




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 15 July 2020

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (11.43 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 for particular purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020 [[1170](#)].

Tabled paper: Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020, explanatory notes [[1171](#)].

Tabled paper: Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020, statement of compatibility with human rights [[1172](#)].

I am pleased to introduce the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. In November last year I released the Palaszczuk government's Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan, which included a commitment to introduce legislation in 2020 which would ban the supply of single-use plastic items starting with straws, cutlery, plates and stirrers. This bill delivers on that commitment to the people of Queensland. First, our government banned single-use lightweight plastic bags. Then we introduced the state's incredibly successful container refund scheme Containers for Change. Today we take the next step in our war on plastic waste.

In 2017 after becoming the environment minister I met a remarkable young girl from Cairns called Molly Steer, who had spearheaded the Straw No More campaign. She had managed to capture the attention of community leaders, her school and the broader Australian community by raising awareness of the impact single-use plastic straws was having on the ocean and its sea life in and around her region and more specifically the Great Barrier Reef. She started a movement that has had international reach—asking everyone to simply say no to straws and help eliminate this single-use plastic item from our environment.

Last year at the regional parliament held in Townsville I then met another dynamic young girl from North Queensland by the name of Emily Walker. She is a Straw No More ambassador. Her passion and contagious enthusiasm for seeing real change around single-use plastics was incredible. She was direct in her request to see a legislative solution to the impacts of single-use plastic in our environment.

The voices of these two remarkable girls have been joined by literally hundreds of schoolchildren I have also had the privilege to meet through the Tangalooma EcoMarines program in South-East Queensland, led by the very driven Penny Limbach. These student ambassadors from local primary schools have led various environmental challenges including those focused on the impact of single-use plastic.

It is in the voices and conviction of our young people that we hear the call to action on single-use plastic, and it is in the introduction of this legislation that today we respond. In introducing this bill, I would also like to recognise the incredible hard work of Boomerang Alliance and acknowledge Toby

Hutcheon, who is in the gallery today. Boomerang Alliance have championed the cause of banning single-use plastics and are the driving force behind Queensland's successful Plastic Free Places initiatives. The Palaszczuk government has proudly partnered with them to invest almost \$250,000 in Plastic Free Noosa, Plastic Free Townsville and Plastic Free Cairns. The success of those programs has been an important stepping stone towards the bill I am introducing here today.

This bill amends the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to provide for the introduction of a ban on single-use plastic items. These provisions build on the existing ban on the supply of lightweight single-use plastic shopping bags that commenced on 1 July 2018. Single-use plastic items often end up as litter in the environment or as landfill. Sometimes they end up in recycling bins where they contaminate recyclable materials, reducing recovery rates. Such is the importance of removing these items from the market that more than 60 countries have now taken some form of intervention to reduce the availability of these items. Individual companies and small businesses are already taking their own steps to phase out the supply and sale of plastic straws and other single-use plastic items such as cutlery. Consumers are demanding change.

Consultation on options to reduce the impact of single-use plastic items, including the option to ban single-use plastic straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery, was conducted between 13 March and 30 April 2020. An extraordinary 19,622 submissions were received, with 94 per cent of these submissions supporting the introduction of the ban. This was an overwhelming response.

This bill makes it an offence for a person conducting a business to sell or give a banned item to another person except if that person conducts an exempt business or undertaking such as a healthcare business or school or is a business that supplies an exempt business. Exempting specific businesses recognises that some members of our community have permanent or temporary disability and healthcare needs which mean they need continued access to a single-use plastic item such as a straw. These exempt businesses, including pharmacies, hospitals, schools and medical and dental clinics, will be able to purchase and provide single-use plastic items to people who need them.

This bill also enables businesses that supply an exempt business to continue to do so. Allowing certain businesses and services to continue to provide items such as straws removes the need for a person to have to ask for a straw at a cafe or restaurant, where they may not feel comfortable doing so. While people will have to bring their own straws, it provides clarity for consumers, businesses and the regulator.

The Queensland Disability Advisory Council and the Council of the Ageing were directly involved in consultation on the ban, and I would like to thank them for their work in ensuring this important issue is properly addressed. Ahead of the ban's start date there will be continued consultation and engagement with the disability, aged and healthcare sectors to ensure there is appropriate messaging and awareness for businesses, carers, service providers and individuals. It is extremely important that people do not feel stigmatised or marginalised and that they can still receive the items they need in a safe environment, which is the outcome achieved in this bill.

As part of the government's plan for economic recovery from COVID-19 the bill provides flexibility concerning the start date for the ban, with commencement by proclamation. During consultation, 90 per cent of submissions supported a proposed date of 1 July 2021.

Regarding compostable items that might be sold to a business, this bill requires that information about the compostability of items must be provided, including whether it is suitable for home composting or to be composted through commercial processes. Compostability means that a product breaks down into organic materials and not microplastics, as many degradable bags and plastics do. This will ensure people have the right information and that waste materials end up being processed in the most appropriate way. It will also help reduce the contamination of food and organics collections sent to compost operations, as there will be clear information provided about the items' compostability when the business purchased them. Penalties will apply if false or misleading information is given about the compostability of items. To help businesses source suitable alternatives, a supplier list will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders to support businesses in making informed decisions about product options and what is best for them.

This bill provides a head of power for additional single-use plastic items to be banned by regulation; however, before any additional items are included in the ban, a full public consultation will be required. This will ensure that a proper process is undertaken and the views of the community and impacted sectors are heard and considered before any decisions are made. While there was significant support from the consultation submissions for other items to be included in the ban such as coffee cups, expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups and other plastic cups, these items will not be included in the ban at this time; however, it gives us a good starting point for future consultation prior to any expansion of the ban.

This bill provides for a review of the efficacy of the ban no later than two years after the ban starts. This will allow us to measure the awareness of businesses and the community about the ban and the banned items and to determine the impact on people with disability and healthcare needs. Regular litter surveys will also be carried out to track the presence of these items in the litter stream and to start to baseline other items that may be identified for future interventions. This will help to prioritise actions at the right points in the supply chain and help meet the targets of the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy and the objectives of the Palaszczuk government's Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan.

There is a groundswell of community support for Queensland's war on waste and a growing understanding of the long-term impact single-use plastics has on our oceans and waterways on sea life, birds and our environment more broadly. More and more Queenslanders are doing their part in reducing the amount of single-use plastic they accept in their lives and, as consumers, are consciously deciding on the products they purchase. In addition, our young people have been raising awareness across our community, helping to shape a new generation of Queenslanders who seek to reduce and remove single-use plastics from our state. Today, with the introduction of this legislation, the Palaszczuk government takes the next important critical step in tackling single-use plastic and protecting our environment. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. LM ENOCH (Alger—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (11.45 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee.