




Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 May 2023

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

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (5.08 pm): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the debate on the Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. It was introduced into the Queensland parliament on 22 February 2023. The bill amends provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 to better embed the goals for, and practical information of, circular economy principles.

The Queensland government has set out a number of worthy targets that are aimed at halving the state's food waste, stopping 80 per cent of material from ending up in landfill and recycling 65 per cent of our rubbish by 2030. The amendments proposed in this bill amend the definition of 'waste' to allow for a thing to be declared not waste through regulation. It will also move the definition of waste from the Environmental Protection Act 1994 to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011.

The purpose of the amendment is to provide security and flexibility for those investing in the circular economy processes and products. I support this amendment as it will ensure that valuable materials can more easily be remanufactured or recycled for other purposes. It also sends a strong signal to the waste industry that it can invest in Queensland with confidence. The removal of the clean earth levy exemption brings Queensland into line with other states, where the waste levy applies to any clean earth disposed of in a landfill or waste facility. Hopefully, its removal will incentivise its re-use in the building sector.

The bill also gives the regulator broader powers for making decisions about amending or suspending a resource recovery area, RRA, declaration. The current legislation only permits the chief executive to revoke an RRA in response to an identified compliance issue. Once revoked under the current legislation, the area must be quarantined for 12 months before it can be re-declared. Under the bill's changes, the regulator can now suspend the RRA to investigate compliance issues on site. However, where no further action is required, the resource recovery area can then continue to operate without the current 12-month wait time. This provides much greater flexibility around compliance activities in these areas. All of these changes, whilst technical, incrementally narrow the scope for exemptions under the act. They are consistent with the Waste Reduction and Recycling Regulation 2011 which phases out exemptions on road planings from 30 June 2023, aluminium sludge from 30 June 2024 and fly ash from 30 June 2029.

The bill introduces into the waste act a specific definition of 'circular economy' and 'circular economy principle', with the goal of embedding the concept into Queensland's legislative framework. The circular economy is also explicitly included in the state's waste management strategy as well as local government strategic planning on waste. On paper, Queensland has committed to ambitious strategies and targets for waste avoidance and recovery which, if realised, would result in many of the targets in the Commonwealth's national action plan being met.

In 2019 Queensland implemented its Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy, providing a strategic framework for achieving the objectives of the national waste policy. It set the following targets for 2050: 25 per cent reduction in household waste, 90 per cent recovery rate across all waste types and 75 per cent recycling rates across all waste types. This framework is underpinned by the waste disposal levy, which commenced on 1 July 2019, and covers approximately 90 per cent of Queensland's population. As the minister stated in her introductory speech—

By embedding these principles across all aspects of the products that we design, manufacture and use we will enable improved resource recovery and reduce the long-term environmental impacts of these products.

However, despite these efforts, Queensland is a long way from being on track to meet its state or national waste targets.

According to a report by Waste and Recycling Industry of Queensland titled *Untangling Queensland's waste levy conundrum*, Queensland still lags behind almost every other jurisdiction in Australia on several fronts, particularly its progress toward meeting the national waste targets. Critically, Queensland's targeted recycling rate is only expected to reach 65 per cent by 2030—a level well short of the 80 per cent recycling target for 2030 set out in the national action plan. To successfully transition to a circular economy, the government needs to do much more in terms of addressing the uncertainty and confusion encountered by market operators who are responsible for turning waste into a resource. This means rethinking the productivity of waste and addressing many of the regulatory gaps that are still acting as a constraint on the resource recovery activities in Queensland.

By far the biggest hurdle Queensland faces in reaching its goals on waste is the state's major recycling infrastructure gap. According to the minister, the government is co-investing with councils and industry to deliver even more recycling infrastructure across the state. However, again, the reality is Queensland still has a long way to go if it is to achieve this. There is insufficient infrastructure capacity across every category of waste in Queensland—including plastics, e-waste, organics, paper and cardboard—to even be close to achieving the national action plan's recovery rate of 80 per cent in Queensland. Actions to expand infrastructure capacity are now absolutely critical to ensuring that Queensland has the necessary infrastructure to realise its circular economy targets.

There is also an urgent need for further action to be taken upstream to support the whole-of-lifestyle transformation envisaged by the national action plan. To realise this potential, the government needs to play a stronger role in ensuring there are commercially viable onshore markets capable of facilitating a circular economy. It requires targeted policies to address regulatory gaps, incentives for the use of recycled materials and additional infrastructure to support resource and recycling activities. Without effective coordination between government and industry, many of the strategies and policies will be a complete waste of time. The government should be discussing with waste companies exactly what they need to boost their businesses, ensure profitability and drive investment.

Secondly, we need to rethink how recycled products should be designed and produced. The products we use and the way we use them need to be fit for a future where reduce, re-use and repair come first. Consideration should be given to legislating requirements on mandatory recycled content. New products should be made fully recyclable, made chemically safe and, ideally, made from recycled materials themselves. Next to that, we need to be looking into the issue of producer responsibility and harmonised systems of waste collection. Longstanding difficulties in closing the loop also remain, with some buyers reluctant to purchase recycled or remanufactured materials. This is compounded by the low manufacturing base in Australia, with limited local demand for recycled materials as a manufacturing input.

These findings of the *National waste report* released on 16 December 2022 should be used to inform the state's future waste planning and its strategies to improve landfill management and promote circular economy opportunities. Currently, there are multiple large-scale thermal energy-from-waste facilities under construction in Australia, including here in Queensland. While the role of incineration in waste management appears to be popular at the moment, it is hardly a sustainable practice in the circular economy. At the very least, these facilities should not be using plastic feedstocks or allowed to divert investment away from the state's much needed recycling initiatives and infrastructure projects.

A report presented at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, stated that Australia is still dumping plastic waste in Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries, despite ending exports of raw plastic waste in 2020. Australian states, including Queensland, continue to ship plastic waste fuel, which contains toxic chemical additives, including organic pollutants and heavy metals. There are grave implications for human health in this, due to toxicity risks and hazards of waste containing toxic additives, which are amplified when burnt. The report by the International Pollutants Elimination Network shows how Australia's plastic fuel waste is being dumped on the shores of at least eight member states.

This practice is a form of waste colonialism and an embarrassing example of the complete hypocrisy of the country's leaders. As the report states—

Australia's policy approach, while superficially appearing to take responsibility for recycling its waste instead of exporting it, is a cynical exercise in reprocessing and repackaging the same low-grade waste for export under the guise of 'fuel' to be burned.

The report added that the Australian waste export ban announcement in 2020 amounts to little more than a public relations exercise to maintain waste movement out of Australia and into less wealthy countries. To quote the minister's introductory speech one last time—

This is about getting things done, not just talking about them.

I would like to thank the secretariat and all of the committee. I have put my views forward.