




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (11.47 am): I rise to contribute to the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. I wish to thank the members of the respective committees and the committee staff for their review of these bills and the submitters who consequently, on more than one occasion, made submissions on the content of the bill. The key objective of the bill is to enable a ban on the supply of single-use plastic items starting with straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery. In conjunction with the bans, the bill provides a head of power for further bans at a later date.

The bill makes provision for additional items to be banned through regulation and requirements that must be met prior to making the regulation to ban additional single-use plastic items. Firstly, the bill says the public must be consulted about any future ban; however, the legislation is silent as to the time frame or how widely that consultation will be undertaken.

This has raised concerns with the Australian Food and Grocery Council about future bans. In its submission the AFGC recommends an amendment to this section in order to prevent unintended detrimental environmental and community outcomes. The AFGC said the bill needs to be amended to require that, before including another product or class of banned single-use plastics, an assessment against a defined criteria must be undertaken. The omission of any such assessment may lead to perverse outcomes such as substitution of items that may cause greater environmental damage or health or safety risks for the community. We also need to be very careful that we do not end up with more items in landfill which causes an impost on the local government sector.

Banning single-use plastics is only one side of the equation; education is on the other side. This was emphasised in the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee report. Some submitters spoke of the need for any education campaign to commence as soon as possible to provide enough time for consumers to prepare for the ban and for businesses to source alternatives—that is particularly important in regional areas where they do not have a lot of suppliers—as well as to provide enough time for businesses to renegotiate contracts, arrange logistics, retrain staff and inform their customers.

The NRA emphasised that this education needs to commence as soon as the legislation is passed. The committee also heard evidence that the education campaign should be targeted at retailers as well as individuals. That will be quite difficult in some regional areas that no longer have newspapers. They simply do not have a lot of that information that can be put out there. They do not necessarily have access to the internet or the ability to find some of that information on the internet. Ms Ebony Johnson of the NRA stated—

I think there is a really strong argument for consumer education as well as retailer education and tying that together. Retailers are often the educator of consumers at the point of sale. We found that was absolutely critical during the plastic bag ban.

Several submissions supported this, detailing the benefits of a wider anti-littering campaign alongside the introduction of the ban of single-use plastic items. I often receive calls to my office about the littering along our highways and roads. Any campaign to try to reduce littering is absolutely welcome.

This legislation bans single-use plastic that is a plate, a bowl, an item of cutlery, a straw, a stirrer, or is prescribed by regulation to be a banned single-use plastic item. I note the amendments in relation to polystyrene containers and material. When it comes to cutlery, it means utensils for eating food and includes chopsticks, splayds and sporks. A straw attached to a juice box, a fork included in a prepacked salad, a spoon attached to a yoghurt container or a plate forming part of a frozen meal are items not banned as single-use plastic items. I think it is very important that people know what is banned and what is not banned.

Originally the legislation was to come into force on 1 July 2021. This was decided prior to COVID-19. I note that the minister stated the commencement date will be no earlier than 1 September 2021. There is also a need for a grace period for the transition. Without a grace period a supplier may be forced to put all of their current stock straight into landfill. That would be an undesirable outcome and it would be counterproductive.

The bill also provides for certain businesses and undertakings to be exempted from the ban. An exempt business or undertaking includes a school or a healthcare business—for example, hospital, aged-care centre, pharmacy, medical and dental clinic. I note that it does not include child care which may cause some complications in the future. There are many not-for-profit organisations across Queensland that provide breakfasts and lunches at schools that are not just provided through tuckshop. These organisations are run by volunteers, and this is repeated across many schools and volunteer organisations across the state.

Whilst the government is banning single-use plastics, I ask that the government do so carefully and to not make it harder for volunteers, particularly those in our schools who undertake that important role of providing breakfast for many disadvantaged children. I am advised that in the community of Chinchilla some 300 breakfasts are provided by some of those not-for-profit organisations. I do not want to see it become more difficult for those organisations to provide breakfasts to those children. I ask that the government consider further transition mechanisms should it become evident that these volunteer organisations operating in schools, but not actually part of the school, are experiencing difficulty with this ban.

One of the complications of this bill is compostable plastics. There is an exemption for these items if they are made with compostable plastics, but there are questions as to whether these plastics are always disposed of in the correct way and if Queensland has the facilities to do this kind of composting in all areas. Queensland is a very, very large state. It is not always easy to make sure that we have an amount of these particular plastics to make it viable and worthwhile to compost them.

One of the problems is that in communities with smaller populations it is not economical to compost these plastics, nor is it economical to transport small amounts of waste over long distances. Compostable plastics need to be processed in an industrial composter. If they go to landfill they produce methane gas, adding more to our emissions. It is counterproductive. Until our waste facilities are up to date and there is education on what to do with compostable plastics, there will continue to be more added to landfill.

It does pose the question: what action is the Labor government taking to ensure that all communities have the ability to compost these plastics and reduce landfill regardless of where they live in the state? After all, it is the state Labor government who are reaping billions of dollars from the waste levy and who should be leading by example when it comes to compostable plastics.

Local governments manage landfill across the state. They cannot do all the heavy lifting, especially those who have a declining population base. Queensland is the only state that has not announced how it will match and invest the Commonwealth's funding commitment of \$190 million commitment in the Recycling Modernisation Fund.

National Waste and Recycling Industry Council CEO, Rose Read, has been critical of Queensland trailing behind other states and territories who are already using their fund. She said—

This is no time for Queensland to be complacent. According to the National Waste Report 2020, in 2018-19 Queensland's resource recovery rate was 48.7%, well below the national average of 63% for the same period.

Queensland makes up about 17.8% ... of Australia's waste generation ... but is sending more than 26.8% ... of the 22Mt total going to landfill.

A further complication of this legislation is that of the cross-border issues that will arise until similar legislation is enacted in New South Wales. Queensland is banning single-use plastics ahead of New South Wales. If you are in Mungindi, you will be able to use a plastic straw in the cafe on the New South Wales side of the border. However, when you have a drink in the Two Mile Hotel on the

Queensland side of the border you will have to use a metal or paper straw. Queenslanders in that part of the state often shop in New South Wales but they will be subjected to the ban. However, New South Wales residents will not be subjected to a ban until legislation is brought forward in that state.

Again we will have a situation that has not been thought through for border communities. This cross-border confusion for border residents demonstrates the need for the Queensland government to have a real cross-border commissioner to provide advice and solutions on matters that impact border residents such as this legislation. The New South Wales government has flagged that they will bring in legislation. However, it is unclear when this will occur, and until then that confusion will continue for those border residents and businesses in those border communities.