




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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**WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.21 am): I rise to speak in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. In my contribution I will restrict my comments to that part of the legislation that amends the act to introduce a ban on the outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons and sets an expiry date for the current exemption on single-use plastic items.

In her introductory speech, the minister stated that in 2022 the Palaszczuk government launched a five-year road map to phase out problematic single-use plastics and control littering brought about by the release of lighter-than-air balloons, amongst other things. This bill keeps to that commitment and road plan by introducing a provision to ban the outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons. These balloons are inflated with gas such as helium, which allows them to float for long distances.

It goes without saying that having these type of balloons in the environment has had and continues to have considerable impacts on our planet. With wildlife—be it land, marine or air—problems caused by the entanglement in and/or swallowing of remnants of lighter-than-air balloons, or the potential entanglement from attachments such as strings, ribbons et cetera that come with the product, are well known to scientists and animal carers. Those people have to deal with the fallout of those escaped balloons which damage the environment and find their way into animal or marine species that are not built to sustain the by-products of this seemingly harmless, mainly recreational item.

Within a marine environment, particularly in my region of the Fraser Coast and electorate of Hervey Bay that encompasses the pristine waters of the Great Sandy Strait and the UNESCO designated island of K'gari Fraser Island, having products such as lighter-than-air balloons drifting from the mainland of Hervey Bay across into that environment can create havoc to land, sea and birdlife. Having a process to clean up the damage done by escaping balloons is an excellent step towards slowing the decline within those species and the duress suffered by nature from encounters with the remnants of these balloons.

This bill manages the control of the release of lighter-than-air balloons by creating a penalty if a person releases or allows the release of any number of lighter-than-air balloons. I note that this is not a ban on all balloons but on the release of balloons once they are filled with a form of gas, which, as we know, is mostly helium. This is basically a ban on the balloons that float for some distance. The bill does provide exceptions to the ban for balloons that are used for science and research such as balloons that can be remotely operated or controlled so are not actually unleashed into the environment. These balloons are controlled on release into the environment and subsequently, one would assume, could be retrieved before they become an issue within the environment. Obviously, some balloons, such as scientific balloons, will go their own way, but given that they are released mainly for the collection and retrieval of data for any number of scientific and other reasons then this bill allows an exemption for that to happen.

When it comes to the geography of an electorate such as Hervey Bay, without doubt this bill takes another step towards ensuring that we do not release manmade substances that are so impactful on the environment that they create further ongoing problems on top of the ever-present dangers of changing climate. As I have just mentioned, the Hervey Bay electorate contains one of the more pristine, UNESCO listed environments on the planet. Any attempt to remove and limit some of these manmade issues has to be applauded. I congratulate the former minister for environment and science for moving on this, particularly regarding the impacts these products have on land, marine and birdlife. The science on this is clear and it backs the changes enacted by this bill as it has been found that when these types of balloons eventually land they work their way into the food cycle or have an immediate impact on land, marine and birdlife. With this bill we are going a little way towards removing more of the human damage done from these associated practices on those lifeforms, which is a good thing.

The other aspect of the bill that I would like to briefly touch on is the provision to set an expiry date of 31 December 2025 for the current exemption for a single-use plastic item that is part of a shelf-ready product. This provision aligns with the agreed national packaging target that 100 per cent of all Australian packaging will be re-usable, recyclable or compostable by 2025 and that includes attachments such as plastic straws on juice boxes. These provisions are on top of the refinements that came about from the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 and adds to the suite of environmental legislation that the Palaszczuk government has put in place to protect our environment from microplastics. The date proposed gives consideration to and plenty of time for manufacturers and retailers to sell their current stock that may become noncompliant after this set date. Manufacturers and retailers would already be aware of the coming change and the setting of this date gives them the lead-in time needed to redesign packaging to meet the new standard.

I emphasise that science shows that the damage that microplastics are reaping on the environment is huge. We need to reduce and eventually eliminate this matter from our food chain, our oceans and the stomachs of many species on this planet. The setting of this date sets the clock running and finally sets us on a path where animals, marine and bird wildlife will not have to face the constant barrage of microplastics that have become a scourge within their nature environments. When it comes to my part of the world—Hervey Bay, the Great Sandy Marine Park, the beautiful pristine K'gari Fraser Island and surrounds—I cannot recommend these amendments strongly enough and I ask all members to support the bill before the House. This legislation will help to create a cleaner state and does clean up—pardon the pun—some of the major contributors of waste in our environment. Finally, I acknowledge the work done by the former and current ministers for the environment as well as the Health and Environment Committee and their secretariat in formulating and reviewing this legislation. I support the bill.