




Speech By  
**Patrick Weir**

**MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE**

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (2.14 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill as the former deputy chair of the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee in 2020 when this bill was referred to the committee for consideration. My LNP colleagues on that committee—the former member for Bundaberg, David Batt, and the member for Buderim, Brent Mickelberg—made significant contributions to the outcome of this bill and its potential to generate less litter for all of our environments, land and sea. David Batt was heavily involved in a recycling project with plastics in Bundaberg at the time of the bill's referral, and it is a pity he is not here today to speak to this bill.

**An opposition member:** He'll be back.

**Mr WEIR:** I take that interjection. The objective of the bill is to enable a total ban on the supply of single-use plastic items by amending the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011, starting with banning single-use straws, plates, stirrers and cutlery.

In the latest data for the reporting period 2017-18, Australia consumed 3.4 million tonnes of plastic and recycled 320,000 tonnes, an increase of 10 per cent from the previous year. Unfortunately, eight million tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans each year which is a terrible indictment on our society—the throwaway generation.

As a recreational fisherman, I hold grave concerns for our fish and marine animals who inhabit the oceans, with plastic creating huge issues for them in their natural environment. Turtles are swallowing plastic items or becoming entangled and either dying or being seriously injured. The more plastic we can remove from our environment, the better we will all be.

The committee had the fortunate opportunity to visit the turtle recovery facility on Fitzroy Island with founder Jennie Gilbert. A very dedicated team of volunteers works at the facility, where it can take up to three years to rehabilitate some of these turtles before they are released back into the wild.

There has been no clarity provided by the government as to the start date of the single-use plastics ban. The bill originally had 1 July 2021 as the commencement date. Then the minister advised during her introductory speech that it would be no earlier than 1 September 2021. Now the start date will be confirmed once the bill is passed in parliament. Business owners need to have adequate notice of the start date to ensure a well-managed transition from single-use plastics. The LNP supports the call by both the National Retail Association and the Australian Food and Grocery Council for sufficient notification to be provided and a period of grace given to make sure current stock or orders do not end up in landfill all over Queensland.

There have been concerns raised by stakeholders regarding the lack of clear definition guidelines provided by the department. This has resulted in stakeholders taking the step of assisting the department in creating a document that will specify what will and will not be allowed. Without this specific information, it will be difficult for businesses to ensure the supply of containers and the correct

containers are ordered. Many retailers provide lidded takeaway bowl containers. Are these captured in the legislation? There is a concern regarding bowls and plates and the definition of each, and there is no sizing definition for a plate compared to a platter, no matter what the dimensions.

Currently there are very few viable alternatives that provide safe storage of food for both the consumer and the provider, particularly when storing hot or liquid food items. Bowls made from cardboard or bagasse lined with a type of bioplastic film are one alternative; however, they present safety issues, with lids dislodging from the pressure created by the heat or the steam from hot food, causing the risk of spills and potential burns. These definitions need to be addressed and clarified so that retailers can prepare and ensure they are compliant for the start date of the ban.

Compostable plastics will be exempted from this ban. This has created a complication as these compostable plastics are not always disposed of in the correct manner. Does Queensland, particularly rural, regional and remote Queensland, have the facilities to manage this type of composting? With waste disposal administered by local government and the facilities differing from one council to another, some will have industrial composters while others will not.

Compostable plastics are required to be processed by an industrial composter. If they are allowed to go into landfill they have the capacity to create methane gas, adding to emissions. Many waste facilities are currently not capable of correctly disposing of compostable plastics. Therefore, they will continue to go into landfill until the facility can be upgraded. The committee visited the Cairns waste facility and saw the significant investment that that regional council is making in this regard.

As we heard in question time this morning, Queensland is the only state which has not announced how it will match and invest funds from the Commonwealth government's Recycling Modernisation Fund—a \$190 million fund from the Scott Morrison government. We are still waiting for an answer to that question.

Each generation brings another challenge in dealing with waste. There is another one that is looming that I would suggest that the minister turn her attention to. I refer to the millions of solar panels that will be replaced in the not too distant future. What is the plan for them and wind turbines when they reach the end of their life? I understand that in some countries they are simply buried. This means that they will become the next generation's problem. This is a question that the public is looking for an answer to and there would be no-one in this House who has not had that question posed to them.

One other aspect with regard to this bill is litter that finds its way into waterways. That is litter that does not go through the system. We need a more concentrated effort around a litter campaign to address that issue. It was encouraging to see the recommendations put forward by the previous committee taken up in this report. Once again, I thank those who served on that committee. We will be supporting the bill.