



Speech By  
**Hon. Meaghan Scanlon**


**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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

### **Second Reading**

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) (5.35 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Last Sunday was Clean Up Australia Day and anyone who was out in their community with their neighbours collecting rubbish, like I was, would be especially aware of the importance of the bill before us today, the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020.

Plastic pollution is spoiling our streets and parks, escaping into our ocean and waterways and killing our iconic wildlife. Half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once, and it is then thrown away. Items such as straws, stirrers, cutlery, plates and cups are used and discarded rapidly and often thoughtlessly. As a result, at least eight million tonnes of plastics end up in the sea each year. That is like dumping the equivalent of more than 170 wheelie bins of plastic into the ocean every 60 seconds.

We have all seen the horrific images of birds and marine life tangled in plastic debris or the disturbing video of sea turtles with a plastic straw lodged in their nostril. Turtles have a 20 per cent chance of dying if they ingest just one piece of plastic, and over 70 per cent of loggerhead turtles found dead in Queensland waters have ingested plastic.

Sadly, the most common ailment the staff at the Reef HQ Aquarium Turtle Hospital in Townsville see is 'floating syndrome' caused by ingested marine rubbish which leaves the turtle unable to dive for food and at risk of starving to death. This is something I witnessed at the Fitzroy Turtle Rehabilitation Centre earlier this year. This needs to stop. That is why the Palaszczuk government takes its responsibility to protect our world renowned Great Barrier Reef and beautiful and unique environment extremely seriously.

That is why this government has taken strong action. First, we banned lightweight single-use plastic shopping bags in 2018. Then we introduced the very successful container refund scheme, which has seen nearly three billion containers returned for refunds across the scheme as a whole and more than 700 jobs created across Queensland.

Now we are taking the next step. In 2019, we released the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy, a critical shift in the way we manage waste in Queensland, which identifies further action to improve the management and recycling of plastic. In response to this issue, on 7 November 2019 the *Tackling plastic waste: Queensland's plastic pollution reduction plan* was released. The plan identifies the environmental and economic impacts of plastic pollution and maps out what actions need to be taken to reduce plastic waste. A key action in the plan is the introduction of legislation enabling a ban on the supply of specific single-use plastic items, starting with straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery.

This bill represents an important milestone that demonstrates this government's commitment to tackling plastic waste and pollution for the benefit of our environment and future generations, but this is just the start of our war on waste. During the extensive consultation, there were many suggestions of other items that could be banned. Importantly, this bill signals a way forward, allowing for additional single-use plastic items to be banned by regulation following a consultation process. This will enable us to be responsive to emerging issues while allowing the views of the community and impacted sectors to be heard and considered before any future decisions are made.

For example, the Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan identifies that the next stage of consultation seeks to include items like coffee cups, other plastic cups and heavyweight plastic shopping bags. We know that this is something that Queenslanders want, and this bill is the result of overwhelming community and business support for the ban of single-use plastics. Many cafes and takeaway stores all over Queensland have already stopped using single-use plastics, and major companies such as Coles and McDonald's have embraced Queensland's example.

Just last week the federal government announced that it would join our fight against plastic waste by banning polystyrene products. Unfortunately in its haste to play catch-up with Queensland's groundbreaking legislation, its announcement was panicked, without wide consultation and confusing for businesses and the community. In contrast, the measures outlined in this bill are clear and straightforward, robust but flexible when required and hugely supported by the people of Queensland, with nearly 20,000 contributions to our first phase of consultation.

While this bill makes it an offence for a business to sell or give a banned item to another person, it also includes some important exemptions for places like healthcare businesses and schools. These exemptions cater to members of our community, including our school community, who may require access to a single-use plastic item, such as a plastic straw, due to permanent or temporary disability and healthcare needs. By providing a safe environment for a person to access these items, the government is mindful of protecting people's human rights, including the right to privacy and the right not to be discriminated against. We heard from the disability and aged-care sector that this option was preferred over the 'straw on request' approach where a person would have to ask for a straw when they visit a cafe, pub or restaurant.

The bill also exempts compostable single-use plastic items from the ban as long as they comply with Australian standards for home composting or industrial composting. In exempting compostable items, the bill requires that information about the compostability of an item be provided. This must include information about whether the item is suitable for home composting or composting in an industrial process. A maximum penalty of 50 penalty units or \$6,870 applies if false or misleading information is given about the compostability of items. This penalty is consistent with the same offence under the single-use lightweight plastic shopping bag ban.

The ban will commence by proclamation which will allow businesses to plan for the ban in line with this government's resolve to provide every aid possible for the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It also allows businesses to work through their current stock on hand of these items and provides time for a comprehensive awareness and engagement program to be rolled out. After consulting with industry representatives, it is the government's intention for the ban to come into effect on 1 September 2021. This acknowledges the impacts of the pandemic and, in listening to our stakeholders, provides sufficient time before commencement.

The former committee that considered this bill recommended that the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill be passed and that the bill be amended to include expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers in the first tranche of banned single-use plastic items. As part of the 2020 state election, the government committed to consult on a ban of single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and I am pleased to announce today that I will be seeking to amend the bill during consideration in detail to include single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups in the first tranche of this ban. Consultation for the consideration of single-use expanded polystyrene takeaway food containers and cups was undertaken between 30 November 2020 and 15 January 2021. During this time more than 6,800 responses were received, an overwhelming 98 per cent of which supported the inclusion of these items in the ban. A consultation report outlining these results is published on the Queensland government website.

This government is determined to help business unite and recover from the restrictions and impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have on businesses, particularly in the food services industry such as cafes, and we will continue to work with the stakeholder advisory group to ensure awareness and support in the lead-up to and following commencement of the ban. The former committee recommended that the Queensland government work with other stakeholders within the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation to accelerate support for businesses to transition away

from single-use plastic items, including expanded polystyrene products. This recommendation is supported. The Department of Environment and Science is already working closely with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation to implement the national packaging target that 100 per cent of all Australian packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation will be invited to participate on the Single-Use Plastic Items Stakeholder Advisory Group to build on this collaborative working arrangement. The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation will join business and brand owner representatives from the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland, the National Retail Association, the Queensland Hotels Association, the Restaurant & Catering Industry Association of Australia, the Master Grocers Association and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council to ensure that appropriate sector specific engagement and messaging is developed. Collectively, these peak bodies represent thousands of individual businesses. Working through these peak organisations ensures equitable representation across sectors and avoids potential conflicts of interest that might occur with individual businesses.

The stakeholder advisory group continues to play a pivotal role working in partnership with the department to co-design messaging and delivery of the engagement processes. As part of the two-year review of the ban, the former committee's report recommended that the Department of Environment and Science review the exemption of schools and the penalties for providing false or misleading information. The bill provides for a review of the ban to start within two years of commencement of the ban and these issues will be included as part of that review process. The review serves to assess the efficacy of the ban and will consider how different sectors and community groups have been affected, including the availability of single-use plastics for the healthcare and disability sector and the voluntary uptake of alternative items within schools.

It should be acknowledged, however, that schoolchildren are often the strongest advocates for change and promoting effective messaging throughout their communities. Indeed, the former committee saw evidence of this when it spoke with Ms Molly Steer, an inspiring 11-year-old school student who is a great advocate for change in schools and the founder of the Straw No More campaign. The Queensland Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan includes an education program for schools to build on this interest amongst schoolchildren for improved environmental outcomes.

In developing an engagement strategy for the ban, the Department of Environment and Science will also look to identify links with sustainable schools initiatives and programs such as Wave of Change developed by Plastic Oceans Australasia in partnership with Container Exchange for schools. Launched on the Sunshine Coast last year, the program is designed to educate primary and secondary school students on the impact of plastics and the importance of recycling, providing an important resource in our fight against plastic pollution.

This bill also provides a local economic opportunity. Many of the single-use plastic items subject to this ban are sourced from overseas markets. The banning of these single-use items presents opportunities for many alternative products to be made locally in Queensland or Australia using locally sourced materials. Many of these local materials could also be sourced from by-products that may have ended up in landfill. The Department of Environment and Science has undertaken to work with the stakeholder advisory group to develop a list of suppliers and sustainable products. One of the criteria to help businesses make decisions regarding appropriate alternatives will include options for the management of these items, including availability of organics, collection and processing services. This bill is ultimately about leaving a better environment for future generations. To the school students who lobbied almost every MP in this House, this is for you. I commend the bill to the House.