



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.54 pm): Today I rise to address the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I add my thanks to those of the chair to the members of the committee and to the secretariat for the work they have undertaken. This legislation aims to enhance our waste management practices and safeguard our environment for generations to come. While we in the LNP endorse several elements of the bill, some crucial areas still warrant further refinement and development.

The primary objectives of the bill are as follows: to provide a head of power in the definition of 'waste' to prescribe through regulation that a thing is not a waste; to shift the 'waste' definition from the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011; to revoke the automatic levy exemption for clean earth and remove the definition of 'clean earth'; to create a legal foundation for banning the outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons; to empower the chief executive to make decisions about amending or suspending a resource recovery area declaration and issuing payments to a local government; to incorporate the circular economy principle as a tenet within the waste act; to alter the waste strategy review requirement time frame from three to five years; and to provide an expiry of 31 December 2025 for the exemption from the ban for an otherwise banned single-use plastic item that is integral to a shelf-ready product.

The LNP is in favour of the prohibition on releasing lighter-than-air balloons outdoors. We acknowledge the detrimental impact such balloons pose to our environment and wildlife. We applaud the government's dedication to implementing necessary measures to minimise their effects. However, we urge the government to emphasise public awareness to ensure comprehensive understanding and compliance with these new regulations.

The elimination of the automatic exemption for clean earth is another initiative that we support. However, we urge the government to collaborate with stakeholders, particularly waste management operators, to ensure that the practical implementation of this modification is handled effectively. Given the limited time until the exemption removal takes effect, it is essential for the government to closely cooperate with industry stakeholders to ensure a seamless transition.

While these aspects of the bill are positive, we must express our concern regarding the government's failure to meet its self-imposed deadlines and targets for waste strategy assessments. This negligence not only reflects a disregard for the environment but also a lack of commitment to the wellbeing of Queenslanders. We have an obligation to hold the government responsible and to advocate for increased transparency in waste management.

The overdue waste strategy review indicates that Queensland is not on track to achieve many of its objectives. More household waste is going into landfill now than before the waste levy was announced half a decade ago. Queensland's municipal solid waste recycling rates have also regressed

from 2018, falling from 31 per cent to 27 per cent, despite a target of 50 per cent by 2025. This lack of progress raises questions about the effectiveness of the government's waste management strategies and their commitment to a circular economy. The review identified a significant failure in public awareness, with only a quarter of Queenslanders aware that they should be reducing their waste output each year. This highlights the need for the government to do more to educate the public about the importance of waste reduction.

We also have concerns about the proposed alteration to the definition of 'misinformation' under section 73DE of the bill. This change, introduced without consultation with local governments, could potentially limit elected members' ability to criticise government actions. We must safeguard the rights of elected officials to express their apprehensions without fear of reprisal. This effort to modify the definition of 'misinformation' highlights the government's intention to retain power at any cost. Muzzling elected members through legislation only serves to weaken democracy and further consolidate the government's authority. We must resist such endeavours and defend the fundamental right to free speech in our democratic system.

In light of these concerns, we recommend that government waste strategy evaluations align with the updated state time line of five years. This alignment would ensure consistency across state and local governments and guarantee a unified approach to achieving shared objectives. This measure could help address the government's failure to make deadlines and targets.

We echo the concerns raised by the Local Government Association of Queensland regarding the broadening of the definition of 'misinformation' under clause 73DE of the bill. As the LGAQ stated in their submission, they reject any attempt to censor councils for making public any concerns about potential impacts. This is an issue that requires further discussion and consideration.

While the LNP supports numerous components of the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, we believe that improvements can be made. We call upon the government to work closely with stakeholders to address the concerns raised and ensure a smooth transition to a more efficient waste management system. By joining forces we can safeguard our environment, minimise waste and foster a sustainable future for all Queenslanders. We must also remain vigilant against any attempts by government to undermine democracy and suppress the voices of our elected officials. Our responsibility lies with the people of Queensland, and we will persist in advocating for their best interests irrespective of the obstacles we encounter.