

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT  
(BANNING PLASTIC BAGS AND OTHER THINGS) BILL 2018**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 29 March.

**The PRESIDENT:** I give the call to the Minister for Environment. I am still a bit confused about whether you are Italian or Irish!

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment)** [9.27 am]: Indeed! Let me tell you the story about my Italian heritage at some stage, Madam President, but not this morning, because today we are dealing with Hon Robin Chapple's Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018. I am very pleased to contribute to this debate. The private member's bill proposes to restrict the sale or supply of the following plastic products: plastic bags, polyethylene and polystyrene packaging, products containing microbeads, balloons and plastic drinking straws.

I say at the outset that the McGowan government recognises the environmental impacts of plastic waste, particularly the adverse effects that plastic waste has on marine life through plastic ingestion and entanglement. I am aware of studies by the CSIRO and others that have demonstrated the significant impacts of damage caused by plastic pollution. Seabirds have been found with their digestive tracts filled with plastic fragments, turtles may confuse plastic bags and balloons with jellyfish, and marine mammals and fish get entangled in lost or discarded fishing gear. In fact, in recent weeks we have seen pictures of turtles in Western Australia that have died as a result of ingesting plastic bags. We have also seen pictures from further afield of bigger mammals that have washed ashore and after they have been opened up, it has been found that they had a substantial amount of plastic inside them, particularly plastic bags.

There is significant community support for action on plastic bags and that has been growing, as people understand the environmental impacts of plastic waste and the need to stop millions of bags entering the waste stream every year. I think the figure that we talked about was 670 million single-use plastic bags that are used annually in Western Australia and upwards of seven million that end up as litter. They are the ones that are being ingested by our marine mammals and birds.

There is a move to national action across the country. At the most recent Meeting of Environment Ministers we made significant gains. Having been around the offices of environment ministers for a number of years, it has always been a frustration of mine that there is not enough action. These things have been raised at that level for at least 15 years. I have to say that the most recent meeting I took part in was a very positive one. We met with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation and, as a result of that meeting, we have set a target of 100 per cent of packaging being recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025. We have also agreed to waste-reduction strategies involving consumer awareness and education and industry leadership. That meeting advocated for the use of recycled materials, a phase out of microbeads from personal care products, and the collaboration through industry-supply chains to drive better packaging and recycling. At that meeting on 27 April this year in Melbourne, we met to set a sustainable path for Australia's recyclable waste. From my perspective, the time line we are working to is not short enough, but it certainly was a very positive meeting. The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation represents about 900 leading companies across the country that are working together to deliver this target that I mentioned previously. The ministers endorsed the development of targets for the use of recycled content in packaging, which will be closely monitored.

I want to mention microbeads in particular. We received a report that day that announced that the voluntary phase-out of microbeads, which ministers initiated in 2016—less than two years ago—is on track. At this stage, 94 per cent of cosmetic and personal care products are now microbead-free. The ministers, nationally, remain committed to eliminating the final six per cent and examining options to broaden the phase-out of the product. That is what is happening so far through that process. I am not a fan of voluntary phase-outs. I am more of a fan of using regulation and legislation. But I have to give credit to industry for phasing out 94 per cent of those products within that two-year time frame, and work will continue to phase out the rest of those products.

I want to mention briefly the Senate inquiry that reported this week and was supported by all major parties. It has recommended that all single-use plastics be banned by 2023 and that a national container deposit scheme be established. I have a list of the recommendations from that Senate inquiry. It spoke of a great number of things. Many things in the report are very positive and I am pleased that that 2023 date is two years sooner than the date agreed upon by environment ministers. I have an issue with its recommendation for a national container deposit scheme. That is a difficult issue. South Australia has had a container deposit system in place for about 40 years, the Northern Territory has had its scheme in place for three or four years now, New South Wales brought its scheme into place last year, Queensland is bringing its scheme online in the next few months and we are due to bring ours in in early 2020. Because there are different schemes in operation across the states and territories, it really would be difficult to retrofit and tell South Australia, for example, that although its scheme has been in

operation for 40 years it is no longer the best and we are going to have a national scheme. That would cause all sorts of angst and concern. The scheme in New South Wales is run by TOMRA Cleanaway. Queensland's scheme is about to start and will be run by the beverage industry. It would be a nightmare to try having a national scheme. That does not mean I do not support each state and territory having a scheme, and I am happy for those that have not come online to copy the other states. We all try to have nationally consistent schemes in this place, but what works in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Victoria does not necessarily work in Western Australia. I will not be signing up to a national container deposit scheme, but I will continue to work on the container deposit scheme that we are working on in Western Australia and that we have been consulting with industry on for most of the past few years. Internationally, we have seen some action take place.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Is the minister prepared to take an interjection?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sure.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Is each jurisdiction experimenting with different models of container deposit schemes and is Western Australia learning lessons from that involvement of experimentation by —

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Absolutely, member. Each state and territory has done things differently. We have all agreed on the products captured by the scheme—drinking receptacles between 150 millimetres and three litres, excluding wine. We have all agreed with what is in there, but each state and territory is doing it differently. New South Wales, for example, has reverse-vending machines. People put their bottles and cans into the machine and get back a voucher to either use in a shop or the refund can be donated. Queensland is doing something different. It has not started to roll out its scheme yet but it will roll out later this year. It will have about 12 per cent reverse-vending machines. That will work in some places. We have sat down and designed our scheme with industry, the community and government over the most of the past 12 months. We will learn from the schemes in those places and my plan is to cherry-pick the best bits of those schemes to ensure that we have the best scheme.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** That is one of the benefits of being a Federation rather than having a national scheme set.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Absolutely. It is about what works in those states and territories. The preference for governments in those states and territories would not necessarily be mine and they would not necessarily work for us. I am particularly keen to ensure that regional Western Australia can participate in this scheme. It will not be economical to have reverse-vending machines in every small Aboriginal community in the state, but there has to be something in place to allow those communities to pay the deposit and to get it back at the end of the day. It has been good to be able to learn from the other states. I certainly do not support a national scheme, but I do support us all acting in this regard.

I will touch briefly on the European Union. Over the past few weeks, it has made some announcements about plastic and single-use plastic. I have to put on the record that not all plastic is bad. Plastic has changed our lives in many respects and the innovation in that area has led to positive benefits in the health space, for example. But it is those single-use plastics that get used once and are then thrown away and end up in the litter stream, strewn across our roadsides or ingested by our wildlife, that we have to tackle. In an ideal world, we would re-use the plastic or, if we did not re-use it, we would recycle it by washing, flaking and remaking it into plastic to be used again. On 28 May, the European Commission issued new rules to reduce marine litter. It addressed the plastic bag issue in 2015 and 72 per cent of Europeans said that they had cut down on their use of plastic bags. The EU is now turning its attention to the 10 single-use plastic products and fishing gear that together account for 70 per cent of the marine litter in Europe. The new rules will introduce a plastic ban on certain products. The commission's press release states —

Where alternatives are readily available and affordable, single-use plastic products will be banned from the market. The ban will apply to *plastic cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws, drink stirrers and sticks for balloons* which will all have to be made exclusively from more sustainable materials instead. Single-use *drinks containers* made with plastic will only be allowed on the market if their caps and lids remain attached;

It is interesting to note that while it is looking at banning sticks for balloons, it has not announced or worked towards a ban on balloons. That is a point of difference from the Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018 brought before us by Hon Robin Chapple. The European Commission is also looking to introduce rules around consumption reduction targets, stating —

Member States will have to reduce the use of plastic *food containers and drinks cups*. They can do so by setting national reduction targets, making alternative products available at the point of sale, or ensuring that single-use plastic products cannot be provided free of charge;

It has also introduced obligations for producers —

Producers will help cover the costs of waste management and clean-up, as well as awareness raising measures for *food containers, packets and wrappers (such as for crisps and sweets), drinks containers and cups, tobacco products with filters (such as cigarette butts), wet wipes, balloons, and lightweight*

*plastic bags*. The industry will also be given incentives to develop less polluting alternatives for these products;

The EU has also introduced collection targets —

Member States will be obliged to collect 90% of single-use plastic *drinks bottles* by 2025, for example through deposit refund schemes;

Many European countries have a container deposit scheme and they are different in each state. A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure—I will mention this later in the evening—of going on a trip to Europe and seeing some of these schemes in operation. For example, places such as Lithuania have reverse vending machines. Everyone who sells cans or bottles has to take them back. That really has made for a very high recycling rate. It has reached the figure of about 92 per cent over the past two years. In different European states and countries, that figure is obviously different. The EU has also introduced labelling requirements —

Certain products will require a clear and standardised labelling which indicates how waste should be disposed, the negative environmental impact of the product, and the presence of plastics in the products. This will apply to *sanitary towels, wet wipes and balloons*;

The EU also introduced awareness-raising measures —

Member States will be obliged to raise consumers' awareness about the negative impact of littering of single-use plastics and fishing gear as well as about the available re-use systems and waste management options for all these products.

For **fishing gear**, which accounts for 27% of all beach litter, the Commission aims to complete the existing policy framework with producer responsibility schemes for fishing gear containing plastic. Producers of plastic fishing gear will be required to cover the costs of waste collection from port reception facilities and its transport and treatment. They will also cover the costs of awareness-raising measures.

These draft guidelines will go to the European Parliament and Council for adoption. It is interesting to see what the European Commission is doing. It certainly believes that its directive will bring both economic and environmental benefits. The new measures will —

- avoid the emission of 3.4 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent;
- avoid environmental damages which would cost the equivalent of €22 billion by 2030;
- save consumers a projected €6.5 billion.

That is something to remember. Obviously, this is about protecting our unique environment for future generations, but there are economic benefits to be had from phasing out this material from acting in this space. There is also the benefit of a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Europe has at least acted and what we have said in the last few weeks is that we will look to Europe and the action happening there. We will start a consultation with the community about what next for us in the phasing out of plastic or single-use plastic.

We all know volunteers who spend thousands of hours every year cleaning our beaches and removing plastic waste from our coastlines and waterways. A number of great organisations are out there, such as Tangaroa Blue Foundation, Keep Australia Beautiful Council and others, which not only clean up the waste, but also carefully record the type of waste and, where possible, the origin of that waste. Data collected by CSIRO in 2017, I believe, and which was reported in the final report of the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, indicates that up to three-quarters of the litter polluting our coastlines and marine environments is plastic. High amounts of litter occur on beaches near urban areas, and most of this plastic originates from land-based sources, so items such as plastic bags, again, drink bottles, lolly wrappers, drinking straws, fishing line and bait wrappers are commonly littered. Commercial and recreational fishing activities also contribute to this pollution. We find things such as broken crab and lobster pots, ropes, fishing line, nets, floats, glowsticks, bait boxes and straps regularly feature on our beaches. Although I am not proposing to ban those things, a conversation certainly needs to occur with both our recreational and commercial fishing industries in this state to work out how we can work together to ensure that we are not leaving this stuff behind when we are fishing commercially or recreationally, because at the end of the day, it ends up in our waterways and is ingested by our marine life and animals. We also see marine debris originate from international shipping, and occasionally we see waste disposal of it at sea. This includes things such as medical waste, fluorescent lights, food and cooking utensils, tools and containers. This information came out of a “West Australian Beach Clean-up Report 2016”, which can be accessed on the Tangaroa Blue website. If anyone wants to check in to see the facts or the evidence associated with these issues, it is readily available online and I am happy to put them in the right direction.

The marine environment is the focus of this information because it is where we are aware of the most devastating impacts of plastic pollution. Before I discuss the issues around the private member's bill, I want to highlight briefly

how government, business and the community are taking action to help change behaviours and reduce the environmental impact of single-use plastic waste. As members in this place would know, the McGowan Labor government is progressing its commitment to implement a container deposit scheme as part of its plan to address plastic pollution. We made that commitment at the last election and, in fact, the previous government made that commitment too, but it just did not get a chance to act before the election and the change of government. I am aware that Hon Sally Talbot in this place has previously moved a private member's bill to get Parliament to act on introducing a container deposit scheme. It was unsuccessful at the time, but I am pleased that now, Hon Sally Talbot, we are in a position to —

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot:** There has been cultural change.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** There has been cultural change. There also has been societal change. I am pleased that Hon Sally Talbot's work has not been in vain and we will get to deliver on the outcome that the member chose to deliver on.

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot:** Thank you, minister.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I thank the member for her work in the past on this matter. We are working on our scheme. The scheme will reduce litter and increase recycling rates. More than 90 per cent of the respondents to an online survey put out last year supported a container deposit scheme in Western Australia. Under our scheme, consumers, like those in other states, will be able to receive a 10c refund on all eligible beverage containers, including containers for soft drinks, flavoured milk, bottled water, beer, cider and sports drinks. My view is that the container deposit scheme will contribute to the protection of Western Australia's unique environment and wildlife and our spectacular scenery. It will save those things from the impacts of litter. The scheme also has significant business development and job creation opportunities. I think I have said in this place previously that there are three times more jobs associated with recycling than there are associated with landfill. That is significant. As a government that is focused on job creation in this state, it is certainly pleasing that we are helping to protect the state's unique environment and also creating jobs. It is a win-win for the environment and the economy in this state.

As members know—I thank Hon Robin Chapple for his placement of a bag on our seats this morning—we are implementing a lightweight plastic bag ban through the Environmental Protection (Plastic Bags) Regulations 2018, which are due to commence on 1 July. It is disappointing to see both Hon Robin Chapple and Hon Aaron Stonehouse move disallowance motions to those regulations today. I have not seen the proposed impact of Hon Robin Chapple's disallowance motion. I suspect it means that a barrier bag will no longer be excluded from being a prescribed plastic bag, so it would be subject to the offence provisions in part 2 of the regulations. Barrier bags are essentially those bags we get when we buy some meat at the deli in the supermarket. The effect of Hon Robin Chapple's disallowance motion, if it passes down the track, would be to criminalise giving out that bag. If someone were to give out a barrier bag, they would face a \$5 000 fine. It is a very punitive measure. We and governments across the country have not banned those barrier bags for reasons of hygiene. We are all aware of the types of illnesses that we can get from things such as uncooked meat, chicken—whatever. These bags are necessary. Could we use fewer of them? Possibly. We could certainly use fewer bags for our fruit and vegetables, for example. I have said before in this place—probably last week during the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations hearings—and I will say it again: I think the amount of plastic used on our fruit and veg in this state is scandalous. It frustrates me greatly when I go to the fruit and veg aisle and see four apples or whatever on a polystyrene tray in plastic cling wrap. It also frustrates me greatly when I go to buy mushrooms, for example. Obviously people can pick their own loose mushrooms and put them in a brown paper bag, but they also have mushrooms wrapped in plastic, plastic, plastic. Those are often cheaper; goodness knows how it can be cheaper to place them in a tray, because it obviously costs something for a worker to put them in there and for the plastic cling wrap to go over the top, but for whatever reason, it is often the case that it is cheaper to buy them in those packs than it is to put them in the paper bag.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** They are the less perfect objects, I think.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I do not actually think they are. I do not think they are less perfect; it would obviously cost the supermarkets more to place them in those things, but for whatever reason, they charge people less to choose their own. Anyway, I refuse to take the ones wrapped in plastic; I put my own in a bag. I would like to see more people doing that, and we will certainly work with the supermarkets over the next little while to see what we can do to phase out the use of single-use plastic for fruit and vegetables. I have to say, to the credit of Coles in particular, it has indicated that over the next 18 months to two years it will reduce its use of single-use plastic and look at alternatives, and that is a good thing.

As I said, our bag ban will begin from 1 July. From this weekend, single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags will be banned in this state. Although those bags make up a small percentage of the waste in litter streams, they can have a disproportionate impact on the environment, including the aforementioned effects on our marine life and our birds et cetera. They break up into smaller pieces and become microplastic pollution, which is then ingested by smaller animals and can move into the human food chain. The scariest thing is that not only are birds,

mammals and fish ingesting microplastics, we, too, are ingesting them. I dare say that somewhere down the track, some medical or health professional will tell us that what we have been doing for a long time is a danger, but we will leave that up to learned people in the future. However, we are taking action at the moment to ensure that we move away from that and that single-use plastic bags do not end up in the litter stream and being ingested by us at the end of the day.

We did a fair bit of community consultation to gauge the community's response to the introduction of a ban on single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags, and around 95 per cent of the more than 4 400 respondents to our survey supported the proposed ban, and 92 per cent supported banning biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags, which also break down to form microplastics, so there is significant support out there. There are a number of people in the community—including in this place, as we know from Hon Aaron Stonehouse's disallowance motion this morning—who do not like this ban. It might be an inconvenience or at least an issue for some people—it possibly will be—but other countries have done it for a long time and I think we can do it, too. I know Hon Donna Faragher is looking forward to 1 July and bringing her bags to the supermarket.

**Hon Donna Faragher:** I have so many of them it's unbelievable.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The single-use ones?

**Hon Donna Faragher:** No!

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The other ones. Good!

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** That's right. You need to recycle the recycling bags.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** That is probably our next thing, but I know that as a former Minister for Environment, Hon Donna Faragher will be onside from 1 July. She has already been doing it, but from 1 July she can take pride in the fact that in this state we will no longer be issuing single-use plastic bags. It is a good thing for us, a good thing for our kids, and a good thing for the environment.

So, 95 per cent of those respondents supported the proposed ban, and 92 per cent supported banning biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags. For more than a decade, communities, state, territory and commonwealth governments and the retail industry have attempted to slow the consumption of lightweight plastic shopping bags and their progress into the litter stream. There have been voluntary codes of practice in place for retailers that, in some cases, were initially successful but were not continued. Promoting alternatives to plastic bags has had moderate success; however, the number of lightweight plastic shopping bags used every year continues to grow and a ban really has become necessary. As we know, the community supports that too.

These new regulations allow for a more responsive approach than new legislation would. They have a greater ability to be updated to ensure that the ban meets any future identified need to further reduce plastic bag litter. For example, in future the bag type, thickness or material could all be changed; regulations give us the opportunity to do that. With new legislation we would also have to have further regulations; or, if there are no regulations, we would have to bring in another piece of legislation, and we all know how difficult it sometimes is to get legislation through this place.

The McGowan government's lightweight plastic bag ban will prohibit the supply of plastic shopping bags that are made in whole or in part of plastic, have a thickness of 35 microns or less, and have handles. The ban includes biodegradable, degradable, compostable and photodegradable bags, all of which break down into microplastics. Our Western Australian ban is consistent with the approach taken in other Australian jurisdictions. It will allow major retailers and food outlets in Western Australia to implement the same changes as have been implemented in other states and territories and will minimise the cost of operating under different regulatory regimes. That is again an important point to make: when we have nationally consistent legislation and regulations in this space, it will make things easier for the big companies that operate across different states. Obviously a number of other states already have a ban in place. Queensland is also coming on board from 1 July, and I was pleased to read last night that Victoria has announced that it also will finally have a ban, although it will be put in place a little later. Nationally consistent legislation will really help companies operating across different states to have the same approach across the board. Having worked for environment ministers, I remember that industry has rarely been onside in this general space, particularly with regard to the container deposit space. Big beverage companies have fought against the introduction of such schemes for many, many years, and it is pleasing that during my time as Minister for Environment, those companies have changed their tune and are now on board and are seeking to help shape or run schemes in different states and territories.

I know from being a minister in this place that consultation is vital. We need to bring at least 50 per cent plus one on board. As a minister, I have prided myself on the level of consultation that has been undertaken with both the community and industry over the last 14 months on the banning of lightweight plastic bags and the container

deposit scheme. We need to have people at the table and in the tent and we need to bring the community along with us to ensure that we can do this.

I will again touch on the issue of barrier bags. They are required for food safety. Bin liners and thicker plastic department store bags are not included in the statewide ban. However, as I pointed out earlier on, regulations will allow for a more responsive approach than would a new act, and they provide greater ability to update legislation in the future. Those are not included at this stage, but we will keep an eye on the issue and work with industry to see where else we might go.

At the national level, we are working with other states and territories and retailers to reduce and phase out thicker department store bags. Those conversations are happening at the moment across the country between the environment ministers and the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation Ltd to see how we might phase them out. That work is at an early stage, but I have to say that we are very hopeful that retailers will understand the need to phase out the use of these bags and to find alternatives without the need to regulate. Can it happen? I used to be sceptical and not so sure about leaving things up to industry, but again I have to say, having seen the efforts and work by industry on the phase-out of microbeads and the fact that 94 per cent of them have been phased out over the last two years, I have a level of confidence now that I did not have previously. We will continue that work and there is a commitment from federal, territory and state environment ministers to continue that work. In fairness, the community demands it. Although support for the banning of these bags is not as significant as it is for single-use lightweight plastic bags, there is certainly a growing appetite in the community to act and to take further action.

Hon Robin Chapple's bill seeks to ban plastic bags, plastic drinking straws and balloons. Exceptions apply to medical or health-related products; policing and security products; meteorological balloons; plastic bags that are made wholly from biodegradable material that is suitable for composting; and classes of products exempted by the minister pursuant to section 6(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1986.

The bill seeks to prohibit microbead plastics. As I have said, work to phase out microbeads in cosmetic and cleaning products is well advanced. We have across the country been working on that and we remain committed to eliminating the final six per cent of microbead plastic products. We will also examine options to broaden the phase-out to other products.

As I have mentioned, the bill also proposes to ban balloons. Again, that is different from the action that is planned in Europe. I am on the record as saying that I am a parent of a child aged three and a half, and I have participated in parties at which balloons have been flown.

Several members interjected.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I probably have blown up a few balloons in my time, too, can I say, not only at children's parties, but also at the occasional party stall and at fairs right around my electorate. I will continue to have conversations with the community on the phase-out of balloons. A number of parents have suggested that I would be a party pooper if I banned the use of balloons. Equally, other parents have said the opposite—that they would like balloons to be banned.

**Hon Alison Xamon:** That is because they care about their children's future.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will take that interjection, because the member is suggesting that somehow I do not care about my child's future, and that is not the truth.

However, there is a range of views in the community about balloons. I do agree that too much helium is used. Helium-filled balloons are the ones that end up in our waterways and are ingested by marine animals and by fish. I support the activity that is being undertaken by a number of local governments around the state. Historically, balloon releases have occurred as part of community events and commemorative occasions. The Western Australian Local Government Association has undertaken work on this issue since about 2015, when it recommended that local governments not organise or approve the release of helium-filled balloons at events. That is a good thing. Local governments such as the Towns of Cottesloe and Victoria Park have taken action in this space. I support them in taking that action. However, I am not proposing to ban balloons today. I believe that we should all be very conscious of our use of balloons, particularly helium-filled balloons, and should phase them out. However, a statewide ban on balloons is not being considered by the government at this stage.

The bill also proposes a ban on plastic drinking straws. Plastic drinking straws are generally an unnecessary single-use item. Straws find their way into the litter stream, particularly as an element of fast-food waste, and add to the number of plastic items littering our environment. In 2016, 13 per cent of littered takeaway food items were plastic drinking straws. Again, this work is available. It came out of a survey on *National Geographic*. I can provide the information to anybody who wants it. It is relatively simple for people to refuse straws and for businesses to provide straws only when requested. It is pleasing that the Parliament acted recently—I think at the behest of Hon Diane Evers—and is no longer giving out plastic straws. It is providing paper straws, but only when

someone asks for a straw. So that is a double win or double bonus. Should we ban plastic straws, as this bill proposes to do? I believe we could do more work on straws. I propose to work with industry, the Australian Hospitality Association and others over the coming months to see what we can do to reduce the use of plastic straws and to encourage small businesses to provide a paper straw option.

However, there is a problem in that many people with disability and many seniors in Western Australians use plastic bendable straws. I have not seen paper alternatives for those straws. I happy to commit to work with industry to look at what other options are available, particularly as Minister for Disability Services, but also for senior Western Australians, to ensure that if we do phase out the use of plastic straws, other options are available and we are not creating issues for those big groups in our community, bearing in mind that one in five people has a disability. That is not to say that one in five people would use a plastic bendable straw. However, a number of Western Australians use those plastic straws, and we need to find an alternative. We do as a government support businesses changing the way in which they provide single-use plastic items for their customers. We also support raising awareness of the wasteful nature of plastic drinking straws. We are considering further action, but I think that further action will be working with industry in this state, and with the Australian Hospitality Association and others, to see what we can do to phase out the use of those things.

The bill also proposes to ban the use of polystyrene and polyethylene packaging. I assume that this aspect of the proposed bill is aimed at the over-packaging by supermarkets of fresh produce with single-use plastics. Polyethylene is generally considered a recyclable plastic, and polystyrene less so. Like other plastics, both polystyrene and polyethylene end up in our environment, and both contribute to land and marine pollution. There are additional issues with polystyrene in that, because of its expanded rigid form, it occupies a significant volume of landfill, and it is rarely recycled. Those plastics are also light and therefore highly mobile, which contributes to windblown plastic pollution. As I said earlier, the use of these plastics, particularly in packaging fruit and vegetables, is scandalous. I would encourage consumers to vote with their feet and use their purchasing power to buy unpackaged fruit and vegetables and to demand change from their supermarkets. It is not the intention of the government to ban these products at this stage, particularly if they are necessary to maintain food hygiene. However, I do support moves by the community to demand a greater commitment from retailers to sustainability and waste reduction. We are at the national level working on what we can do to phase out these products and to ensure that if these products are used, they are 100 per cent recyclable or compostable or reusable in the future.

On that note, I place on the record and commend the decision by Woolworths, Coles and IGA to voluntarily phase out the use of single-use plastic bags ahead of the plastic bag ban that will come into operation on 1 July. It is great to see that those major grocery chains are getting behind this push to reduce the scourge of plastic on our environment. Even though Hon Aaron Stonehouse does not agree, I think they are acting because the community demands it.

**Hon Aaron Stonehouse:** I do accept that.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Good. They have acted. It was pleasing that after I phoned them over 12 months ago now to say that it was my intention to bring in this ban in this state and to ask them what was their view, to their credit they both responded positively and announced that that is what they would do. There are retailers who have been doing good stuff for a very long time. Part of the Wesfarmers family is Bunnings. Bunnings has changed its practices as well over the past few years. If members are lucky enough to have a Bunnings in their community, they would know that people have not been able to get single-use plastic bags at Bunnings for some time. Bunnings makes available empty cardboard boxes at the front of the store and people can either use those boxes or spend some money and buy a green bag. I hope that other retailers, such as Coles and Woolworths, will also offer this option to consumers over the months and years ahead. At the moment, all the products that come into their shops are in boxes. I presume those boxes are broken down and sent off for recycling. I think consumers would support the option of those boxes being kept at the front of the store so that they can use them to take home their shopping and recycle them in their own bins. It is to the credit of some of the smaller IGA stores that they offer that option already. I hope some of the bigger supermarkets will do that as well. I have heard people say that they do not have the space to do it. I think they could make the space to do it.

**Hon Donna Faragher:** Just for the sake of clarity, with respect to the single-use plastic bags, which will obviously end as of 1 July, is there a mechanism as to the size of the bags? I recall that there was some concern, particularly in South Australia, where they actually phased out single-use plastic bags and then some slightly thicker plastic bags were still able to be utilised. One of the ways that some businesses were getting around it was by offering those bags at no cost. Is that included here?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** What the regulations state—not the bill—is that the ban applies to bags of less than 35 microns. The single-use bags that are available at the cash registers are banned. The legislation does not ban thicker ones. What Coles in particular has done is to put a fee on the thicker ones. It is a 15c fee, with 10c going to charity and 5c covering the cost of the bag. In places like Ireland, which just brought in a fee for single-use plastic bags rather than banning them, there was a significant decrease in the number of people taking a bag. We

have kind of got both. We are banning bags based on the thickness. We are open to looking at it. The regulations allow us to monitor whether there is a significant uptake in those thicker bags, even though people are paying for them. If that is the case, we can go back and put some more regulations in place.

**Hon Donna Faragher:** I know that that was an issue in South Australia in the early days—people were getting around the regulations with the thicker bags.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I think that has been the case in some places. We are going to monitor that. Certainly by retailers putting a fee on those thicker bags, I think people will vote with their feet and will not want to pay a fee for a bag, even if some of the cost is going to charity, so they will bring their own. I have spent more time in supermarkets in the past 12 months, and particularly in the last month, than I have done probably in my life. It is very pleasing to see people already doing the right thing. When we gave out some bags to the community in Port Hedland on Friday, I was particularly pleased to see young people coming in with their bags, in advance of the ban, and doing their shopping. I am very conscious of ensuring that we do not move from the single-use, less-than-35-micron plastic bags to the thicker ones in big numbers. We will keep an eye on that. I want to place on the record that those major grocery chains have got behind this push to reduce the scourge of plastic on our environment.

Regulation for the public good does have a very important role to play, but it should be used only after robust consideration and the expiration of alternative options. We are not ready to expand bans to other plastic products at this time, although I place on the record that we are doing a range of work. We are consulting with the community and working with our federal, state and territory colleagues on a national level to see what we can do collectively to ban this stuff. We are also working with industry in Western Australia to see what we can do.

I want to briefly mention the China Waste Taskforce, which my parliamentary secretary, Reece Whitby, is chairing at the moment. That came out of China's decision to stop taking certain types of waste—that is, waste that had higher than a certain contamination threshold. That has caused issues for companies around the world and across Australia, but less so in Western Australia because not as much of our waste went there. However, it did cause us some concern, but that has also created an opportunity. The member for Baldivis is meeting with the task force, which is made up of industry, community and local government representatives, to work out what we can do in the short, medium and long term to ensure that we are dealing with the issue. Some of that involves educating the community about what we can and cannot recycle. Far too many of us think that everything can go in a recycling bin, but at this stage it cannot. That does lead to contamination. We are also looking at the types of things that government can do to foster innovation and create opportunities for industries to grow in this state. One positive from a container deposit scheme will be that whoever runs the scheme will have to make sure that the material is recycled. As I briefly mentioned earlier, I was in Europe a couple of weeks ago to look at some of the waste facilities over there. People were very generous with their time and with the information they shared with us. The task is probably not as onerous as I had first imagined. The bureaucrats in this state are a little uneasy about the government putting money on the table to encourage industry to grow, given that some years ago money was put into a glass recycling facility that fell over when China decided to pay more for glass. They are conscious of that. I think that we have a real opportunity in this state to create an industry. It may well be that we have to work with South Australia or the Northern Territory to ensure that we have the volume of waste that is needed, but certainly those opportunities exist. I am making sure that, as Minister for Environment, we are working on those. That task force is good. It is meeting monthly, I think. Hopefully over the next couple of months, there will be some announcements about what we should do in that space to help industry and to mitigate the risks associated with China's decision, which may create opportunities to have our own recycling facility onshore or allow for our material to be source-separated so that it is less contaminated, ensuring that there are markets for it overseas.

To finish, I agree with Hon Robin Chapple on the importance of reducing plastic pollution. I acknowledge the efforts he has gone to in preparing this bill. I appreciate the bag that he gave us today. However, the government will not be supporting the bill today. We are doing further work in this space. We will bring further regulations to this Parliament in the coming months. We will also continue to have a dialogue with the community over coming months. We will learn from the announcements from Europe and we will see what next we can do. Together, we are committed to acting on single-use plastics in this state. We will continue our efforts in Western Australia. Our waste strategy is due out in the next few months. We have a litter prevention strategy that looks to reduce the amount of waste generated. We want to prevent littering. We want to increase the recovery of materials from the waste stream. We look forward to this weekend's ban and our upcoming container deposit scheme. With those words, I will conclude my remarks.

**HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan)** [10.16 am]: I rise to indicate my wholehearted support for this visionary and important private member's bill, which has been put forward by my colleague Hon Robin Chapple. The Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018 seeks to amend the



Environmental Protection Act 1986. It is important. It will attempt to restrict the supply of plastic bags, balloons, plastic drinking straws, and polyethylene and polystyrene packaging, and prohibit the supply of products containing plastic microbeads. I think that history is going to look on this bill kindly. I recognise that we are right in the middle of a public debate on this. As usual, the Greens are taking the lead in this area. I think we will ultimately find that these changes will occur, but hopefully sooner rather than later.

As has been said, from next week—1 July 2018—the supply of lightweight plastic bags will be banned in WA. This legislation is generally supported by the community and industry and will bring WA in line with South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. The problem, of course, is that plastic shopping bags do not break down and have a devastating impact on marine wildlife and birds. They are far too often mistaken for jellyfish, particularly the small bags that are used to package fruit and vegetables. Those bags are ingested by turtles, birds, seals and whales. Because they cannot be digested, they stay in the animal's gut, blocking it, and the animals slowly die. It is a terrible death. Anyone who spends any time on our coastline or riverbanks, especially in urban areas, will have seen plastic bags or shreds of plastic bags. The ban is a positive step to try to prevent this sort of needless pollution. But we can, and we do need to, go further.

The community has responded positively to the plastic bag ban. Through voluntary community action, the community is showing that it has a strong appetite to go further to tackle the other visible forms of litter that exist in our surroundings. People have for some time been creating alternatives to using all disposable plastic bags and not just the ones that will be banned as of 1 July. Many cafes, bars and restaurants, and customers themselves, are declining to use plastic straws with their drinks. It is good that the Parliament has now sought to lead the way in the banning of plastic straws in our immediate surrounds. Thanks go to my colleague Hon Diane Evers for her efforts to change that within our Parliament.

A community-led campaign to stop using balloons, particularly releasing balloons into the atmosphere, has gained traction and several Western Australian local councils have now banned balloon releases. People are beginning to favour using reusable decorations and bunting instead of balloons for their children's parties and various celebrations, and are considering new ways to commemorate and symbolise the passing of their loved ones, such as tossing flowers into the ocean instead of releasing helium balloons into the sky, which can cause so much damage. Where possible, people are lobbying their local shops and suppliers to reduce polyethylene and polystyrene packaging and, in some cases, this action is also being led by suppliers.

I want to give my thanks to many people and groups for doing this important work. In that, I include Sea Shepherd Australia's marine debris campaign. Members of the Western Australian public understand and care about the problem of plastic waste and I think they want to see change.

The opportunity to undertake that change is now. The Premier himself has recognised that there is an appetite to go further. He now has a KeepCup—good on him—and has that suggested that further government restrictions on plastic products are on the way. The Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018 presents that opportunity, so I am very keen to hear the government's response, but I am disappointed that it is indicating it is not prepared to support the bill at this stage. Who knows? The passage of time may change that view. We are intelligent people who love our marine life and wild places, so we can begin to do things better.

I bring to the Premier's attention an article in Saturday's *The Weekend West* about the Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School in his Rockingham electorate, which has adopted a goal of being completely plastic-free by 2020. This year the school introduced a rule requiring students to take home any plastic packaging used for wrapping food. If food waste cannot be fed to the school's chickens or worms or be composted, it has to go home, and the canteen is using paper bags and compostable containers as much as possible. The upshot is that less packaging is being used and the school of 750 students has halved the amount of rubbish it sends to landfill. It also reported that the school grounds are much cleaner.

We can do things differently. It is only a short time ago that our community did not rely so heavily on single-use plastics. Indeed, I am old enough, Madam President, to remember the Charlie Carter's paper bags being the norm when my parents brought home the vegetables and groceries. I am showing my age; I recognise that, but it is true I have much life experience!

**The PRESIDENT:** Member, some of us can remember picketing Charlie Carter's too.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Madam President, I was in primary school then.

Cutting out disposable plastics will improve our amenity and health, as well as help our wildlife, so we really need to look at going down that path.

I will say a little bit about plastic microbeads. This bill would also ban microbeads. They are small, manufactured plastic particles, usually less than two millimetres in diameter, which do not degrade or dissolve in water. From around the 1990s, microbeads were added to face washes, personal care and cleaning products as an abrasive or exfoliant to bulk out the product, prolong shelf life or enable the timed release of active ingredients. As most sewage treatments do not capture microbeads, they end up in the ocean where microbeads are very good at absorbing toxins in the water. They can thus end up absorbing more toxins from the surrounding ocean. Being tiny, the microbeads are then eaten by fish and the toxins enter the fish's flesh. In this way, the toxins are passed up the marine food chain, including into fish species that humans eat. The good news is that, following the lead of other countries in banning microbeads, including the United Kingdom and United States, microbeads are being voluntarily phased out in Australia. This bill would make sure they were eliminated entirely, and not before time.

Some important change has been achieved on microbeads, but more is required. I take the opportunity to point out that all plastic waste eventually becomes microplastics, so we need action on other plastic items too. Our waste problem will only get worse unless the government starts to show strong leadership. Support for this bill would represent that opportunity.

Nationally, this week the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications completed its inquiry into waste and recycling in Australia. It has called for a ban on single-use plastics by 2023, a national cash-for-containers scheme, and mandatory targets for the recycled content of materials bought by the federal government. These are important steps and achieving those outcomes will take cooperation by the state and federal governments. Again, the McGowan government could show its willingness and leadership in this space by changing its mind and agreeing to pass the Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018.

I wanted to make those brief comments. I think that people are generally fairly devastated when they see footage of turtles with straws up their noses. I think people are distressed when they see that sort of degradation of our precious environment and the apparently limitless amount of plastic floating around in our oceans. It is an ugly and distressing sight. Nationally and overseas, at times traditionally conservative parties are increasingly coming out to stop the scourge of plastic, particularly single-use plastic. Importantly, scientists are now making it clear that this action is necessary. Increasing numbers of people in the community approve actions that are deemed to be necessary in this space.

I urge this state government to consider what message it will send to the Western Australian public because I think it is the wrong message to send that it does not support action in this space. What message would that send to the schoolchildren in the Premier's own electorate, who have shown such leadership at their level to take action to cut out disposable plastics? They are the future; good on them. I think that people will be closely watching this debate. We have seen an enormous shift in public sentiment around the issue of single-use plastics even just in the last few years. As usual, the Greens are taking the lead and I look forward to ensuring that government shows leadership as well.

**HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [10.28 am]: I have only a short time, so I will put just a few comments on the record. I genuinely look forward to the Environmental Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018 coming back again, Hon Robin Chapple, because I think that the comments I made earlier about the need for cultural change is probably the most important thing. That is one of the things that we can do in this place. We tend to view the role of parliamentarians as being agents of change by passing legislation, but sometimes we just have to have these conversations and we just have to do good, old-fashioned consciousness-raising about these issues.

A number of points made by Hon Stephen Dawson in his general survey of the move towards a changed attitude to plastics show that at least some of the change that we see is brought about by individual commitment rather than legislative change. But, as Hon Stephen Dawson said, there is a role for educative laws. I certainly think that there is a place in chambers such as this all over the world for informed debate on removing environmental hazards, but also on things like sugar content in drinks, fat consumption, obesity and all sorts of different measures that rely on people making the changes themselves. Their path along that route to change can be eased by changing public opinion about these things.

I have been on this mission for some years, as a lot of honourable members know. I introduced a bill for a container deposit scheme and it got some considerable debate in the other place, which I was very pleased about. It is with genuine delight and relief that I look to my colleagues in the Labor Party and see that these measures are now being put into statutory form. I look forward to seeing the legislation and participating in not only the parliamentary debate, but also the campaign to get people to embrace the idea of changing their practices in their homes and workplaces. We have taken some steps. With all these kinds of social changes, I think it is inevitable that in some sense the legislation will never go quite as far as some people would like. I issue something in the nature of a warning to my colleagues in this place who might be on the progressive end of these changes on all sorts of

matters, but specifically on the reduction of plastic, that sometimes they just have to take small steps at the start. We have to bring the community with us. We have to make it possible for people to make more radical changes in their lives if that is what they want to do, but we have to fundamentally make it easy for people to do it. That has always been my concern about some of the intents to legislate for the reduction of plastic, whether it is plastic bags, straws, bottles, balloons or takeaway food containers. We have to make it easy for people. It has been my longstanding criticism of the system in South Australia, which is often lauded as a role model for the rest of the country. Actually, its container deposit scheme is not that good. It is run by industry, for heaven's sake. That is not necessarily a model that we would want to adopt. These are the discussions we have to have. If we talk to the local scouts, who have been recycling for years, about container deposits and plastic bag bans, we find that they are right there. But these are complicated matters for legislators. The community deserves a legislature that is capable of getting its head around the complex things. I welcome the debate on this matter that we are having today.

There is one thing that disturbed me after the McGowan Labor government made the announcement about banning single-use plastic bags. As honourable members know, my home is in Denmark in the south west. Denmark is renowned as being a bit of an activist community. We are very green, not necessarily in the political sense, but environmental consciousness is pretty high in quite a significant majority of the community in Denmark. Only a matter of a few weeks after Hon Stephen Dawson made the announcement about plastic bags, I walked into the local IGA and found that the use of glad wrap-type plastic had absolutely exploded. I could not believe it. I was looking at the fresh fruit and vegetables—I know that Hon Stephen Dawson talked about this—that are displayed around the edges of the supermarket. As we all know, the fresh stuff can be found around the edges of the supermarket; people should never go down the middle aisles. Is this news to Hon Tjorn Sibma?

**Hon Tjorn Sibma:** No. I just don't know why you would stick to the periphery.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** If people stick to the outside of the supermarket, they will keep their calorie intake down. I was walking around the edges of the supermarket in the big IGA in Denmark and I found it was awash with plastic. I thought: what on earth is going on here? I took some photos. I do not know whether people raised a few eyebrows at what I was doing, but I was taking photos of bananas wrapped in plastic and two or three sticks of celery wrapped in plastic. I sent the photos to Hon Stephen Dawson. I am not claiming credit for the reduction in that aspect of plastic use, but I have noticed that it is now being talked about everywhere; that is, we do not need to wrap an avocado in half a kilogram of plastic to sell it or keep it fresh. We have to keep on with this. We have to point out that it is wrong.

One of the ideas I have often toyed with in recent years is a bit of a civil disobedience campaign whereby we stand at the checkouts and unwrap the plastic on everything we have bought and leave it at the checkout. I ran this idea past one of the national activist groups in Australia that have campaigned for years about the reduction of plastic, and it was a little uneasy to see a member of Parliament advocating a civil disobedience campaign. Hon Stephen Dawson is absolutely right; we need to continue to work with the producers to get this done. We have to make the point that it is not good enough to arrive home with our shopping and half fill a rubbish bin with the plastic that we have discarded from things like avocado and celery. It is just insane. We have to change all that.

I look forward, perhaps in the second half of the year, to having another session like this and I will resume my remarks then.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.