




Speech By
Charis Mullen

MEMBER FOR JORDAN

Record of Proceedings, 13 February 2019

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

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (6.17 pm): I am pleased to speak in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Waste Levy) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. As our population in Queensland continues to grow, how we manage waste in this state has become an imperative. It is something the community wants us to confront, particularly in finding alternatives to landfill. We are not unique in this situation as all states are struggling under the weight of their rubbish. However, we have an opportunity to change the way we manage waste, to look at waste as more than a burden but as an opportunity to create jobs and drive significant economic growth, to make better use of resources and develop new industries.

We also need to deal with the terrible policy decision of the former LNP government who repealed Queensland's waste levy in 2012, making us a cheap place to dump interstate waste, and the proof is there. As the Minister for Environment highlighted only last week through the release of *Recycling and waste in Queensland 2018*, in 2017-18 we saw 2.1 million tonnes of waste trucked across the border into Queensland. I am particularly conscious of this as a significant part of my electorate is within the Ipswich City Council area, which has faced the brunt of this interstate dumping.

The Palaszczuk government understood that this situation could not continue, which is why the former environment minister appointed the Hon. Peter Lyons QC to lead an investigation into the transport of waste from other states into Queensland. The final report on the transportation of waste into Queensland, the Lyons report, was clear that the reimposition of a landfill levy would be likely to discourage the movement of interstate waste to Queensland and recommended that the Queensland government consider implementing a general levy on all waste disposed of at landfill in Queensland.

The legislation before us seeks to introduce a waste disposal levy to be set at \$75 per tonne from 1 July, requiring operators of leviable waste disposal sites to pay the state a levy on waste delivered to the site. The bill has also established a simple zone system whereby your local government area is either in a waste levy zone or in a non-levy zone. The waste levy zone will cover 90 per cent of Queensland's population, where the majority of waste is generated. However, we also want to make sure that those in the non-levy zone are not disadvantaged by having waste generated in a levy zone dumped in a non-levy zone to avoid paying that levy. If the waste is generated in a levy zone or interstate, you still have to pay the levy in a non-levy zone.

The Palaszczuk government understands that reintroducing a waste levy is a big change for the community, particularly for local governments, many of whom will have key carriage of the waste levy administration. It is clear that the reintroduction of the waste levy and its ongoing management will be a big change. In fact, the Local Government Association of Queensland's submission on the legislation considered that the bill will herald the biggest change in the governance of waste management in Queensland in decades. However, this legislation will also herald more than just an issue of administration and governance: it is a fundamental change in the way we think about waste strategy, with a comprehensive waste and resource recovery strategy.

In their submission the Waste Management Association of Australia summed up why we need to act. They say that at present Queensland continues to be one of the largest generators of waste but one of the poorest diverters of waste from landfill. The absence of a comprehensive strategy has resulted in Queensland maintaining a 'take, make and dispose' approach to waste and resource recovery, when the remainder of Australia and the developed world has moved further towards a circular economy. Our communities certainly agree. Last year the then Ipswich City Council announced that rubbish collected in the yellow topped recycling bins would be heading to landfill. The decision, following China's import ban on recycling and the rising level of contamination of non-recyclable rubbish, meant that the council believed it had become too costly for the city to recycle. The community response was swift and decisive, and the council was forced to reverse its decision very quickly.

As a member of the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee, we received a number of detailed submissions from stakeholders and participated in public hearings in Ipswich, where we heard directly from local governments, the waste management industry and other key stakeholders on the bill. It is clear that the government has listened to the feedback from stakeholders, many of whom will be at the front line of the waste levy, and has made changes to the bill to support its smooth implementation. This is very important because we are a government that listens, takes feedback on board and responds accordingly to stakeholder concerns, which is a feature that was sorely lacking when those opposite were in charge and legislation was implemented that proved to be flawed and unworkable. We know that we need to get this right—to set in place a long-term and sustainable strategy for waste management and resource recovery—and to ensure that we re-invest the collected funds into programs that will help reduce the amount of waste and boost the recycling and resource recovery sector in Queensland.

I would like to challenge something that the shadow minister earlier asserted in his speech, which the member for Burdekin repeated, when he said that 90 per cent of the levy funds are coming back to government, meaning that only 10 per cent is being reinvested. This is simply not true. I challenge the member for Broadwater to table the maths and the calculations that he is using to make this assertion because, from what has been announced so far, we know that already over 50 per cent will be reinvested into the industry.

One of the concerns raised by stakeholders was the initial start date of 4 March 2019. I am pleased that there is recognition that a start date of 1 July 2019 will support current financial time frames, particularly for local governments. I was also pleased to see the take-up rate from local governments for the \$5 million Local Government Levy Ready Grants Program, which will see 60 project proposals from 34 councils successfully receiving funding to assist them with their waste disposal infrastructure upgrades prior to the introduction of the waste levy.

The short-sighted and politically motivated decision by the LNP to remove the waste levy also robbed us of years of investment in the waste and recycling industry, as we now find ourselves trying to catch up. Unfortunately, the current linear approach has deprived Queensland of the opportunity to create new jobs, making it difficult for resource recovery industries to invest. What is clear is that the Queensland waste avoidance and resource productivity strategy developed by the former LNP government did not deliver opportunities for the resource recovery sector to grow and prosper. It was a dud strategy that should have gone straight to landfill. This is largely because the strategy was unfunded, relying on the development of voluntary action plans and not underlined by a market mechanism to encourage behavioural change. The disposal of waste into landfill without an incentive to recover resources has been a lost economic opportunity and, as we now know, creates avoidable environmental problems such as additional greenhouse gas emissions.

We also have a burgeoning bio-futures industry, and I believe that Queensland does have the opportunity to learn from international experience and ensure that, through modern infrastructure, technology and innovation, we can provide viable domestic and local processing of waste. I am also of the view that as legislators we have an obligation to seriously look at waste-to-energy technology—not by playing into people's fears and lack of information regarding this technology—but through proper and thorough investigations, research and analysis.

I recently read a report by the New South Wales Legislative Council which was tabled in March last year regarding energy-from-waste technology. They presented a comprehensive assessment which acknowledged the significant concern amongst stakeholders about energy from waste, and in particular whether the specific combustion technology posed an undue risk to human health and the environment. However, the committee also acknowledged the importance of working towards energy recovery as being preferable to disposal and that the current dependence on landfill is simply unsustainable. Ultimately, waste-to-energy technologies may be one component of a comprehensive solution only after a significant shift up the waste hierarchy to avoid, reduce and re-use waste and the issues of social licence, air pollution impacts and health risks have been addressed.

What is clear is that Queensland will finally have a way forward in relation to waste—not only minimisation but investment in the resource recovery industry, including the \$100 million Resource Recovery Industry Development Program and \$6 million for a regional recycling transport assistance program, supporting regional councils and businesses in overcoming additional challenges. In conclusion, and returning to my opening comments on this bill, Queensland is growing and, along with it, our waste. As leaders within our communities we have an obligation to address this pressing issue, and the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Waste Levy) and Other Legislation Amendment bill 2018 is an important start.