

CITY OF JOONDALUP — CHARITY BIN BAN

Grievance

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [9.52 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Environment regarding the City of Joondalup adopting a local law to ban charity collection bins on council land. I believe it is a case of the council using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut. I am sure that every one of us here in this chamber has at some stage made use of a charity recycling bin. I lived next to a property in Willetton for 10 years that had a Good Samaritan Industries recycling bin. I know that those bins overflow occasionally and people do the wrong thing and dump old TVs and other rubbish around the recycling bins but I found that after a quick phone call to the Good Samaritans, someone would be there within 12 to 24 hours to clean it up and it was not a problem.

These charity recycling bins help our community to recycle more. In fact, it leads to thousands of tonnes of material being reused, which is really the best form of recycling. I have visited the Good Samaritans' facility in Canning Vale many times. It is always a joy to see the enthusiasm of the people with disabilities who are working there. They are so pleased to have a place to go where they can do productive work. Not only did the Good Samaritans provide 246 people with disabilities with work in 2013–14 but they also diverted some 85 per cent of the 5 000 tonnes of material that it processed into recycling, which stops a lot of landfill. Many other charities have these recycling bins, such as the Salvation Army, the Smith Family, the Spine and Limb Foundation, the St Vincent de Paul Society, Anglicare WA and more. It came as a shock to me when my friend John Knowles, the CEO of the Good Samaritans, told me back in July that the City of Joondalup had resolved on 23 June to no longer issue permits for charity clothing bins to be placed on council-owned land. The charities realised that if this decision stood, it would have a detrimental effect on the amount of recycling taking place in the City of Joondalup, not to mention the impact on employment for people with disabilities. Seeing that the City of Joondalup law allows charities to apply for a permit, the Good Samaritans applied for a permit knowing that the council had made its decision not to issue further permits. As expected, the council rejected the application. GSI went to the State Administrative Tribunal and SAT has ordered mediation to take place on 14 December.

Clearly, if the local law provides for permits, the city must consider each application on its merits and not reject it without due consideration. Given that the City of Joondalup's own report states that the community recycling bin sites are generally well managed by the charities, it really does not have a rational reason for enforcing a blanket ban. Realising that the City of Joondalup had no rational basis for refusing to issue permits, the council decided to bypass the SAT process by making a new local law without any consultation with the charities, I am told, which means that no bins will be allowed and the council has no discretion to allow them to be placed on council land anymore.

I find the City of Joondalup is two-faced and hypocritical. On the one hand, it likes to sing its own praises about how it is into sustainability and recycling and then it turns around and bans one of the most effective recycling tools in the city. The bins, which the Good Samaritans had on City of Joondalup-owned sites, resulted in 246 tonnes of material being donated in the two years ending 30 June this year, and made up over 30 per cent of the total donations received. I am told that the Good Samaritans keep a record of all reports received about charity recycling bins requiring attention for illegal dumping, graffiti or other reasons. The fact is that only one bin site—the James Cook Park site at Hillarys—attracted more than one report a month in the past two years. Indeed, three bin sites attracted only one report for two years.

I have provided the minister with a list that the Good Samaritans provided me of the 13 sites that it has in the City of Joondalup and the number of reports that it receives a month. It is interesting to note that two sites accounted for half of all the reports in the two-year period. If the issue were a practical one, I could understand if the council decided, say, not to renew the permit for James Cook Park but the bins in Greenwood, Craigie and Kingsley attracted only one report in two years. This highlights the fact that there is not a systemic problem. I cannot speak from experience for the other charities that have bins but I am sure that they also operate very professionally.

It would seem that the mayor and the councillors at the City of Joondalup have a bit of a bee in their bonnets about these recycling bins and have responded in an over-the-top manner. To ban all the bins on council-owned land is totally out of touch with community expectations and, indeed, the need to recycle goods and help create employment for many people with disabilities.

My understanding is that the council took peremptory action to prevent the SAT mediation from having any effect by passing a law earlier this week which hopefully bans bins being placed on council land. Fourteen days after being gazetted, that law will come into effect, which will mean that within a few weeks, all those recycling bins that are on council property will have to be removed. The spin doctors at the council have claimed that they

have carried out successful clothing collections but they would need to run 169 of them a year to collect the same amount of material, so they are totally ineffective.

My question to the minister is: does the minister, the Waste Authority or the department have any authority to prevent the City of Joondalup from implementing this ill-conceived, draconian and environmentally unfriendly local law that will reduce employment opportunities for disabled people and result in more rubbish going to landfill?

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.C. Blayney): People in the gallery, you are starting to make a bit too much noise and we are actually having trouble hearing some of our speakers.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [10.00 am]: I thank the member for Southern River for raising this grievance with me. It is an issue that is of great importance to local governments, to the charities that are involved and to the communities that these charities support. Charitable recyclers, such as Good Samaritan Industries, operate on a not-for-profit basis and through doing this provide an essential community service. Indeed, the service that they provide through these bins operates, to my mind, on three levels. There is the immediate community work that is provided through the charities, the increased recycling activity benefit, and providing these drop-off points helps to prevent incidents of illegal dumping as they offer a readily available avenue for people to dispose of perhaps unwanted goods but goods that can still have a successful second life. We would all agree on the important role that these charitable recyclers play. Indeed, as I said, by recycling material through these bins, they also prevent a significant amount of material otherwise going into landfill. I think the member for Southern River referred to 246 people with disabilities; is that correct?

Mr P. Abetz: That is Good Samaritans, plus all the other industry organisations.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There are therefore significant employment benefits for the community; 246 people with disabilities are employed through Good Samaritan Industries alone. Obviously, those organisations also provide a particularly strong community benefit, and charity bins are a vital part of that service that those organisations provide.

A major issue for charitable bin providers is illegal dumping of household and unusable rubbish at or around the recycling bins, and the clean-up for that illegal dumping is a substantial financial burden for those charitable recyclers. People are dumping produce that has no recyclable life. They are essentially just short-cutting their own tip costs and dumping those tip costs on the charitable recyclers. In my view, by taking the short way out they are actually imposing those costs on the people most in need. That dumping may also result in environmental harm. It is unsightly and it also encourages antisocial behaviour, and in some instances criminal behaviour. I understand that it is in response to these issues that the City of Joondalup is seeking to limit the operation of donation bins on its land.

The Liberal–National government also recognises the problem that sits around these charity bins. I am happy to report to the member for Southern River that we are taking action at a state level to do something about this problem for all charitable recyclers around the state. In August this year I announced a program with a specific focus to reduce illegal dumping at charity bins. This program will include grants for charitable recyclers to implement measures such as better lighting at the bins—perhaps motion-sensor lighting; in some instances fencing will assist in management; and the funding will also go into education programs to discourage illegal dumping. That is because two types of illegal dumping happen at these bins. There is deliberate dumping in that people regard the bins as an easy place to dump material that they know is rubbish. However, I recognise that in some instances people may not be dumping intentionally; for instance, they may think that an old stove has a useful second life. Part of the program, therefore, is to educate people on what is and what is not appropriate to leave at these bins. Importantly, the state government will also provide rebates to all participating charitable recyclers to help offset the costs of disposing any illegally dumped waste at landfill sites. We recognise that those charities inevitably collect a lot of items that they then have to dump, and we will rebate their tip or landfill levy costs when they have to do that.

Our focus as a state government is to work cooperatively with the charitable organisations. We want to support the important community work they do. We believe that by supporting them we are helping to protect the environment and keeping our local areas cleaner and safer by reducing the dumping of illegal waste. At the moment the Waste Authority is leading these discussions with charitable recyclers, which include the Australian Red Cross, Good Samaritan Industries, the Salvation Army, the Spinal and Limb Foundation, Anglicare WA, the St Vincent de Paul Society, Save the Children, People Who Care, the RSPCA and others.

This program will also be complemented by a new team that has been set up within the Department of Environment Regulation. We now have a specific illegal dumping task force, which will focus its activities on, for example, those areas on the peri-urban fringe that are known dumping hotspots. The team has

a range of covert cameras now that they can use as part of its activities. We will also use the team to assist in patrolling charitable bin recyclers and in some instances those covert cameras may also be an appropriate approach for those bin sites.

I understand that on Monday this week, 9 November, the City of Joondalup held a special meeting to adopt the Local Government and Public Property Amendment Local Law 2015. That local law is intended to enable the local government to make a determination to prohibit the placement of collection bins on local government property throughout the district. It is worth noting that the local law affects only City of Joondalup land. My understanding is that it is not a total ban on charitable bins within the City of Joondalup, but a ban only on its land. My electorate is largely within the City of Joondalup. In many instances those bins in the City of Joondalup are on private property, so the law will affect only those bins on the City of Joondalup land. The member read out a list of some properties that will be affected. It is not really a matter for me to comment on the city's local law; it is really a matter for the city to determine through delegated legislation provisions. However, at a state level our engagement with these charities has been well received. I am also very confident that the measures we are now initiating as a state government in the grants program we have put out in partnership with these charities will assist in addressing the problem that is being experienced, particularly across the Perth metropolitan area but also in other parts of the state. We are focused on enabling those charities to continue to do their important work.