




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 23 May 2023

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.27 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I wish to thank the members of the Health and Environment Committee and the committee staff for their consideration of the bill. I also want to thank the industry groups and individuals who made submissions to the bill through the parliamentary committee process.

The policy objectives of the bill are to: provide a head of power in the definition of waste to prescribe through regulation that a thing is not a waste and move the definition of waste from the Environmental Protection Act to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act; remove the automatic levy exemption for clean earth and the subsequent removal of the definition of clean earth; provide a head of power for the ban on the outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons; provide the ability for the chief executive to make a decision about amending or suspending a resource recovery area declaration and making a payment to local government; include a circular economy principle as a principle under the waste act; change the review date for the waste strategy from three to five years; and provide an expiry of 31 December 2025 for the exemption for the ban for the otherwise banned single-use plastic item that is integral to the shelf-ready product.

It is ironic that we are dealing with legislation about waste from a government that are struggling to practice what they preach on waste in the circular economy. The Palaszczuk Labor government must explain to Queenslanders why 126 million liquid paperboard drink ‘poppers’ have been secretly shipped to India, rather than being recycled in Queensland, as promised. The LNP have exposed ‘Harry Popper’s container of secrets’. The government is collecting billions from the waste levy. However, they cannot find a way to recycle these poppers in Queensland.

The Containers for Change recycling program was sold to Queenslanders as a solution to increase recycling. I ask the new minister: how do Queenslanders know if this waste has been recycled—where is the oversight? Five years on and still no site has been built to deal with this waste. Instead, this government has shipped it overseas to India. Thousands of Queensland school kids have been playing their role in recycling only to be let down by the chaos of the Palaszczuk Labor government. ‘Harry Popper’s container of secrets’ has been exposed by the crisis and chaos in the Palaszczuk Labor government.

No-one knows waste better than the 77 councils and the one town authority in Queensland. Councils appreciate the advance payments and the provisions of the bill that will allow for adjustment to individual payments due to identified inaccuracies. Councils also welcome simplifications to the process and the introduction of the circular economy principle. However, there are concerns from the local government sector about some elements of the bill and the removal of the blanket exemption for clean earth.

Section 73DE changes the previous definition of 'misinformation' so that section 73DE(4)(a) will read 'the effect of the waste levy on the local government or households in the local government's local government area'. This amendment expands the definition to a false or misleading statement about households. This was not a previous requirement of the legislation. Further, the broadening of this section was not communicated to the local government sector ahead of the introduction of the bill; nor was it explained during the bill's introductory speech. You would think that a government interested in transparency would actually include that in the introductory speech and would at least communicate it to the local government sector.

What this Labor government has done is try to sneak this provision in. It is effectively gag legislation. This change has raised concerns from local governments because it limits the political expression of elected local government members. This sounds a little bit like history repeating itself. I recall the mayor of Barcaldine found himself in a similar situation in relation to freedom of speech. My question to the minister is: where is the evidence that there has been misinformation circulated regarding the waste levy? If there is no evidence then why have this massive gag clause? This Labor government is so sensitive about criticism that it places a legislative gag on elected local government officials at any opportunity—and here we see it again. This is censorship by legislation.

The LNP will seek to amend this legislation because of the gag that it places on elected local government officials. As the shadow minister has outlined, the LNP will seek to amend the legislation to revert the definition of 'misinformation' to its current form. Where is the evidence base that these changes are needed by the government? If there is no evidence then this is exactly what the local government sector have said—it is a gag. The Labor government should support the LNP's amendments. If there is no evidence then there is no need to have that in place in legislation.

Currently, clean earth is automatically exempt from the waste levy. However, this expires on 30 June 2023. While most stakeholders were supportive of this change to remove the automatic exemption, a number have suggested that clean earth should instead be listed as a resource. They submitted that more work is required to ensure landfills and waste operators are ready for the change that is potentially happening in a matter of months, as there has not been clarity about how they will apply for the exemption.

Waste management operators currently use clean earth at waste disposal sites for activities including daily cover, interim cover, final capping and as construction material for access roads, bunds or additional landfill cells. It is clear from the stakeholder feedback that there is a lack of certainty about how this continuing exemption will occur and what burden will be placed on operators. Queenslanders and waste management operators do not need any increased costs or compliance during the present housing crisis. They certainly do not need any increased costs in construction because we know construction costs have escalated dramatically. The LGAQ stated in their submission—

Local governments as waste management operators are dependent on the ongoing ability to utilise this material without incurring a levy liability. Local government agrees with industry operators that clean earthen material is not a waste and should not be treated as such and is required for environmental compliance of waste disposal sites.

They stated—

Should there be no appetite to reconsider the definition of clean earthen material, local government and industry operators of landfill and resource recovery areas require, before the due date of 1st July 2023, a clear pathway to an operational exemption that can be granted for all current uses. As has been made clear before, the use of clean earthen fill is an operational imperative and therefore cannot be substituted with other material already in place at a landfill.

Mr McDonald interjected.

Ms LEAHY: I take that interjection—3.9 million tonnes. Before I conclude I want to ask the minister about the circular economy, especially in relation to damaged solar generation panels and damaged wind turbines. It is not acceptable that these items end up in council landfill. I would like to hear what plans the government has to deal with these panels and wind turbines when they are damaged and when they reach the end of their life. The state Labor government is approving energy generation alternatives at a great rate of knots. With this approval there is a responsibility to deal with the waste that is generated now and the waste that will eventuate for future generations.

Across my electorate I see a lot of solar generation panels and wind farms. I know that the member for Southern Downs will have a lot of wind farms in his area as well. Councils do raise with me their concerns about what will happen when these solar and wind generators reach their end of life. There needs to be some way that they can be dealt with in a circular economy so that we are not putting in place problems for future generations as we go forward with this change to the renewable energy sector.