




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING (PLASTIC ITEMS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (12.03 pm): Since the 1950s all of the plastic that has ever been produced has ended up in our environment. As plastic is non-biodegradable it is still present in one form or another, causing incalculable damage to our environment, wildlife and ultimately ourselves. However, because it is versatile, cheap to produce and provides convenience in a throwaway society it has become one of the most difficult to wean ourselves from. Queenslanders and Australians have done a remarkable job working to change their behaviours through cleaning up, recycling, repurposing and transitioning away from the ‘plastic fascination’; however, behavioural change alone has not been enough and has led to the necessity to legislate further.

As we have heard, the Waste Reduction and Recycling (Plastic Items) Amendment Bill 2020 amends the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to ban the supply of single-use plastic items starting with straws, stirrers, plates and cutlery. This is in addition to the single-use bags that happily no longer clog our waterways and the plastic and glass bottles which are no longer roadside courtesy of the Containers for Change program. This was especially evident during Clean Up Australia Day recently.

This bill seeks to achieve a further reduction of 20 per cent in plastic pollution resulting from single-use plastics by 2023. I can hear you. It is not enough; however, I believe the level of support from everyone will speed up now that there is serious intent. Each of the 13 submissions to this inquiry supported the principle of a ban on certain single-use plastic items. Of these, six had previously submitted to the original inquiry during the 56th Parliament, including the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, which agreed that banning these items, with appropriate exemptions, is consistent with the approach being taken in other jurisdictions.

In addition, updated submissions from stakeholders, including the Boomerang Alliance, reaffirmed their previous support and have been instrumental in Noosa’s efforts. Initiatives such as Plastic Free Noosa have seen our businesses already do what this bill is legislating. How fortunate I am to live in an electorate committed to these efforts. We are also so very proud of two of our youngsters, George and Carter, who developed e-PAC. The e-PAC has all of the essentials you need to get rid of your plastic desires. The cool coconut shell bowl is sensational and I recommend it highly.

There were a couple of concerns from submitters. These have been addressed by the option of allowing healthcare businesses such as pharmacies and hospitals, as well as other outlets, to provide plastic straws in recognition of the need to provide accessibility for people with disability and healthcare needs. There is considerable community support to expand the range of banned plastic items including takeaway food containers, plastic takeaway cups, polystyrene cups and containers, and oxo-degradable plastics. The bill does allow for additional items to be banned in the future by regulation following community consultation. It also provides for a review of the ban within two years of its commencement.

With regard to concerns about the implementation date, 1 September 2021, the impact of this ban on businesses was highlighted by the National Retail Association, which said that with COVID-19 restrictions and associated supply chain complications the proposed implementation date warrants ongoing consideration. The one thing we want to avoid is a trash and burn versus replenish and replace strategy to prevent large quantities of banned items ending up in landfill all at once.

The extensive stakeholder consultation undertaken in preparation for this bill is appreciated. It has been very effective, and I thank the Department of Environment and Science and the minister for this. It included the establishment of a stakeholder advisory group and interdepartmental committee with peak bodies representing those impacted, including: retail, hospitality, tourism, food service, disability, aged care, local government and environmental sectors. It is invaluable that these bodies continue to meet and advise on various matters relating to the implementation of the ban.

I thank the committee and the considerable number of submitters to both the 2020 and 2021 bills, attendees to the public hearing and public briefing and the department for their comprehensive work and consultation. I also thank our fabulous residents and organisations back home in Noosa and across Queensland who have for many years fought so hard to de-choke, clean up and educate around the consequences of our plastic fascination which, thankfully, is starting to wane. Keep up the incredible work. Do not forget that it is up to every single one of us to make a difference. Legislation can only go so far. If you are coming to Noosa do not forget to grab your e-PAC on arrival.