




Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.46 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Waste Levy) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. There is much to welcome in this bill that, in short, introduces a levy on most waste going into landfill across a large area of Queensland, as well as allocating money to local councils which they are required to use to compensate households for any impact on rates that might flow on from the new levy.

In Queensland just 45 per cent of all waste is recovered or recycled, which makes Queensland the second worst in the country, just ahead of the Northern Territory. When the Newman government scrapped our old waste levy and we saw the dump trucks come from New South Wales and treat Queensland like a trash heap, the Greens condemned it. We called for the levy to be restored. We were hopeful in 2015 when Campbell Newman was removed that it would be restored immediately, but unfortunately we have had to wait for Labor's second term to see this welcome step.

The levy is part of a broader government strategy on waste which was announced this week. The Greens welcome it and commend the government for that strategy. We need to move towards a zero waste circular economy. The Greens support the government's objective to cut waste going to landfill by 10 per cent by 2050, but we could be moving much faster than that and should be aiming for 100 per cent recycling, composting and waste recovery.

Whenever we are talking about waste and resource consumption, it is incredibly important to remember who the real villain is. Environmentalists have sometimes fallen into the trap of blaming everyday people for problems caused by greedy corporate interests. Big companies are, in reality, the ones that benefit from a system that treats resources and the environment as disposable. While individuals can obviously make a personal contribution, and good policies to drive behaviour change are imperative, it is the behaviour of companies that must ultimately change and governments must drive this. In fact, ordinary people in Queensland are broadly already doing their part and have taken up kerbside recycling with gusto. It is one of the most successful environmental programs around. People from all walks of life up and down the state participate. By contrast, it is the big end of town and governments that are not yet pulling their weight.

I acknowledge and support the government's commitment that households will not face any extra direct costs as a result of the levy. It is crucial that the government's funding for local councils to compensate households is reviewed robustly to make sure it is doing its job. The bill, as I understand it, does not deal directly with that spending, and if it did the Greens would be pursuing amendments to ensure that the household sector as a whole does not pay more.

People in my electorate on Brisbane's westside overwhelmingly support this kind of waste reduction initiative and are keenly aware we need to do more to protect our environment. In fact, it has been really positive to see the response to both the plastic bag ban and the container deposit scheme. I have had so much correspondence from locals who are looking to set up their own little initiatives to do their part.

If we are going to minimise waste going into landfill, I urge the government to speed up the rollout of the container deposit scheme. In my electorate, in the inner city, there is a solitary location where residents can return used containers—UQ at St Lucia—and for months there was none. For pensioners or those without a car, it is just not practical. Those running the scheme, including the government and big beverage companies, must do better.

This new waste levy is projected to raise about \$1.3 billion a year. Labor has announced that \$100 million will be allocated to the Resource Recovery Industry Development Program. The main project in the running for a slice of that funding which is under discussion is the Remondis waste to energy plant at Swanbank. Waste to energy is a nice little piece of green speak, but we really do need to call this what it is. It is an incinerator. Burning rubbish is not clean energy.

It is also alarming to read in draft waste strategy that Labor seems to be hinting that incinerating rubbish could count towards the 50 per cent renewable energy target for 2030. The draft waste strategy released yesterday sets out the hierarchy of waste management. In that hierarchy the best option is avoiding waste, then reusing, then recycling and only then is there any role for burning waste to create energy, just above landfill.

This just makes sense. There is no argument from me about the common sense in the treatment of waste in that order. What we do not see yet in any form other than policy rhetoric is an explanation of how this hierarchy will be made to work in practice. While the government is doing all it can to give this rubbish a commercial value as feed stock for an incinerator, how will it ensure that the hierarchy is not muddled and the incineration of recyclable or recoverable materials becomes accepted practice?

The Greens do not support burning rubbish in place of developing a more sophisticated recycling and waste recovery industry. We do support biodigesters, commercial scale composting and other technologies that do not involve burning that tends to increase health risks. This is crucial. The impacts on human health and the impacts on the local food supply of burning trash are still not well understood, but we know that burning rubbish mobilises dangerous fine particulate matter, lead, mercury and dioxins which are carcinogenic.

In April 2018 the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment recommended against a similar proposal in western Sydney saying that, on the advice of the Environmental Protection Authority in New South Wales, New South Wales Health and independent experts, the department had found the air quality impacts and risks to human health were unknown. Queensland's air quality regime is, at the moment, very weak. We know that coalmines and coal-fired power station already get away with routine exceedences above safe limits so why should we expect that our underfunded regulators are going to be able to do a better job now?

It is sadly typical that Ipswich is being treated like a sacrifice zone in this instance. Unfortunately, the Minister for State Development and the member for Ipswich have been out there playing cheerleaders for this multinational company, Remondis, which has proposed this incinerator.

If Labor is so confident that the Ipswich community supports this proposal, I would invite them to put it to a community vote. We already see the concern in the community—for example, with the petition that I think is before this parliament and open at the moment by Cornelia Turnie from East Ipswich which has over 4,000 signatures of people opposing this incinerator. Plenty of Ipswich residents do not want to see it go ahead, and who can blame them? Even the administrator at Ipswich City Council has made comments to this effect. Ipswich has already been a dump for New South Wales for too long and it now seems that they are at risk of playing the same role, just with an incinerator as the delivery point for the interstate dump trucks.

The Greens support the campaign by local residents against dangerous, polluting trash incinerators at Ipswich. I, along with other local Greens, intend to be at the rally that is being hosted by Ipswich Residents Against Toxic Environments, or IRATE as they are called. It is being held at d'Arcy Doyle Place on Saturday, 9 March at 10 am. I would encourage the local members to attend and hear from locals firsthand.

I support this bill and very much welcome the progress it represents, but I call on Labor to rule out any funding for trash incinerators from the proceeds of the levy.