



Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (4.08 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Today we debate historic reforms to cut litter in Queensland. This bill will ban the scourge of plastic shopping bags and put a price on beverage containers so they are recycled. Many of the most passionate advocates for these reforms are Queensland schoolchildren. Every day I get letters from schoolkids around the state. By passing this bill we say to our young people that we value our wildlife, especially our marine creatures like turtles and dugong. We say that we want our parks, waterways, Moreton Bay and the Great Barrier Reef to be litter free. Today we can also deliver to all the community organisations who will benefit from the container refund scheme and we give kids a chance to make some pocket money by cleaning out parks and collecting and returning cans and bottles.

Many of us have fond memories of cash for cans and re-usable bottle recycling. I remember school holidays spent with my grandad, stacking XXXX longneck bottles in a wire collection depot to raise funds for the northern suburbs racing pigeon club. I can still smell the stale beer and hear the crash of broken glass. It is entirely possible that my taste for Queensland's iconic XXXX beer dates back to those fond memories of my grandad, although it is also fair to say that grandad did not mind emptying a XXXX bottle of his own later in the day.

An estimated 2.4 billion beverage containers and one billion lightweight plastic shopping bags are used in Queensland every year. These are ending up in our waterways and killing and maiming our native animals. This bill responds to overwhelming community demand. Queensland has the most iconic marine environment in the world, and we must act to protect our world renowned beaches, our waterways and, of course, the Great Barrier Reef. I have seen the impacts of this litter firsthand on my visits with Trevor Long and the team at Sea World. Many animals ingest plastic litter. Some marine turtles even choose to eat plastic bags over their regular food, unaware of the harm that will follow. Queenslanders told us that they are worried about the effects of plastic litter going into our environment and ultimately our own food chain.

The container refund scheme and plastic bag ban will address our litter problem while creating jobs across the state and supporting social enterprises and charities. It will give local communities an incentive to stem the massive amounts of litter in our playgrounds, parks, rivers and beaches. We are giving people access to the latest technology to do it. Reverse vending machines are easy to use and provide instant refunds. They will be made available right across the state. I am pleased to advise that, with Mr Speaker's permission, Queensland's first reverse vending machine is currently installed here at Parliament House. Members can test it out for themselves now if they like, before making up their minds whether to support this bill.

With an estimated 2.4 billion eligible containers generated in Queensland each year, the container refund scheme will create new social and commercial opportunities. This means more revenue for our not-for-profit organisations including sporting clubs and charities, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of the state. It will give community groups like the Scouts a chance to make some money out of the work they are already doing to keep our neighbourhoods clean. I acknowledge their hard work and dedication and am encouraged by their positive feedback.

I also want to commend Woolworths and Coles for their announcement that they will voluntarily implement a nationwide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags to align with Queensland's 1 July 2018 commencement date. It goes to show that there is broad momentum and support for this ban. Another great example of locally inspired action on plastic litter came from the Spar supermarket at Alexandra Headland on the Sunshine Coast on Friday, when they took on the challenge to go plastic bag free. I congratulate Bruce and Sue Luchterhand for their courage and encourage other retailers to follow in their footsteps.

We recognise that many Queenslanders are in the habit of relying on free plastic shopping bags to carry goods home and that some will require some support to shift their behaviour. This is why the bill contains a transition period ahead of the ban commencing on 1 July 2018. The Queensland government has partnered with the National Retail Association and Boomerang Alliance to ensure retailers and communities across the state are ready. We have also partnered with Boomerang Bags, a grassroots organisation, to empower local communities to make low-cost re-usable bags from recycled materials.

Importantly, Queensland's action on banning lightweight shopping bags goes one step further than the ban in other states by also including biodegradable and degradable plastic bags. Despite the promise of these technologies, it turns out that they can be as dangerous as, if not more dangerous than, regular plastic bags as they quickly break up into more pieces when in the environment. If we pass this bill today, Queensland will go from being the litter capital of Australia to the front of the pack, where we should be.

The Agriculture and Environment Committee considered the bill and published its report on 11 August 2017. The committee recommended that the bill be passed and made three further recommendations. These recommendations relate to the mandatory inclusion of a recycling industry representative on the board of the Product Responsibility Organisation that will operate the container refund scheme and to the minister reporting to the committee on progress on reaching relevant benchmarks within two years of commencement of the container refund scheme. The final recommendation refers to the inclusion of the benchmarks in regulation.

The Queensland government response fully supports three of the four recommendations of the committee and partly supports the remaining recommendation. The government agrees with the committee's view that the recycling industry will play an important role in the implementation and functioning of the proposed container refund scheme. The government also supports the committee's view that inclusion of a recycling industry representative on the board of the Product Responsibility Organisation would ensure balanced representation. The government is proposing to achieve the aim of this recommendation by amending the Waste Reduction and Recycling Regulation 2011. The amendment will ensure that at least one member of the board will have knowledge and experience of the waste and recycling industry. The regulation will also ensure the board has a member or members with knowledge and experience of the local government and not-for-profit sectors.

It is important to note that the container refund scheme is designed to create the potential for members of the waste industry to compete for revenue through the scheme. This opportunity is also available to other sectors, such as local government and the not-for-profit sector, but is not available to the beverage industry as the beverage industry must fund the scheme and the Product Responsibility Organisation itself cannot distribute a profit to members. Any person who is able to earn revenue through the scheme has a pecuniary interest which would create a potential conflict of interest if they were a Product Responsibility Organisation board member. The amendments to the regulation will avoid this potential conflict of interest by specifying that a board member may not be currently employed by a waste or recycling company, local government or not-for-profit organisation.

I note that the committee reported that support for the measures proposed in the bill was universal and that the community is ready to make the switch from single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags to re-usable bags as a way of reducing plastic litter. I also note that the submissions received by the committee indicated there is considerable support for the introduction of a container refund scheme. I thank the committee for its valuable work and I welcome the fact that community support for the bill is so overwhelming it also enjoys bipartisan backing in this parliament today.

The container refund scheme is a product stewardship approach where the beverage manufacturers will take responsibility for appropriately managing the empty containers that result from the consumption of beverages. Queensland is leading the pack again by establishing a not-for-profit Product Responsibility Organisation to administer the scheme. The bill also ensures there is strong governance and oversight to ensure the container refund scheme is transparent and accountable in all parts of its operation. The Product Responsibility Organisation board's composition includes a balance between industry and independent community representatives. The government has proactively engaged with the beverage industry to establish this organisation by the end of 2017.

The Queensland government recognises that waste is often a valuable resource that can be used beneficially and encourages the safe and environmentally sound re-use and recovery of waste. The bill amends the end-of-waste framework by enabling better regulation of the end user of resources. Without the control on the end user that is afforded by these amendments, the risks of environmental harm associated with the use of resources would have to be eliminated before the waste is supplied as a resource.

The amendments clarify that an end-of-waste approval can be used to trial the use of a waste as a resource when there is a lack of certainty about the waste, its intended use or its suitability for an end-of-waste code. These amendments respond to concerns raised by stakeholders about gaps in the existing regulatory framework and complement a raft of other minor amendments that clarify the operation of the end-of-waste framework. The amendments to the end-of-waste framework will result in more waste being used as a resource and will reduce the costs for operators who choose to apply for an end-of-waste approval for their wastes. These wastes would otherwise have been disposed to landfill.

As a result of these initiatives, Queensland can look forward to cleaner parks, beaches and public areas after the container refund scheme and the ban on plastic shopping bags start next year. For too long we have been the litter capital of the country. The container refund scheme and plastic bag ban represent an historic step towards correcting this record.

Finally, I want to speak to the amendments to the Planning Act also proposed in this bill. Amendments to the Planning Act 2016 and to the Planning and Environment Court Act 2016 will provide clarification on a small number of issues that have been identified since commencement. All of the amendments seek to clarify existing provisions and ensure that these new pieces of legislation operate in the way they were intended. The amendments do not represent a change in policy. Now that these issues have been identified, amendments are being progressed as a matter of urgency to ensure our planning system can operate in a clear and transparent manner.

It is intended that amendments be made to the Planning Act 2016 to clarify, firstly, the intent in relation to the minister's decision on certain change applications; secondly, owner's consent in relation to particular development applications; and, finally, to clarify certain appeal rights. It is further proposed that amendments to the Planning and Environment Court Act 2016 be made to address a cross-referencing error and to extend the period for the current Planning and Environment Court rules. I commend the bill to the House.