




Speech By  
**Andrew Powell**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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**WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT  
BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (12.32 pm): I, too, rise to support the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. As a number of members have mentioned, it seems like a very logical progression from what we as a parliament have achieved—first with container deposit legislation, then with the ban on single-use plastic bags and now plastic items—that we should debate this bill today. It is something that both sides of politics support; indeed, the LNP led the charge on container deposit legislation and plastic bags. We are pleased to be supporting this additional step today. I do not think there is a member in the House who was not active on Sunday morning on Clean Up Australia Day. I think we all would acknowledge that, whilst this year we saw fewer containers—it is very worthwhile hanging on to them these days—and fewer plastic bags, we still would have seen plenty of plastic in what was returned to us.

I was able to join the joint Clean Up Palmwoods-Clean Up Australia Day activity put on by the Palmwoods Scouts in conjunction with the Palmwoods Community and Business Association and fed by the great Palmwoods Warriors Football Club. I sat behind the barbecue, making sure everyone had a good feed that morning. I also acknowledge Leigh Martinuzzi Real Estate for its sponsorship of that event. There were plenty more activities going on around the electorate. Jo Turner led her famous Obi Obi clean-up in Maleny while the Maleny Blackall Range Lions were also cleaning up along Landsborough Maleny Road, and the Glasshouse Mountains Advancement Network, GMAN, did a great job down in Glass House Mountains.

It is my hope that, once we pass this legislation, over the coming years we will find less plastic as we travel around on Clean Up Australia Day. As others have mentioned and as written in the explanatory notes, the principal policy objective of this bill is to amend the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to ban the supply of single-use plastic items, starting with straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery. The bill seeks to achieve a reduction in plastic pollution resulting from single-use plastic by 20 per cent by 2023.

I want to focus on two aspects, both of which express a level of frustration. The first occurred during my tenure as the state minister for environment from 2012 to 2015 when we were exploring container deposit legislation and plastic bag legislation. When I went out on the water with the likes of Dr Colin Limpus AO—I acknowledge that Colin received his Order of Australia last year; I congratulate him on that very well deserved accolade—he would point out to me that it is not plastic bottles or even plastic bags that are the biggest frustration for marine life, particularly turtles; it is actually those shards of hard plastic formed when a takeaway food container degrades in the sun and in the water. They look remarkably like baby jellyfish floating around on the surface of the water. It is those that are ingested by the turtles that cause the damage.

The National Retail Association is still seeking some clarity around what is meant by 'bowls' and 'plates'. In reading the bill, I am not convinced that we have addressed what those takeaway containers are. I will come to why I think that might be the case. I read from the committee's report around the definitional concerns of the NRA. It states—

We re-emphasize our submission in that retailers require clarity on the definition of items and what products are and are not banned under these terms to be able to take timely action.

We believe the current legislation provides adequate explanations of most of the items to be prohibited however the legislation still lacks clear definitions for 'bowls' and 'plates'.

For example, many retailers use lidded bowls as takeaway containers and need certainty that these items would be considered containers and not captured as bowls under the legislation. Additionally, retailers who supply catering products need clarification about the size and diameter distinction separating a plate from a platter. Providing more clarity on the differences between bowls, containers and tubs as well as the differences between plates, trays and catering platters will help to address retailer concern and uncertainty on these issues.

Not only would it address retailer concern; it would also address community concern that perhaps we have not extended this appropriately to include what needs to be protected. I know that there will be a review of this in two years and that that provides us an opportunity to come back and have a look at these, but I go back to the conversations I was having some eight years ago where we knew that the bigger issue was these takeaway containers.

The NRA made a submission around what it considered the government's pragmatic decision to allow exemptions for certified compostable items, in particular bowls and plates. The NRA said—

We maintain our original position that at this point in time, certified compostable options such as those lined with polylactic acid (PLA) are the only viable and safe alternatives for many businesses. For example, the only disposable bowl alternative available to hold heat and liquid is fibre (cardboard or bagasse) lined with a bioplastic film such as PLA.

We do have a situation where, as much as we probably want to get rid of those hard plastic takeaway containers, we have not yet come up with a solution to get home in a safe way the Chinese, Thai or Indian from our favourite takeaway, given it is hot and often liquid based. The government needs to work with the industry over the coming years to come up with solutions, because that will ultimately address much of the plastic pollution that we see in our waterways.

The other concern I have has been expressed by a number of others. Like all members out there on Sunday on Clean Up Australia Day, I have been contacted by countless school students pleading with us to ban plastic straws, so it is ironic that in doing this we are exempting schools. The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia said it very well when it said—

While schools have been exempted from the ban, WMRR acknowledges—

the former committee's—

fourth recommendation that this exemption is reviewed as part of the two-year review. WMRR continues to strongly advocate against this exemption. Schools should not be allowed to distribute, sell, or use banned plastic items unless it is to persons who require these products due to a disability or medical requirement. There is an opportunity to drive generational change through this ban, with school aged children being champions of this initiative given many are currently participating in initiatives such as *nude food* (eliminating single-use packaging in lunch boxes), which should continue to be encouraged.

These young people are indeed the champions of this kind of legislation and in many ways they are the reason we are debating it here today. It is those younger people who have contacted my office demanding that we do this that we are delivering this for, but we are then exempting the main environment in which they operate. I echo the calls of WMRR that this issue be looked at within two years because what I think we will find is that many schools will have already transitioned away from these single-use plastics in those two years, so having an ongoing exemption is kind of pointless. I do acknowledge that in a number of cases, as the WMRR said, we need to make sure that if there are reasons for disability or a medical requirement plastics continue to be available, but that is an exemption around a particular need, not around a particular location such as a school.

There is a lot of positive in this, and I note that polystyrene containers are going to get picked up through amendment. That is another positive step in the right direction. Let us face it: the world did not end when we phased out single-use plastic bags and it did not end when we brought in container deposit legislation, and so it is not going to end in doing this. In fact, we are making the world a better place and therefore this legislation has my support.