




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.36 pm): I am delighted to rise in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. This bill delivers on key values of the Palaszczuk Labor government to protect our ecosystems, waterways and wildlife and reduce waste by banning single-use plastic items. It is the logical next step in our work banning lightweight plastic shopping bags and introducing the container refund scheme that has now seen 2.5 billion containers saved from landfill and created 700 jobs right across Queensland.

Protecting our waterways and wildlife are truly matters of heart in my beautiful electorate of Pumicestone. Last weekend I and 30 or so volunteers joined the Pumicestone Passage chapter of OzFish Australia for their Clean Up Australia event along the Sylvan Beach foreshore. Thanks to the work of the Palaszczuk government, those 30 volunteers found almost no refundable cans or bottles. We also found very, very few lightweight plastic bags. In the Pumicestone Passage this government's reforms have reduced the risks to our loggerhead turtles, dugongs, pelicans and other bird species that are posed by lightweight plastic bags and single-use drink containers—and that is great news.

What we did find as we cleaned up the Sylvan Beach foreshore were hundreds and hundreds of single-use plastic items that will be banned under this bill. Sacks of single-use plastic straws, cutlery, plates and expanded polystyrene takeaway packaging were collected by volunteers and weighed in by OzFish, leaving our foreshore litter free. With the ban due to start in September, by this time next year my hope is that there will be hundreds of kilos less of plastic waste to be cleaned up from Pumicestone's beautiful beaches thanks to the Palaszczuk government.

I was privileged to consider this bill in my role as a member of the Health and Environment Committee. I thank my chair and my fellow committee members. I also acknowledge the 56th Parliament's Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee for their detailed consideration of the legislation.

The bill amends the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to ban single-use plastic items, beginning with single-use plastic straws, stirrers, cutlery and plates. Proposed amendments to the bill will extend the ban to include expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups after community consultation showed strong support for including those items. The bill also provides for further plastic items and similar items to be banned by regulation subject to a strong community and stakeholder consultation and assessment process. Importantly, this work has been done while listening to stakeholders and the community.

In February 2020 the Palaszczuk government established a stakeholder advisory group to discuss how best to implement the proposed ban. The stakeholder advisory group offered some key considerations for exemptions from the ban. As a matter of equity and human rights, the government's priority is to ensure that people with disability and healthcare needs can continue to access the single-use plastic items they need when no suitable re-useable or non-plastic alternative exists. The public is with us on this, with 78 per cent of the almost 20,000 submissions received in the initial

consultation supporting options that are responsive to people's disability and healthcare needs. Other key considerations were creating exemptions for plastic products that are compostable to Australian standards and for plastic items that are integral to pre-packaged food items while alternatives are developed.

Single-use plastic items are essential for day-to-day life for many people with disability and healthcare needs. This is a real concern in my electorate of Pumicestone, where people experience more than their share of disability and health challenges. Since the Palaszczuk government announced we were taking the next step to ban single-use plastic items people often ask me whether they will still be able to get the items they need to care for their spouse, child, brother or sister, parent or client with disability. I am glad to confirm that this legislation puts the needs of people with disability front and centre.

Persons with a Disability Australia, a peak body for people with disabilities, gave evidence that all current alternatives to single-use plastic straws have at least one flaw for people with disability: metal and bamboo straws can be difficult to use; pasta and paper straws can create choking risks; and glass and paper straws cannot cope with hot drinks. Under the exemptions contained in this bill people with permanent or temporary disability and healthcare needs will be able to obtain single-use plastic straws from pharmacies, hospitals, dental and medical clinics and medical supply businesses. Those same businesses, institutions and organisations will be able to purchase and supply otherwise banned single-use plastic items to those who need them. These exemptions will ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities are not disadvantaged by this ban and can continue to access the plastic items they need to give them dignity in their everyday lives.

I note with interest the concerns raised by the member for Southport and his comments that the legislation does not go far enough. While his trip down memory lane was a great exercise in nostalgia, I do note that anecdote does not equal data. Built into this legislation is a pathway for the phasing out of future plastic items and settings that encourage innovation and the development of further products that are environmentally responsible. This bill incentivises the development of cleaner, greener plastic alternatives such as compostable plastic. The exemption for compostable plastic items recognise the success of the Plastic Free Places program, which has reported the elimination of over 6.8 million pieces of plastic across Australia as at the end of 2020. Plastic Free Places is a partnership between the Boomerang Alliance and the Australian Packaging Covenant and is supported by the Queensland government. Plastic Free Places is working directly with food retailers, events, markets and organisations in the community to support a transition from single-use plastic items to re-useable or compostable items.

The exemption also recognises that compostable plastic items currently available offer good alternatives to banned items. The stakeholder advisory group we set up noted the need to ensure that compostable items are clearly labelled and meet Australian standards. The bill defines those items as being compostable under Australian standard AS4736 for industrial composting or AS5810 for home composting. Compostable plastics under these exemptions will need to be clearly labelled or come with written information explaining how to compost them. These requirements will ensure that manufacturers, distributors and consumers have clear information on whether compostable products are a suitable substitute for single-use plastic items.

The bill also contains exemptions for otherwise banned items that are part of pre-packaged products such as that bane of every parent's existence: the plastic straws that attach to juice poppers. Through the Australian Packaging Covenant organisation, manufacturers are working hard to design more sustainable packaging. They are looking at alternatives to items like plastic spoons in pre-packaged yoghurts and instant noodle cup packaging which are integral to those shelf-ready products. The Department of Environment and Science will keep working with the Australian Packaging Covenant organisation and other key stakeholders to find suitable alternatives.

As we implement these world-leading laws to reduce plastic waste and protect waterways and wildlife right across our state, we are making sure that Queensland is the place to be now and for the future. I could not be more pleased to commend this bill to the House.