




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 14 February 2019

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.18 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the waste levy legislation. We have just heard from the member for South Brisbane how Queensland is the only mainland state that does not have a levy on the disposal of waste headed to landfill. Unlike the member for South Brisbane, I do not think that is a reason for a new tax. In fact, I think our state being the only one to not have a tax on something is a cause for celebration and something we should be proud of. I am proud to be part of a party that has ruled out introducing any new taxes, because Queenslanders already pay too much.

This is part of \$2.2 billion in new taxes that Labor introduced in its last budget, but let us look at the issue at hand. We cannot deny that Queensland has been an underperformer in resource recovery, with the recovery rate of our waste remaining unchanged over the last decade. Queensland has one of the lowest recycling rates of all jurisdictions. In 2016-17 the recovery rate in Queensland was estimated to be 44.5 per cent, with the highest rate in South Australia of 80 per cent and a national average of 61 per cent. We need a change in understanding and behaviour for these rates to shift.

Theoretically, the only way that a tax could change those rates is by charging people more to try to change their behaviour. However, that is not what Labor is proposing. We have heard the government say many times that this will have no direct impact on households, which has been repeated many times, and on the day of the announcement the Premier said that Queensland families will not face the cost of this levy. If it is about increasing the rate of recycling, how will it do this? Maybe it is the interstate waste problem which has also been raised by many members. Interstate dumping, particularly in Ipswich, is a huge issue, but let us be clear: this is a problem that can be solved at the local government level, particularly with the Ipswich City Council and its continual support and approval of superdumps.

I have spoken before about my family who live at Flinders View and how bad the smell is at their house. Depending on the wind direction, they often have to close the windows. Recycling is restricted and bottles are not allowed in their bins. This not only impacts their day-to-day lives but also hurts their property value. For my mum and dad, that is a big deal. Their house is their main asset and they are proud of it. I spoke to my dad yesterday about this. He works in Brisbane and he said that he regularly cops jokes about where he lives. In fact, when I drive out there I always notice a giant makeshift billboard on the Cunningham Highway saying 'no superdumps' and that road is always full of trucks heading to the dumps around there, but this tax will not stop a single new superdump being approved. It will not fix that problem.

A new state government tax will not stop a single one of these superdumps, and in Ipswich residents are also charged for going to the tip—something locals do not have on the Gold Coast. On the Gold Coast our city's council did have a spike in dumping from outside of the city, but it brought in its own charge on businesses from outside of the city that were off-loading waste there. Since its introduction a number of years ago, we have not had an issue. This is from a council that is closest to the New South Wales border as well.

What about the money side of it? Within the few months that the government had delayed the rollout, it has already shifted the levy to a 2020 figure of \$75 a tonne, so it is unclear what and when the figures will continue to rise. I cannot see how the Premier's guarantee that Queensland families will not face the costs of this levy could ever be fulfilled, particularly as there is a reduction in the amount provided to councils over time. Those opposite keep sprouting the no direct impact line, but Queenslanders are smarter than that. There will be an impact from this and more than anywhere else it will be measured through increasing construction costs, tradie costs and prices that businesses have to charge. I have heard this from a number of businesses in my area, particularly Brian, who runs a skip bin business. This will hit these Queenslanders hard and it would be great if we had a government that would be up-front about that.

What will the money do? We are told that 70 per cent of the levy will go towards councils, the waste industry, scheme start-ups and environmental programs. How about the other third? That goes straight to government coffers. As the member for Broadwater said, barely more than 10 cents in the dollar of the \$1.3 billion raised will go directly towards environmental or resource recovery programs. It is another way for this Labor government to hide how poorly it is managing our state's finances. Whether or not you support a waste tax, for it to have any environmental benefit more has to go to environmental initiatives and not straight into the state government's coffers. We need the government to look outside of taxes.

As I have mentioned before in this chamber, our council is already taking its own measures to ensure that residents are maximising their recycling opportunities. It is showing that you can take action on this without imposing a new tax. Recycle Street opened just last year at the Helensvale waste centre. It is pioneering in its promotion of recycling and empowers people to responsibly recycle different materials. It is doing exactly what this new tax aims to do—ensuring that our avoidable waste is lowered by maximising the opportunities for residents to recycle.

There is a huge issue with illegal dumping in my area already, and that is with a council that already offers a waste service that is practically free. I am personally reporting illegal dumping to council several times a week and getting reports from constituents that they are seeing it at a similar level. I have heard of businesses that are already illegally dumping because of the fees that they have to pay to go to the tip. What is going to happen when more fees are attached?

We have all heard the history on this. The bill was first proposed due to an interstate waste problem, then it became a recycling issue, then it was an issue because of an international trade issue with China and then it became about helping to develop Queensland's recycling industry. It is another tax on Queenslanders that they do not need and it does not contribute much at all to the recycling effort and will no doubt increase illegal dumping and achieve little. Once again the Palaszczuk government only knows how to solve a problem through a new tax. Yes, we need to reduce our avoidable waste; yes, we need to stop interstate dumping; yes, we need to be innovative and cutting edge in our recycling, but the way to do that is not through a new tax. We need real innovation, real solutions and a government that is willing to put in the effort.