

PLASTIC WASTE — DOGGY DO LITTER BAGS

Grievance

MR J.N. HYDE (Perth — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.15 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for the Environment. My grievance concerns our need to think in a more global way about decreasing the use and production of plastic. I want to address the very important issue—I know it is an issue close to the minister's heart—of doggy do plastic bags in our parks. Although our jihad on plastic shopping bags is laudable, we also need to look at the entire array of plastic used in our society. I want to focus today on doggy do litter bags.

We are all aware of the huge damage that plastic causes to the environment: the excessive environmental and raw material cost of producing plastic in the first instance and the long-term problem of dealing with its disposal. The good strong steps we have taken in the voluntary reduction of shopping bags, which will hopefully soon involve a more comprehensive tax or ban on them, has made a difference. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to look at other ways in which we can decrease our dependency on plastic.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: We could take a device for dogs to put into their bottoms when they go out for a walk.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Yes. The use of plastic doggy do bags is an environmental extravagance, minister. Plastic doggy do bags, such as the bags I am holding, are an extravagance. Although dog excrement would break down naturally after five days in sunlight, by enclosing the excrement in plastic that goes into landfill, we are delaying the process and choking landfill unnecessarily. We need to keep our parks clean and usable and we need to assist dog owners to be responsible for Muttley, Dino, Lassie, and, of course, Scooby-Doo.

Mr R.C. Kucera: And Bobby.

Mrs C.A. Martin: What about Deefa?

Mr R.C. Kucera: What about Bonnie?

Mrs C.A. Martin: What about Deefa—D for dog?

Mr J.N. HYDE: I thank members for their assistance in this grievance.

Therefore, Minister for the Environment, what is the solution? I will tell the minister what the solution will be. Just as we have cut down on plastic shopping bags by recycling cardboard boxes and paper bags, we can enjoy similar sustainability benefits by switching from plastic to sustainable paper and cardboard doggy do bags. I am holding up an example of this kind of doggy do bag from Slovakia. It is a waterproof bag that is used with a recyclable cardboard scooper.

Mrs C.A. Martin interjected.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I am very aware that many councils, such as the Town of Vincent in my area, use a biodegradable plastic bag, which is laudable. However, as with many biodegradable plastics, these bags are produced with chemicals, are biodegradable only to a degree and are very costly. These biodegradable plastic bags do not have the environmental benefits of recyclable paper and cardboard. This is very much a sustainable way of dealing with the collection of dog excrement at the source. It is clean, it is hygienic and it is easily disposable.

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is a very serious matter. I have to respond to the member's grievance and I am finding it very difficult to concentrate with members talking to each other by way of interjection.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, but perhaps we might listen to the member with the call.

Debate Resumed

Mr J.N. HYDE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate your protection.

By the time the dog excrement in the easy to break down cardboard and paper ends up in landfill—if it has not been recycled more easily—it takes up less landfill space and it does not add to the amount of wasteful plastic by-product; even if biodegradable, plastic still has residue issues.

I would like to thank a couple of my local residents, Dr Harry Clements-Shepherd and his wife, Helen Bryant, for drawing my attention to this important issue. Like many inner-city residents they have a concern for the environment. I think it is an indication of the growing awareness that, as we go further and further down the sustainability path, people are looking at even better and more inclusive ways of enjoying sustainability. In a recent trip to Helen's homeland of Slovakia, they came across local councils distributing biodegradable doggy

paper bags. As members can see, while the dog is universal, the writing on this easily produced biodegradable bag and recyclable scooper is in Slovak.

This is an issue that we should look at. It draws our attention to the fact that much of our focus is on the plastic bags provided at supermarkets and not on the whole array of plastic products available. I have spoken previously in this place about the amount of plastic wrapping found when one buys white goods or a television.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Member, will you take a brief interjection on this point, on behalf of your electorate?

Mr J.N. HYDE: Certainly.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I have a bag here. Is it similar to the bag used by the Town of Vincent?

Mr J.N. HYDE: I think that is a household rubbish disposal bag from the Town of Vincent.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Is this bag the same as the one my newsagent now wants to wrap *The West Australian* in to save money?

Mr J.N. HYDE: I can neither confirm nor deny that, member for Yokine.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I just wondered.

Mr J.N. HYDE: I thank the member for Yokine for that interjection.

Minister for the Environment, members are aware that many of our local governments have an environmental bent and are concerned about this issue. Anybody who has been involved with a local council knows that dogs are an emotive issue for people. I wanted a local dog for a photo opportunity in support of this issue. I was told by the dog's owner that because the dog was signed-up to a modelling agency we would have to get an exclusion signed to use an image of his dog. People take their dogs seriously. We need dog owners to be responsible and we need to help them be responsible. I understand that some females have said that more of the texture of the dog excrement can be felt when using the existing doggy bags and that they would be happier to use a paper or cardboard product. This is an issue that we should be looking at more closely.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [9.23 am]: I thank the member for Perth for his very interesting and important grievance this morning. Also, I thank the other members for their helpful interjections provided throughout the member's grievance.

There is no doubt that we are always very keen to look at ways that we can improve the disposal of waste products, including, of course, those from our pets. I think the member is right to say that many local governments throughout Western Australia have very clear processes and practices in place to encourage dog owners to tidy up after their dogs, particularly when they are out in public areas. As the member displayed in exhibit "A", local councils already provide plastic doggy disposal bags and many dog owners are encouraged to carry them when they take their dog for its daily exercise.

We all know that plastic continues to be a key issue, particularly given the fact that many plastics still take far longer than paper or cardboard to biodegrade and break down. Dog excrement collected in plastic doggy bags ends up in landfill, and any new and innovative solutions, including the one that the member for Perth has collected from a European country, should be considered. I am a little concerned about the scoop element because—as I explained to the member of Perth during our workshop yesterday evening in which the member explained the use of the bag to me—I think it is an additional measure that is not required. The beauty of the plastic bags is that they allow the faecal product to be collected and then disposed off in one "foul" scoop! I believe that any doggy disposal bag—such as the one demonstrated by the member for Perth in exhibit "B"—should be able to be used in the same way as the current plastic bag; a far more appropriate solution because it is not necessary to carry around a scoop as well as the bag. Some people have very innovative ways to scoop up excrement in parks. I have seen people use twigs and other objects they can find to do that.

The member rightfully highlighted that the issue of plastic bags, per se, will be discussed by the federal and state environment ministers later this month. There has been much discussion and debate about how we can best move towards less plastic in our environment. The member is correct when he says that the focus has been predominantly on shopping bags. It is interesting to note that Bunnings, as one example, has introduced a voluntary scheme in which it no longer offers plastic bags to customers. Customers who request a plastic bag must pay a 10c fee. Bunnings have reported a remarkable reduction in the number of plastic bags requested. I know of—and I am sure members are aware of—a town in Tasmania, Coles Bay, that has embarked on a totally plastic bag free initiative. That proposal has resulted in a significant but very simple behavioural change by residents and people who live in the area. I think people will adapt and do adapt very quickly. We now only need to visit a supermarket to recognise the green recyclable shopping bags used by many people. We need to encourage more people to use them as part of their ongoing daily behaviour. I think we can do that. Later this month I will discuss with the federal minister and other state ministers for the environment how best to move

forward on the issue of reducing the use of plastic bags in Australia. There is undoubtedly clear evidence that plastic bags making their way into waterways and landfill have a detrimental impact on our environment, and, in the case of the marine environment, a devastating effect on marine animals.

According to a recent report last month, plastic bag use in Australia has markedly increased. The member for Perth has proposed an interesting initiative. I would be interested to see whether companies in the Western Australian market are interested in trialling such an innovation. I think the member mentioned in his grievance that that particular product has a waterproof capacity. I believe the member for Cottesloe has highlighted the difficulties of picking up anything that may have greater than normal water content in it!

Mr C.J. Barnett: I thought it the weakness in a very powerful argument made by the member for Perth.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That could be debated. However, I think the answer is contained in the potential waterproof status of the bag in question. Members will be aware that we passed the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Bill only last year. The new Waste Authority, to be established in the next month or so, will look at target waste. This may be a very important issue for the new Waste Authority to look at, along with other important waste issues in the community.

I thank the member for Perth for his innovation. He is a member who brings to this house broad thought and broad issues which are sometimes a little left or right of the field but which, to all intents and purposes, are still important. As we move towards zero waste, we need to look at all the things that we do in our community to protect our environment and reduce the amount of litter or waste that we create—including the waste that our beloved domestic pets create.