




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Record of Proceedings, 10 March 2021

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.07 pm): I rise to support the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. The bill before us is a positive step towards stopping a large amount of further plastic making its way into our waterways, our beautiful beaches, our streets, our parks and our bushland. I am proud to stand here today and say that the LNP led the charge for this change and this legislation.

In 2016 the member for Clayfield, the then leader of the opposition, and the member for Moggill, the then shadow minister for the environment, first announced the container deposit scheme as something needed to protect our waterways and curb landfill. It was the LNP's 2016 commitments to ban plastic bags, regardless of cooperation from other states, and introduce a recycling refund scheme that prompted the state Labor government to move on this, and the Labor government should be congratulated for that.

The LNP has provided bipartisan support for this bill. We did this when the legislation was introduced last year and we are doing it again now. Globally, humans produce 300 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, and eight million tonnes of this rubbish ends up in our oceans each year with a 2016 study reporting that by the end of 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by weight. That is why in 2016 the LNP first announced the container deposit scheme and that is why we have given this legislation bipartisan support. We must act now to change this. We must protect our precious environment for our future generations.

On Sunday for Clean Up Australia Day I spent my morning scuba-diving in Currumbin Creek with the aim of collecting plastic and litter that had made its way into Currumbin's beautiful waterways and estuaries. It was great to get out and take action with some incredible people in my community. I spent the second half of my Clean Up Australia Day cleaning up around Currumbin with my daughter. I wholeheartedly agree with what the member for Bonney, the shadow minister for the environment, said yesterday in his contribution: our young people are the best advocates for our environment and education is pivotal to creating real change in the community. Young people inspire older generations through their actions, including on the very laws that we are discussing; however, I note that schools are identified in this bill as being exempt. Accordingly, a school tuckshop may continue to provide single-use plastic items to the general school population. Our young people are indeed the champions of this legislation, yet it seems they are exempt from complying.

If an exemption is necessary to accommodate the healthcare or disability needs of a staff member or student within the school then provision should be made for that, but that is an exemption around a particular need—not around a location such as a school. The majority of school students should not be, and in fact probably would not want to be, treated any differently from a business or the broader community groups this bill applies to. These kids are the generation championing the banning of single-use plastic items.

In fact, many of the schools in my electorate are already ahead of the game on this. They are already encouraging students and teachers not to distribute single-use plastic items. In particular I highlight Elanora State School, which has a 'Go Green' initiative so it can be a litterless school, endeavouring to be rubbish free; Coolangatta State School, which has 'Wrapper Free Wednesday'; Currumbin State School, which has a sustainability committee; Ingleside State School, whose tuckshop is already free from plastic knives, forks and plates; and Currumbin Valley State School, which has banned plastic straws and has a worm farm for composting.

I am proud to say that in the Currumbin electorate we have already started making changes to strive towards a sustainable community. Another brilliant example of this is the Currumbin RSL. The Currumbin RSL has made sustainability a part of its mission since 2009, making a difference to its carbon footprint including reduction in waste, resource use and social initiatives. The Currumbin RSL takes its responsibility within the hospitality industry to do the right thing with waste very seriously.

Mr Nicholls: They won an award last night.

Mrs GERBER: I take that interjection; they did. Firstly, their suppliers are encouraged to use containers for the delivery of goods that are not single use. This ensures the full supply chain is involved in great outcomes. They are members of the Last Straw community, an organisation dedicated to eradicating single-use plastic straws globally. At Currumbin RSL you will not get a straw in a drink; however, if you need one you can be guaranteed that it is 100 per cent compostable. At the Currumbin RSL, food preparation vegetable scraps are sorted by chefs and sent to a local pig farmer as a nutrient-rich food for his animals. The Currumbin RSL's Bottlecyclor crushes around 3,500 bottles per week, the glass shards of which are 100 per cent recycled and used as road base and in other recycled glass manufacturing. Containers including milk bottles, catering cans, jars and other recyclables are set off in the commingling bins for recycling.

Another brilliant example in my Currumbin community of a sustainable business is the ecovillage at Currumbin—an international, award-winning, sustainable community. The 270-acre site is set in the hinterland just seven minutes from Currumbin Beach. The community is the most awarded estate in Australia with over 33 accolades, including the world's best environmental development. The 120 homes support a community of over 450 residents. The community is managed by a caretaker and other support bodies. The village also contains a cafe, health rooms and a greengrocer. I am very proud to be serving a community that is taking real action on the reduction of waste and single-use plastic items.

One of the issues in this bill that I think should be raised in the House relates to compostable plastics. The bill provides exemptions for items made from compostable plastics; however, the committee processes revealed that in reality some of these compostable plastics are not always disposed of in the correct way and sometimes end up in landfill. Because local governments all around Queensland do not have the facilities or industrial composters needed to properly process compostable plastics, these plastics end up in landfill. Compostable plastics need to be processed in an industrial composter if they go to landfill. They produce methane gas, adding more to our emissions. Unless this issued is resolved, all of the good intentions of this bill could be undone. I leave that with the government to look at once more.

Another question that needs to be asked is: why is Queensland the only state that has not announced it will match and invest the Commonwealth's funding commitment of \$190 million in the Recycling Modernisation Fund? In fact, this question was put to the minister in question time today. The minister was asked, 'What is the holdup? Why is Queensland the only state not to sign up?' It is an important question that the government needs to look at. Now that the opposition has raised it, I am sure the minister will look at it.

There is one other issue that I want the government to look at, that is, the definition of 'bowls' and 'plates'. We know that in the context of marine pollution one of the biggest risks to our marine life is plastics in the ocean. A large contributor to this is the plastic takeaway containers that degrade with sun and salt exposure to ultimately end up looking like little bits of jellyfish in our ocean and, accordingly, are consumed by turtles and other marine life. The bill is not clear as to whether these containers are banned. This needs to be looked at by the government.

Ultimately, this is a bill that the LNP supports. This is a bill that codifies the LNP's policy regarding banning plastic bags and introducing a recycling fund scheme in order to cut plastic use in our great state. I am pleased to support this legislation today.