




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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### **WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (WASTE LEVY) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.26 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Waste Levy) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill amends the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 and makes minor transitional amendments to the City of Brisbane Act 2010 and the Local Government Act 2009. I understand there are now some changes that have been made to the date of commencement of this legislation due to the amendments.

Before I speak in detail about the provisions of the bill, I think it is important to acknowledge that a number of local government areas in the north and north-west of this state have faced record floods, devastation, damage to their communities, homes, businesses, livestock, roads and other local, state and federal government infrastructure. The mayors and councillors of the north and north-west, from Townsville on the east coast to the Northern Territory border, should be commended for their tireless work during this unprecedented disaster. These are very difficult times and the effect on the regions has been devastating, but we have seen community leaders rise to meet the challenges that are ahead of them.

When this bill was first proposed by the government it was portrayed as a response to an interstate waste problem at Ipswich. If we cast our minds back, there were a few issues with the Ipswich council and the government had a few problems with—

**An opposition member:** With the Labor Ipswich council.

**Ms LEAHY:** I will take that interjection from the honourable member—the Ipswich Labor council, and this Labor government had a few problems removing that council from office. Then we heard that this was all about a recycling issue; then it was because of some international trade development with China; and after that it was to develop Queensland's recycling industry. Well, talk about excuses for a new tax! This tax will raise the most income of any of the five new taxes. It is also a tax that Queenslanders were not told about prior to the last state election. For the record, let's be clear on the real reason that the government dreamt up this waste bill: it was a tax grab, pure and simple.

**Mr Crandon:** \$1.5 billion.

**Ms LEAHY:** I will take that interjection. There is nothing clever about it. It is just an ongoing reminder of Labor's love of taxing Queenslanders at every opportunity.

While I acknowledge the desirability of progressing towards a zero-waste goal, this legislation has been rushed and is poorly constructed. Hence there are some 51 amendments—a further example of lazy Labor. This bill will not be the vehicle to deliver zero waste. It will not be the bill to deliver help to local councils or the environment. It has been designed to deliver consolidated revenue to the state

government directly from the pockets of mums, dads and businesses. We heard from the member for Broadwater the estimates in relation to Mount Isa City Council, which expects that this will cost each and every one of its ratepayers an extra \$320.

We need no further evidence of this taxation intent than to recognise that less than 10 cents in the dollar of the estimated \$1.3 billion raised will go towards environmental programs. Where does the over 90 cents in the dollar go? It goes to the government. Let us call it what it is. It is not about dealing with waste, as indicated previously. It is all about siphoning millions of dollars into Labor government coffers from mums, dads and businesses in the levy area.

Many practical issues were raised by Queensland local governments. They were overlooked or ignored in the original bill. Even the March 2019 start date for the waste levy was not originally aligned with the financial year. I acknowledge that there are some amendments, but the added burden falling to local councils had to be pointed out. After a good deal of pushback from local government and the LNP, the start date was eventually deferred to July 2019. What a nightmare it would have been for council budgets if the levy had commenced in March and the increments were levied in March in every year thereafter. It would have been an absolute nightmare for councils. This is a Labor government we are talking about, so the earlier date was understandable in the government's rush to extract higher taxes as soon as possible.

Many legitimate concerns were originally overlooked, so councils and industry had to fight to get exemptions. I acknowledge that there are some amendments, but it would have been horrendous to tax people for cleaning up after the recent weather events. I refer to exemptions for wastewater used for irrigation from coal seam gas plants. Now I know why Maranoa Regional Council is included in the levy area: a deliberate attempt to tax the use of that wastewater. I refer to exemptions for weighbridges and road scalplings. The road scalplings exemption is for only three years. Three years is not good enough. If this exemption is not ongoing, the cost of road repairs for local government will skyrocket.

By way of further example, Maranoa Regional Council has not been subjected to the levy before. It is concerned it will bear considerable costs. It has a network of nine waste facilities over some 63,000 square kilometres, with travel distances of 100 kilometres or more and populations of individual and urban areas ranging from 10 to 700 people. The council estimates that the cost to install a weighbridge at each of these sites is in excess of \$200,000. To compound this issue, these smaller sites are not eligible for the waste levy readiness funding. I am sure that Maranoa Regional Council would appreciate a clarification in relation to the amendments that have been foreshadowed and whether these amendments will provide exemptions to the sites to which they refer and at which they believe they will have to install weighbridges. I am sure they would like to hear that in the minister's reply to the second reading debate.

This bill is one of the biggest changes in governance of waste management in Queensland in decades. Given this, and the collective and individual impact to 38 councils—now 39 with the inclusion of Goondiwindi Regional Council in the levy zone—and many more impacted indirectly, it is incredibly disappointing that only nine business days was allowed for consultation. You would think that if you were going to raise \$1.3 billion you might have allowed a little more than nine business days for consultation.

In the time remaining I will outline some further legitimate concerns and reservations that local councils have expressed about the bill. One is the inclusion of Maranoa Regional Council and Mount Isa council in the waste area. They have never been included before. It is not well reasoned that both councils be included. They have strongly objected to their inclusion. The inclusion of Mount Isa City Council in the waste levy zone is based solely on a population level—a highly arbitrary policy basis ignoring other relevant factors such as remoteness, high transport costs for waste, the already high living costs, and those costs will probably go higher, given recent disasters—and the almost certain inability, due to low volumes and high transport costs, of the Mount Isa City Council to successfully bid for funding under the Queensland government's announced \$100 million Resource Recovery Industry Development Program. Placing Mount Isa in the waste levy area produces no benefits to Mount Isa residents and businesses. It is simply another remoteness tax on their community.

True to form, I have a feeling that placing Mount Isa in the levy zone was about capturing more tax from Mount Isa Mines for state Labor government coffers. The new remoteness tax will raise \$320 from each resident. It is ridiculous to include Mount Isa City Council. They actually do not have an issue with interstate dumping from New South Wales because they are on the Northern Territory border.

In its submission Brisbane City Council referred to section 73D and the requirement to see the annual payment as needing to be transparent to the community. The council raised concerns about placing this information on rates notices. They estimate that it will cost them \$100,000 per annum to include that. That is something that the ratepayers of Brisbane will have to cover.

A number of councils raised the issue of misinformation in proposed new section 73D(4). I am sure that councils would appreciate some further guidance and clear examples from the government about what is considered acceptable in relation to misinformation. They are quite concerned about that situation. They have suggested that the information required would be better placed on council websites and adopted council revenue statements.