




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 23 May 2023

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

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (6.48 pm): I rise in support of the proposed Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to thank the DES, the Health and Environment Committee, the secretariat, Hansard and everyone involved in the careful consideration of this bill. I would also like to thank the former minister for environment, the member for Gaven, for all of her work in that role and welcome in the member for Nudgee as our new minister for the environment. I know she will do a great job.

I would like to give a shout-out to the member for Lytton for reminding everyone that today is World Turtle Day. I recently had a wildlife encounter with a Mary River turtle. He did not belong on the Eumundi Kenilworth Road so I had to put him back where he belonged.

I support the amendment of the definition of 'waste' in the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act and the removal of the definition of 'waste' from the Environmental Protection Act. Redefining 'waste' in the WRR Act strengthens the implementation of the principles of circular economies and better enables environmental protection and product stewardship. If a waste material has the potential for re-use or recycling, it should be considered a resource and not be an exempt form of waste. Waste should mean there is no value, and this bill seeks to generate an end-of-waste code for clean earth so that it can be considered an end-of-waste resource. This amendment supports the Palaszczuk government's objective of environmental stewardship.

Redefining waste will increase waste diversion from landfill rates and will be consistent with waste reduction targets. These amendments are in line with the objectives of the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to: promote waste avoidance or reduction and resource recovery; promote the re-use or recycling of waste; minimise the impact of waste disposal; share responsibility and stewardship between government, industry and business; and support national objectives to recover 80 per cent of all waste by 2030.

Driving around the Sunshine Coast, 'clean fill wanted' signs are a common sight. Due to current exemptions, 3.9 million tonnes of clean earth were disposed of in landfill that otherwise could have been used within community construction projects, further increasing time delays and prices for sourcing suitable materials, which are decreasing affordability and suitability for the community. This bill will enable waste disposal sites to maintain operational use of clean fill and is not intended to be leviable, which maintains support for business and industry. The removal of the blanket automatic exemption of clean earth is in line with government plans to reduce waste and enable the recovery of resources from waste materials.

The ban on the release of lighter-than-air balloons is consistent with the government's environmental stewardship objectives by reducing the environmental damage caused by plastic litter. Balloons are in the top three most harmful waste items to wildlife, particularly as helium balloons burst into many small pieces due to a drop in pressure, with large pieces strongly resembling jellyfish. I think the member for Lytton alluded to the fact that it affects marine turtles, as it is a big food source.

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council banned the release of helium balloons in 2011 to protect its state and national matters of environmental significant areas, as well as the internationally significant wetlands and the biospheres to which the Nicklin constituency is connected. Western Australia has no ban on the release of balloons. New South Wales, the ACT and South Australia have banned the release of more than 20 balloons. Tasmania and Victoria have banned balloon releases. The Northern Territory has an outright ban on them. This ban is an opportunity to be one of the leading states in Australia to totally ban the release of balloons and it places Australia in good stead to be the first continent in the world to completely ban balloon releases. It is consistent with the commencement of the banning of single-use plastic items.

I stand in support of the inclusion of the circular economy principles in the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act. The Sunshine Coast is one of Australia's fastest growing economies, with more than 30,000 small to medium enterprises. Ensuring the inclusion of the circular economy principle in this act is important so that our businesses can consider and accurately prioritise these principles to enable long-term successful operation and to support the sustainable growth of our region.

I stand in support of the amendment that places a time limit for the exemption provided for shelf-ready, single-use plastic items, as the time limit encourages the focus to remain on finding appropriate alternatives. The expiry date of 31 December 2025 is consistent with the national packaging targets of 100 per cent of Australian packaging being re-usable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

On a local note, I am extremely proud to represent a region that takes this issue seriously—from our Containers for Change, which recycles our bottles and cans, to Earthborn, which are commercial operators involved in organics and soil recovery. Our primary schools and community gardens are all heavily invested in closing the food waste loop. It is very encouraging to have legislation that builds on the excellent work of our community as we keep our environment clean and ensure nothing is wasted. As such, I commend the bill to the House.