




Speech By  
**Brent Mickelberg**

**MEMBER FOR BUDERIM**

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

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (12.45 pm): I rise to address the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020—a bill which is, for the most part, the same as the lapsed bill of the same name introduced to the House immediately prior to October's election and which was considered by the then Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee, of which I was a member. During the previous committee hearings into the lapsed bill I had the opportunity to receive submissions from many interested parties and we conducted hearings in Brisbane, Cairns and Yeppoon. During those hearings the bill had widespread support, including from key businesses and lobby groups such as the National Retail Association.

We know that of all the plastic used in Australia 84 per cent is sent to landfill. With Australians consuming around 100 kilograms of plastic each year, this bill addresses a considerable problem that is growing year on year. It is a problem that residents in my electorate are rightly concerned by. Just on the weekend, along with my daughter Lara and son Alex, I joined 40 other members of my community to participate, as many other members did, in the Clean Up Australia Day. My four-year-old son, Alex, was particularly motivated to fish every single little piece of rubbish he could find because he wanted to ensure 'that it didn't make the turtles and fish sick'. Having your four-year-old son educate you on the adverse effects of plastic on the marine environment is an instructive experience and it made me reflect on the importance of the kind of practical environmentalism that we could all employ to tackle problems that seem insurmountable—practical environmental initiatives like the single-use plastic bag ban and the container deposit scheme, both of which were first proposed by the LNP and subsequently adopted by the government with bipartisan support.

During the hearings of the previous committee, submitters to the bill, as I said, were generally supportive. However, a number of issues were raised in relation to the implementation of the bill which I now want to address. Specific concern was raised in relation to the need for greater clarity on the commencement date of the provisions in this bill, as we have heard. Both the NRA and the Australian Food and Grocery Council have asked for adequate notice to ensure an orderly transition for industry. Noting that many businesses have existing contractual arrangements and hold a considerable amount of stock, such a change needs to be phased in to ensure that businesses are in a position to adapt. Because of its inconsistent approach to this bill, the government has created unnecessary complication and uncertainty. I ask the minister to listen to the businesses that will be impacted by these changes and to work with them to implement these important changes in a collaborative fashion that acknowledges some of the challenges which businesses are required to overcome.

One of my principal concerns during the previous committee consideration of the bill was in relation to compostable plastics. As we have heard, plastics which are compostable through industrial processes are excluded from the ban implemented by this bill. However, during submissions to the previous bill it quickly became evident that in many parts of Queensland compostable plastics end up

in landfill in the exact same way as all other single-use plastics. They end up in landfill because many Queensland councils do not have the industrial processing capacity to compost the waste generated by these so-called bioplastics.

All the good intentions to remove single-use plastics from the Queensland supply chain will mean nothing if the state government does not do more to ensure that all parts of Queensland have the capacity to process compostable plastics which will largely replace the single-use plastics from the food and drink sector. The federal government has announced a \$190 million commitment in the form of its Recycling Modernisation Fund, but the state government remains silent on how it will match that funding and how it will invest to ensure that that capability on the ground is able to be improved to achieve the objectives that this legislation seeks to deliver.

Another issue raised during the committee hearings was the fact that schools, as we have heard, are expressly excluded from this legislation. The committee heard from Alison Foley, the director and founder of Ten Little Pieces—an empowerment movement that encourages people to make a difference by collecting 10 little pieces of rubbish anywhere, anytime and with a particular focus on educating children. Alison spoke to the committee on the importance of children driving change and how this is a game changer over the short term but also in the long term. I will read from Alison's contribution—

I think we have a massive opportunity. The children that I interact with take on board the knowledge and the effect of their purchasing and consumption decisions very quickly. If we do not lead by example and use the schools as a method of dominating and pushing through for a much more sustainable and ecologically sound operational environment then it feels hypocritical. It feels as if we are not leading by example and providing them with the best chance. What we see in schools is that the children drive the change. They say, 'We don't want soy fish with our sushi. Can we have our sushi in paper bags? Can we have waste recycling stations within the school? Can we have composting facilities? Do we do litter-free lunches or plastic-free lunches?' Kids are one of the strongest agents of change because they do not have the blinkers and the barriers that perhaps adults do. What we find is that we give kids information with the methodology and the best practice that is available to us. These changes are not difficult, but they can be led very strongly with messaging from the government that there is an alternative, especially if government is going to incentivise the transition away from single-use plastic in school canteens. It is a simple strategy, but my belief is that that will have enormous ripple effects.

I note that the government has said it intends to review the application of this legislation in schools. For the reasons so clearly expressed by Alison Foley I encourage the government to consider the transformational educational effect that normalising the removal of single-use plastics in schools will have.

A final issue I wish to mention is the lack of law enforcement in relation to littering and the general lack of education as to the effect of littering. The previous committee heard testimony about the problem of littering on the Sunshine Coast. The point was made that there are sufficient bins yet many forms of litter continue to accumulate across the coast. This was never more evident than on the weekend given the copious bags of rubbish that volunteers fished out of the lake and gardens in Brightwater.

**An honourable member:** Disgraceful.

**Mr MICKELBERG:** It is disgraceful. It is striking that around children's play equipment there were cigarette butts shoved into the cracks of chairs and in the building while a bin sat nearly empty less than 30 metres away. Clearly the littering problem needs to be attacked through several different approaches and not just removing some of the items from the supply chain. The issue of cigarette butts is an interesting one given they too contain single-use plastics along with biological hazards and a multitude of other carcinogens. I understand there are few alternatives to the cigarette butts that are currently sold, so given that they cannot be easily removed from the supply chain greater enforcement and education must be considered.

During the hearings of the previous committee we heard that littering is largely the responsibility of local council officers. While QPS officers can issue littering infringements it is understandable that that is not a priority policing issue. I was disappointed to learn that in the last financial year the Sunshine Coast Regional Council issued only five littering infringements and in the year prior only three littering infringements. None of those infringements related to the insidious problem of cigarette butts. I believe that the Sunshine Coast council is abrogating its responsibility to keep our community clean. However, I am sure it is not on its own among councils in Queensland.

To be clear, I also believe that the state government is failing to meet its responsibilities, an example of which is in relation to the enforcement of no-smoking areas which should be undertaken by Queensland Health environmental health officers or the QPS. I call on the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, Queensland Health and the Department of Environment and Science to do more to ensure compliance with the existing littering rules and smoking provisions.

I note that the minister has foreshadowed amendments to expand the scope of this bill to ban the use of single-use expanded polystyrene. In my opinion this is a positive move. However, given the previous committee recommended exactly that course of action in its report tabled on 28 August 2020

it is puzzling why the government chose to not include expanded polystyrene in the bill which we are now debating when it was tabled initially. Such a course of action would have helped remove some of the uncertainty that businesses have and are experiencing in relation to the implementation of this bill.

In conclusion, this is an important and welcome initiative to remove single-use plastics from the supply chain in Queensland. However, if those plastics are just replaced with compostable plastics that end up in landfill, this initiative will be for nothing and it will fail. I ask the government to do more in relation to education on littering and in relation to littering enforcement. It is important that they are given greater attention than has historically been the case. However, noting all these matters—and I would like to see those areas addressed—I will be supporting the bill.