




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 9 March 2021

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.06 pm): I rise to support the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill. The waste reduction and recycling bill will amend the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to provide for the introduction of a ban on single-use plastic items. Before I continue with my contribution on the bill, I point out to the member for Bonney that I will be asking my federal member, who has delivered nothing in Townsville, to bring something from the \$600 million federal recycling fund that the member spoke of.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HARPER: I take the interjection. To say that we have no strategy is amazing. Of course we have the fantastic Containers for Change program, which is a great investment. We continue to back Queenslanders in this space. This is good, commonsense legislation. It is good for our environment. It is good to get plastics out of our marine environment. We have all seen Queenslanders embrace the ban on plastic bags.

A government member interjected.

Mr HARPER: Yes, they are gone and we thank the former environment minister for that. I consistently forget to take my material bags so I have a great collection of Coles and Woolworths bags, as well as the occasional BWS bag, both at home and here at Parliament House. If any member needs a material bag, I am happy to sell those off at a discounted price.

I thank the former committee, the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee, for their extensive and comprehensive work on this bill in the 56th Parliament. That committee tabled their report in August 2020. Given their outstanding work, our committee agreed to consider the subject bill and include the former committee's report as part of our report. I thank the member for Bancroft and the other members of that committee for their work, which was very good.

The bill was referred to our committee on 3 December 2020. We tabled our report on 12 February 2021. I thank the secretariat and the stakeholders who provided submissions as we worked over the Christmas period. On Monday, 7 December we invited stakeholders and subscribers to make written submissions and we received 13. We also received a briefing on the bill from the department. The principal objective of the bill is to amend the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act to ban the supply of single-use plastic items, starting with straws, stirrers—there are a few stirrers in this House—plates and cutlery. The bill seeks to achieve a reduction in plastic pollution resulting from single-use plastics by 20 per cent by 2023, which seems to me to be a pretty good strategy.

At its very core, the ban will commence with single-use plastic straws, stirrers, cutlery and plates, with provision made for additional items to be banned in regulation following a robust consultation and assessment process. *Tackling plastic waste: Queensland's plastic pollution reduction plan*—obviously the member for Bonney was not listening or considered that—released on 7 November 2019, identified and prioritised actions to reduce plastic waste and pollution in Queensland. That plan included a commitment to introduce legislation in 2020 to ban the supply of single-use plastic straws, stirrers,

cutlery and plates in the first instance, and, following further analysis, extend the ban to include coffee cups, other plastic cups and heavyweight shopping bags. The Palaszczuk government made an election commitment to consult—that is what we do—on the inclusion of single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups in the first tranche of the single-use plastic items ban.

I want to talk about the consultation on the bill. I note that the stakeholder advisory group, an interdepartmental committee, was established in February 2020. They did good work. That stakeholder group included peak bodies representing the retail, hospitality, tourism, food service, disability, aged care, local government and environment sectors. The public consultation received significant public support in March and April 2020. This was followed with the release of the single-use plastic items consultation regulatory impact statement, which put forward four options including the introduction of the ban on single-use plastics. Some 94 per cent of the 20,000 respondents showed overwhelming support for the introduction of the ban. The consultation regulatory impact statement, the submissions to the parliamentary committees, a public online survey and targeted retailer consultation all supported a ban on single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups. The minister has flagged that she will propose amendments to the bill during consideration in detail to include expanded polystyrene takeaway containers and cups in the first tranche of the ban.

Single-use plastics create challenges for our waste management and resource recovery systems, the environment and the community. Plastic straws, stirrers, cutlery and plates are consistently among the top 10 littered items found on beaches and in the marine environment. There was also strong support during consultation for the inclusion of single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups. When littered, these plastic items break up into increasingly smaller pieces that persist in the environment and act like sponges, collecting pollutants from the environment. When mistaken for food they pose a threat, as we have heard, to the wellbeing of our wildlife. From a recycling perspective, these single-use items are also difficult to recycle and can contaminate recyclable items collected through kerbside collection services, leading to the disposal of otherwise recyclable resources.

The ban introduced by this bill will eliminate a substantial amount of single-use plastic items from use and avoid the environmental impacts that result from the waste items entering the environment. The availability of suitable alternatives was one of the considerations in selecting single-use plastic straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery as the first items for the ban and also expanded polystyrene containers and cups, as mentioned. I note that the parliament has already well and truly, like many in the hospitality industry, introduced paper straws and bamboo cutlery, which is good to see.

Single-use plastic items are increasingly being replaced on supermarket shelves with a greater range of sustainable alternatives made of paper, bamboo, metal and compostable plastic. Initiatives such as the Plastic Free Places program, run by Boomerang Alliance—it was initially piloted in Noosa then expanded to Cairns and Townsville and now has planned further expansion to Rockhampton and Livingstone—help to support cafes, markets, restaurants and events to move away from single-use plastic products to better environmental alternatives. I support the bill.