to encourage students to become globally aware and, more importantly, responsible citizens.

My community is also getting excited at the prospect of a container refund scheme. Community groups and businesses from across Bundaberg and the Burnett came to a forum that I co-hosted with the Boomerang Alliance. I understand it was the first in the state. I encourage all members to take up the opportunity offered by the Boomerang Alliance and engage with their communities through this very important scheme. It is important for local community groups and businesses to understand how these changes may affect the way they operate and what they can do to prepare to make the most of the opportunities presented. The forum provided the ideal platform to discuss these changes. The forum was well attended by various community and school groups including the Bargara Lions, Impact, the Bundaberg Special School, the Bundaberg Regional Council waste management centre, the Burnett Heads Progress Association, the Girl Guides and local businesses, including A2Z Waste Recycling. The container refund scheme will offer local charities, sporting clubs and schools a lot of money-making opportunities, not to mention the benefits of the scheme in reducing pollution in our region's precious natural environment.

Local initiatives are important as toxic plastic is causing significant damage to marine life. We know from research that it could be making its way up the food chain, ending up in our diet. Unfortunately, this means that what is at the bottom of the food chain is eating plastic and it accumulates as it goes up the food chain. Several studies have looked at fish and crustaceans that we purchase or catch and even they have digested plastics. We know plastic contains toxins and those toxins can leach into the seafood we love to consume. Reducing the impact of marine debris demands a multipronged approach involving consumers, industry and government. From a consumer's perspective, it is all about making personal choices and being educated about what needs to be done.

Published research has found that in Queensland 34 per cent of sea turtles had ingested marine debris, including microplastics. Types of rubbish most commonly found inside turtles are day-to-day consumer generated debris, such as food wrappers, packaging, plastic bags, fruit stickers and so on. Every year four to 12 million tonnes of debris enter the oceans and 80 per cent of that debris comes from the land. The majority of that debris is plastic and it takes hundreds of years to break down.

The sea turtles that we are finding washed up on the shores of Australia are eating or getting tangled in marine debris just off our coastline. They eat it as it resembles the food they like to eat. For example, older turtles love to eat jellyfish, so they will go for soft, clear or translucent plastic bags, because of their resemblance to jellyfish. Turtles have been on this planet for almost 110 million years and they are now in danger of extinction, partly because of marine debris. This is about making choices that will reduce the probability of those animals becoming extinct in our lifetime. Of course, this gives me the opportunity to mention the Mon Repos Visitor Centre, which is one of the iconic tourist ventures in Queensland. Rejecting a product because of its excessive plastic packaging will send a strong statement to industry and industry will respond.

Firstly, I will address the container refund scheme, which has been widely talked about tonight. The bill contains the planned introduction of a 10-cent refund on all covered beverage containers from July 2018. It is estimated that every year in Queensland 2.4 billion containers are used. In Queensland we have low recycling and high litter rates. It is reported that the container refund scheme could reduce container litter by at least 60 per cent and increase recycling above 80 per cent. The bill also allows community organisations to get involved in collection to raise valuable funds, which is something that community groups in my region welcome. It is estimated that community groups that collect cans and bottles could share in an expected conservative estimate of \$25 million in refunds every year. The scheme should be self-financing, with the beverage industry responsible for covering the costs of the scheme.

The scheme includes all glass, plastic, aluminium and paper beverage containers between 150 millilitres and three litres. These will have a 10-cent refund applied. Milk, some fruit juice and health tonics are exempt. There has been questions raised as to why beer bottles are included but wine and spirit bottles are not included in the scheme. Wine bottles, in particular, are common in litter and their exclusion creates an unfair advantage over other alcoholic beverages.

The use of barcodes has been widely discussed and explored as the primary means to verify refund containers on collection. Collection points have been widely discussed. Those of us who live in regional Queensland want to make sure that local not-for-profit organisations or established local enterprises are given the opportunity to undertake this activity.

Other submissions to the committee supported the establishment of container refund points. I have mentioned that not-for-profit organisations should be involved in this. The establishment of regional hubs will assist with accessibility challenges. However, it has been highlighted through discussions with the department that an accessible Queensland scheme would require in excess of 300 container refund points. We want to ensure that regional Queensland is included.

I will now turn to the issue of plastic bags. The bill announces a ban on single-use lightweight plastic bags up to 35 microns in Queensland. It is encouraging to see that the government is talking about the option to increase the thickness of banned bags should retailers seek to provide slightly thicker bags.

This is a subject that we all feel very strongly about. There is bipartisan support for this legislation tonight. Plastic bags are doing enormous damage to the environment, including our oceans. Not only is the chemical pollution harming our ecosystems; it is also harming us via the food chain. I live in a region where plastic rubbish on our beaches is a daily reminder of how prevalent plastic pollution has become. The need to reduce this pollution is vital.

I want to acknowledge Toby Hutcheon from Boomerang Alliance who is in the gallery tonight. He has been an avid supporter of this legislation and an advocate to us all. Thank you for your advocacy, Toby. It is great to see that this legislation will pass with bipartisan support tonight. Thank you for all your work.