




Speech By
Charis Mullen

MEMBER FOR JORDAN

Record of Proceedings, 23 May 2023

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

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (6.22 pm): I wish we could have implemented a gag order on someone, but thankfully she has finished speaking.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. As childish as that was, I take personal offence and I ask that the inexperienced member withdraw.

Mrs MULLEN: I withdraw. I am pleased to rise in support of the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. Our government has a vision for Queensland to become a zero waste society—where waste is avoided, re-used and recycled to the greatest possible extent. We also know that many in our communities are seeking to move away from the current take-make-use-dispose approach and be part of a new, more circular system that keeps materials in use for longer, extracting the maximum value from them. Our government is listening.

It is why in 2019 we developed the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy—developed in partnership with industry and local government. This has presented a fundamental shift in the way we manage waste in Queensland, recognising that we can use waste as a valuable resource to create new products, industries and jobs and disposing of it to landfill only as a last resort. It is also why we are seeking continual improvements in this relevant policy space. The bill before us supports some important intentions announced by our government.

One of these areas is around the issue of clean earth. Currently, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act provides an automatic exemption for clean earth which is delivered to a waste disposal site accepting the waste levy. This exemption has been in place since we introduced the waste levy on 1 July 2019. The Department of Environment and Science advises that more than 3.9 million tonnes of clean earth has been delivered to waste disposal sites and reported under the clean earth exemption code in just three years.

During the parliamentary committee's review of the bill, the department acknowledged the importance of clean earth in the good operation and maintenance of a landfill, and confirmed that removing the clean earth exemption is not intended to penalise operators of waste disposal sites who use clean earth for operational activities such as day cover, batter profiling or final capping. It is clear there is no intention to apply a levy to clean earth delivered to a waste disposal site being used for beneficial or operation purposes. That is where an operational purposes exemption can be sought so that no levy applies to them.

Another key measure through this bill, which is strongly supported by the community, is a ban on the mass release of lighter-than-air balloons, which is expected to commence on 1 September 2023 with the expected passing of the bill. While releasing balloons is considered a littering offence under the current litter provisions, the proposed ban on the outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons prevents the action of release, so avoiding balloons becoming litter. This removes confusion for people

who may be planning events and memorials and allows a consistent message to be provided. The ban is not a ban on balloons but a ban on the outdoor release of any number of lighter-than-air balloons—for example, helium balloons. The formal banning of the mass release of lighter-than-air balloons is a good initiative reflecting contemporary community sentiment.

Speaking of sentiment, it was interesting to read the LNP's statement of reservation and their proposed amendments. I must have missed the moment the LNP became waste warriors because it is like they have collective amnesia. Do they not remember repealing Queensland's waste levy in 2012—making us a cheap place to dump interstate waste? Who could forget the Queensland Waste Avoidance and Resource Productivity Strategy—sounds great—developed by the former LNP government which did not deliver any opportunities for the resource recovery sector to grow and prosper. It was a dud strategy that should have gone straight to landfill. This is largely because the strategy was unfunded, relied on the development of voluntary action plans and not underlined by a market mechanism to encourage behavioural change. The disposal of waste into landfill without an incentive to recover resources was a lost economic opportunity under the LNP.

I am also interested in their concerns about limiting the political expression of elected councillors. The department clearly advised the committee that the amendment was not intended to limit or require elected council representatives to self-sensor in relation to payments to local governments, noting—

The amendment relates to, for example, where a householder may be told that there is a direct correlation between a rate increase and the application of the levy to household waste disposal—without referencing the fact of a payment to the local government to offset that cost.

That is not political expression; that is a fact. Again, the LNP must have forgotten when they included gag clauses in funding agreements for community groups when they were in power. Clearly the member for Southern Downs did when he started quoting Fitzgerald.

We know that the global economy is transforming towards a more circular model. The Queensland government is working hard to take the lead in growing the recycling and resource recovery sector and the bill before us supports these aims. I commend the bill to the House.