




Speech By  
**Brent Mickelberg**

**MEMBER FOR BUDERIM**

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

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (11.39 am): I rise to address the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, a bill that seeks to address several shortfalls in the state government's existing legislative and regulatory framework to facilitate recycling and the management of waste. We have heard from the contributions of members that it is basically a bill that seeks to deal with the mechanics and the failures of the state government's waste levy and the state government's waste strategy.

Having sat on the Natural Resources, Agricultural Industry Development and Environment Committee last term—it considered a bill quite similar to this one—I had the opportunity to receive submissions from many of the interested parties right across the state. That bill did not get debated, but it forms the basis of the legislation we are debating today. One of the main concerns that stakeholders involved in that inquiry raised was in relation to compostable plastics. Many of those plastic replacements end up in landfill in exactly the same way as single-use plastic do.

Consumers are trying to do the right thing. Consumers are actively seeking products that are recyclable and they are paying more for those products in many cases. In many cases that recyclable product is treated exactly the same as single-use plastic and ends up in landfill. There are lots of different reasons for that. There is a lack of infrastructure in many regional centres. We went to the Cairns resource recovery centre—the transfer station—where compostable plastics simply cannot be processed. There is a process required to do that, and many regional areas in particular do not have that infrastructure.

We have the Containers for Change scheme—and many people have spoken about the benefits of it—but we have 126 million poppers going overseas. That is not a circular economy. That does not seek to achieve what the community expects and, indeed, what one of the principles in this legislation seeks to achieve. I question the government's commitment to genuinely addressing some of these issues when much of it looks like window-dressing.

We have seen that compostable plastics are just substituted for single-use plastics. That is what the legislation requires, but if they are dealt with in the exact same way then we achieve nothing. If anything, it is a detrimental action because people are hoodwinked into believing that they are doing something for the environment when there is very little benefit. Clearly the problem needs to be addressed through a more comprehensive approach than just removing single-use plastics from the supply chain.

During the previous committee's inquiry we heard from Alison Foley, who is the director and founder of Ten Little Pieces. Ten Little Pieces is an education and empowerment movement for ordinary people, in particular young people, to make a big difference in the places they visit by collecting 10 pieces of litter anywhere, anytime. They have a strong focus on educating children. Collecting 10 pieces of litter is an easy concept that even the youngest child can grasp and it opens up conversation around conscious consumerism, circular economies and rethinking and reframing our

concept of waste. I think it is safe to say that our young people in particular want to see action on protecting the environment. Too often the actions that this place debates and the measures that this government puts in place are simply window-dressing.

Organisations like Ten Little Pieces offer educational programs from preschool right through to year 12. They talk about the science of marine debris, environmental empowerment and solutions-based thinking in relation to the impact of plastic on the environment. Removing plastic from the supply chain is undoubtedly an important part of the process, but it is only one part of the process. Much of the government's approach to this issue has ignored the other parts of the process which are arguably more important.

It is important that the government considers the transformational effect that education can have, particularly in relation to our school system. Previous pieces of legislation have excluded schools from many of the provisions around single-use plastic. There are reasons for that. There are exclusions in relation to medical endeavours and the like, and there are important reasons for that. We are not going to achieve change unless those entities and industries—schools and the medical profession—are brought along on the journey. I think the community expect that as well.

The projections for plastic pollution entering our oceans are, simply put, a disaster waiting to happen. We need to do better at restricting and redesigning products and packaging that has such a devastating environmental impact. That is why I support removing single-use plastics from the supply chain where possible. It is policy that has been championed by the LNP over many years. We need to do better to facilitate the recycling of those products that are used as a substitute for single-use plastics.

The urgency of the transition required has been highlighted by the Pew Charitable Trusts' report, *Breaking the plastic wave*. In that report there was a revision of the current estimate of how much plastic is entering our ocean—11 million metric tonnes a year. The report also states that without action the annual flow of plastic into the ocean will nearly triple by 2040, to 29 million metric tonnes per year or the equivalent of 10 kilograms of plastic per metre coastline worldwide. Eighty per cent of that comes from land-based sources.

Madam Deputy Speaker Lui, I know that in many parts of your electorate, where I have spent quite a bit of time, beaches that are not regularly visited are often littered with considerable plastic—much of it not from Australia, I might add. Similarly, in many countries such as East Timor/Timor-Leste the problem is replicated. The reality is that the environmental damage in places that may not be seen by people every single day is just as great as that which occurs on the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast or in the centre of Brisbane.

Our environment is at risk. The government needs to stop wasting time and moving the goalposts to meet its deadlines. Too often the government's approach to environmental issues has been lip-service, whether it is on protected areas and not meeting its own goals or in not even meeting its own review and reporting requirements. It is pretty clear. We have heard those opposite criticise the LNP, but I think with a bit of introspection those opposite would acknowledge that Labor's response to these environmental issues has not been genuine.

Plastic is cheap and versatile. As the shadow minister for small businesses, I know that many businesses rely on plastic product because it is flexible, durable and has many positive applications, but we need to rethink the origin of many of the goods that we use, the destination of the goods that we consume and the packaging they come in. Simply substituting it for compostable plastics that do not end up getting composted is not the solution.

Some of the other issues that were raised by stakeholders concerning the bill were in relation to the lack of incentive to minimise household waste. The state government has shifted the burden with respect to waste onto businesses and local government. If we want to address this problem, we are going to need to tackle the problem of household waste. The state government has not shown leadership on addressing these issues. This is an opportunity for the current government to tackle those issues. I am sure that if it does not then a future government will. Queensland has a great opportunity to lead the way on these issues and to effect lasting change. The government could start by addressing the issues I have spoken about in our schools.

I do not believe that there has been adequate enforcement of the anti-littering law—certainly not in my part of the world on the Sunshine Coast. I have previously sought information from the Sunshine Coast Council and the Department of Environment and Science around the numbers of warnings and infringements issued by the Sunshine Coast Council for those littering. The data was, frankly, alarming. In 2017-18 one warning was issued by the Sunshine Coast Council. Bear in mind that this region has a population of over 200,000 and many visitors. Six infringements were issued across the whole Sunshine Coast. The following year, zero warnings and three infringements were issued. In 2019-20, five warnings and five infringements were issued.

We know that littering goes on. We understand that littering goes on. Many people littering do not even understand the impact their littering is having on the environment. State and local governments have an obligation to take every possible step to stop this, whether that is education, enforcement or the redesign of products. We need a genuine commitment if the Queensland public are going to take these issues seriously.

Education is an extremely powerful tool. People who litter are often ignorant of the harm their littering has on the environment. Many cigarette smokers who choose to litter—not all cigarette smokers litter—do not understand that there are 4,000 toxic chemicals in the cigarette butt they choose to throw out on the kids playground. They do not understand the consequence that has on the environment. With an enforcement approach, which crystallises the issue in the mind of those individuals, I am sure they will become more conversant with the challenges and issues that their approach to littering causes.

Far too often, particularly on the Sunshine Coast, people are not challenged on their littering behaviour. I would like to see the Sunshine Coast Council and the state government take a more proactive approach. Frequently when questioned on these issues the response is that it is a police responsibility. The simple fact is that the police are not dealing with littering unless it is an egregious issue. The police are dealing with, to be frank, far more serious matters such as domestic violence, violent robberies and the like.

It is a matter for the environment department and it is a matter for local government to take a proactive approach to enforcement. I call on the state government and local governments across the state to be genuine with respect to their commitment to tackling the waste problems in our community. I was going to speak to the concerns of local government with respect to the provisions to gag them from commenting on some of these issues, but others have addressed those. I share those concerns.