




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (6.14 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill. While my role on the committee was not that substantive because we were simply reviewing a committee report that was being re-presented from the previous term, nonetheless I am a supporter of this bill. I think the changes proposed within the legislation are sensible steps forward; however, I have to foreshadow a few concerns.

All legislation has unintended consequences. The sad thing about this legislation is that it probably does not go far enough. If the House will indulge me with something of a walk down memory lane, it might shock some members of the House to know that back in the seventies as a young high school student I was packing groceries at Woolworths. We were only using recycled cardboard boxes and brown paper bags. There were those wonderful moments out in the parcel pick-up area when condensation started to form on the outside of the ice-cream container, the bag would then get wet, and the next thing, while we were carrying the bag out to someone's car, the bottom would fall out and we would say, 'Oh, gosh, if only we had plastic bags.' Be careful what you wish for!

I think all of us in the House would agree that any steps forward we take in this respect are good steps for the environment in the future. I think it is fascinating that we are going to ban plastic straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery, because I remember a time when we did not have any plastic straws. As a kid in primary school, one of the frustrations of sucking the flavoured milk out of a glass bottle through a wax-covered paper straw was that the straws would often snap, bend or whatever. That is why they invented plastic straws, to try to overcome some of those challenges.

These are good steps forward; however, one of the challenges with any legislation is the unintended consequences. While I applaud the ban that we put on plastic bags in supermarkets, I think it is incredibly sad that so many people still do not remember to take bags with them when they go in, so they end up buying more and more of these plastic bags. I see it in people's homes; I see it even with my sons and some of their mates. The new garbage bin liners are not the cornstarch bags or the biodegradable grey plastic bags that we had in supermarkets previously but are more and more becoming these multi-use bags that have a longer life and perhaps do not break down as quickly. I think it is sensible for us to be looking at these reforms, but we perhaps need to be having another look across the board at what other reforms we can be making. Even while we all supported that as a policy, I am not sure that we are getting the intended results. Perhaps we have a long way to go with educating people around the need to use multi-use bags sensibly and wisely, not using them as garbage bin liners to end up in landfill and creating even greater problems.

I am concerned about the disturbing trend we see in supermarkets with pre-packed food. We now have all these wonderful meal programs where you order a box—I have not done it, but my kids have told me about it—and have all your meals for the week delivered. Some of them are weight-loss programs; others are programs where retailers are encouraging greater variety and greater convenience. However, often with greater convenience comes more and more packaging.

The days of buying loose fruit seem to be more and more a thing of the past when shopping at Woolworths, Coles or ALDI now, although I note that Woolworths has just introduced into its fruit section a pack of three re-usable fruit bags that you can buy—for \$5 by the way, which is a little bit exy—and the idea is that you put your loose fruit in the bags, get them weighed, take them home and then you re-use those bags, but I am not sure that people will remember to do that either.

We need to keep pushing forward. That is where I want to go in my comments today. Life is always about the sum of the parts. We are never going to get everything absolutely right—we are not going to achieve perfection—but if we do not keep striving with sensible reforms, raising awareness around these issues in our communities and encouraging our kids to step up and think about other ways to do things then we will not improve. I do think these are sensible steps forward.

I note, as have the member for Bonney and other members in this House, that many of the coffee shops and retailers in my electorate have already stepped up in this space. Todd Corr from Parc-Bah in Alicia Street, Gabriel and Elly from Blendlove on Ferry Road and Ellie Doyle from Vector Coffee in Southport basically got rid of plastic straws a long time ago. They did not wait for the legislation to come into effect. They have stepped up and embraced the need for more compostable and biodegradable cups and to get rid of plastic straws. I commend them and the many other businesses in the electorate that will have to embrace these changes.

As always, I want to thank the committee secretariat for the work they have done in preparing the report for the House. I also acknowledge my fellow committee members for the work they do. As a member of this House, I am proud of the fact that we are making these changes. As I often say to my kids and to some of my constituents, the better we do today the brighter the future is for all of us. We all need to be looking at ways we can incrementally improve things.

While Containers for Change has been a great initiative, and certainly my community has embraced it, we do not always implement these things well. Sadly, in my electorate I have ended up with two Containers for Change outlets about 500 metres apart—one in an industrial area, appropriately located and well supported, and another that was rushed through and put into a residential area and for which council planning laws and normal planning instruments were overturned. That centre has created enormous issues for my local community. It has taken the best part of two years for council, the department of environment, the planning department and a range of other organisations to work through the challenges associated with that. There have been some compromises reached which have improved the noise issues that came. On the one hand we are wanting to save the environment from waste bottles and to encourage people to recycle but on the other hand we completely ignore the environmental issues of a local community in terms of noise pollution. With any measures we undertake in the future there needs to be great execution and a lot more thoughtfulness around planning. We have to be a lot more considerate of our local communities.

There are so many other things we can do. One thing I am particularly proud of—I think the City of Gold Coast can be proud of this—is that about 20 years ago the city took a decision to undertake a city greening program. It was initially about protecting waterways. All of the catchments across the city have seen significant volunteer programs and revegetation programs to clean up the waterways. The outcomes of that are seen in the water quality reports on the southern part of Moreton Bay and the Broadwater, where we have absolutely pristine water quality. It is those sorts of initiatives that we need to continue fighting for and looking for. Change is the sum of the parts. The little things that every one of us does every day of the week and every week of the year lead to better outcomes for the environment and a better future for our kids.