




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

Record of Proceedings, 10 March 2021

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (3.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020. The mass production of plastics has probably been the biggest contributor to modern society as we know it. Natural plastics, such as tar, latex and amber, have existed and been in use since ancient times, but it is the 20th century that has brought us man-made plastics. We are where we are today because of plastics.

Early experimentation in the thirties gave way to the war machines of the forties. In an era where metals, steel, copper, zinc and aluminium were in short supply, the ramping up of the petrochemical plastic industry was a major contributor to the allied war effort. Production lines were quicker, cheaper and more agile. With the war over, the role of plastics went from supporting the war machine to the mod cons that would drive the postwar industrial world. Cars could be made lighter and cheaper and owning a car became within reach of average families. Televisions, phones and other appliances became more accessible. The revolution in global travel brought on by efficiencies in aircraft travel turned us into the more global society that we are today. In short, a consumers' paradise was opened and we are where we are today because of plastics.

On the flip side, it should be acknowledged the role that plastics have played in the advancement of medicine and its accessibility. Storage, vaccines, instruments and prosthetics have saved millions of lives. Plastics are all around us—literally. They are in our clothes, in our seats and quite likely in your hands right now. We have even left plastic on the moon and other planets.

The startling truth is that almost every piece of plastic ever made still exists today. It may have been re-used or recycled, but it still exists in the world today. This is our challenge. More and more plastic is being produced every year. The numbers are astounding. A number of other speakers have addressed how many tonnes are manufactured each year and where they end up. They are certainly all around us and building up. So much so, that by the eighties, the concept of recycling became the challenge. As much as our various recycling schemes are designed to reduce the amount of new plastic we manufacture, re-using what is already there, this must sit alongside efforts to reduce our reliance on plastics altogether. We are facing an environmental catastrophe if we cannot curb our use and reliance on the plastics that make up the vast percentage we use every day.

Scientists estimate it takes around 450 years for a plastic bottle to break down naturally. That can only be an estimate because the PET bottles have only been around for 50-odd years. Here we are, over a year on from the single-use plastic bag ban and the community has accepted this initiative and have asked us to do more.

In the last term, my youth advisory committee were big drivers locally of environmental initiatives in the community to see a reduction in waste. I am continually heartened by the attitude that younger people are taking towards their plastics footprint. They are truly setting the pace and rightly so because they are the generation that will still be dealing with the plastic throw-away consumerism of the sixties,

seventies and eighties. They challenge us to do more and it is our role in this House, and one that I take seriously, to deliver. It is incumbent upon us, as leaders in our community, to set our community up for success into the future.

I have two major South-East Queensland rivers in my electorate, the Albert and Logan rivers. My electorate is where they meet before flowing out into the Ramsar listed Moreton Bay. My community has a vital role in monitoring waste habits and being vigilant about what is entering our catchments and waterways. On Sunday, Clean Up Australia Day—which apparently every single member in this House went to, which is great to see—I went out with my youth advisory committee and locals to do some cleaning up in our local area.

For the first time ever I brought all three of my children along—not as fun as it sounds. The promise of participation in the container recycling scheme, in particular the 10 cents a bottle, was a big incentive for one of my children to come along. Unfortunately for him, the container recycling scheme is so successful in my area that he did not find a single bottle along the side of the road. That is a big change from what we saw last year. Those of us of a certain age may remember the old recycling schemes where we used to collect our glass soft drink bottles and take them back to the store. If you took back a certain amount of bottles you got a new bottle of soft drink. I remember taking my Wimmers glass soft drink bottles back on the weekends to get one big tall bottle of soft drink. As a society we have done it before and we can do it again.

This bill, introduced in the last parliament, seeks to ban single-use plastic plates, bowls, items of cutlery, straws and stirrers. I recognise the many businesses, big and small, who have already taken on these initiatives, some with varying success. Some small businesses in my electorate will need to rethink how they provide takeaway options, but I know they are up to the challenge and that they accept the moral obligation to do so.

I am also heartened by the fact that our community wants us to do more, and we will. The two-year review set out in this bill will allow us to see how we are tracking towards the objectives of the bill, and allow us to see the second- and third-order effects of the ban. It will also allow us the ability to extend bans to other items. I look forward to seeing the outcome of the review at the scheduled time.

I am also excited by what innovation these bold changes will incite in our research and development space. Plastic manufacturers, such as SDI Plastics in my electorate, are placing themselves at the cutting edge of future plastics technology. As a state government we are assisting them in joint projects with scientists at our universities who are researching the use of organic plastics and plastics that do break down in the natural environment. The proverb states that necessity is the mother of invention. It is necessary that we reduce the number of plastics in the environment. We will adapt our behaviours and we will develop new technologies and products to make sure we have a more harmonious existence with our fragile ecosystem. I commend the bill to the House.