

## SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

### *Grievance*

**MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont)** [9.42 am]: I rise today to raise a grievance with the Minister for Environment about the devastating impact of plastics. Protecting our environment is the most incredible legacy we can leave for future generations. In fact, it was one of the main motivators behind my decision to ultimately run for Parliament and become actively involved in the Labor Party at the age of 16. It is important to me, as it is to so many others right across our community, that we do as much as we can to ensure our beautiful natural environment that we are so lucky to have here in Western Australia is preserved for future generations to enjoy for many years to come. However, plastic waste is having a massive and detrimental impact on the environment here at home and right across the globe. Plastics and microplastics devastate wildlife populations and cause irreversible damage to some of our most fragile, vulnerable and beautiful ecosystems. Plastic pollution is one of the greatest threats to wildlife around the world. Plastic takes a long time to break down, if it does at all. In 2018–19, only 11 per cent of Australia's plastic waste was recycled. That means that 89 per cent was sent to landfill. Unfortunately, because plastic is so often used away from home, it is frequently littered, ruining not only the amenity of our beautiful environment but, more critically, posing a major threat to our wildlife and our marine and aquatic biodiversity. It ends up in our oceans, rivers and forests.

The impact of single-use plastics has been widely reported in recent years, and the facts are absolutely shocking. In 2018–19, a total of 3.4 million tonnes of plastic was consumed in Australia, generating about three million tonnes of plastic waste, or 120 kilograms per person. It is estimated that eight million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean globally each year. Recent coastal debris collections identified that more than 75 per cent of rubbish collected on Western Australian beaches was plastic. We have a responsibility to act, and I believe the community expects us to do so. To put it simply, if it cannot be re-used or recycled, it should not be made.

Given the drastic and present danger that plastics and microplastics pose to our precious environment, it is incumbent on governments at all levels to act to preserve our treasured wildlife and ecosystems. The McGowan Labor government's decision to ban single-use plastic bags in 2018 was an important step forward in the war on plastic waste. It also demonstrated the capacity and the willingness of the Western Australian community to adapt to everyday changes that will make a big difference. The change was embraced by retailers and the community. We all got used to having re-usable bags and now it is simply second nature. The Containers for Change scheme has also been thoroughly embraced. I am pleased to say that 765 million containers were saved from landfill during its first year of operation.

I am so proud that the McGowan government took the next step by announcing a broad ban on single-use plastics, and that we have also fast-tracked that plan. I especially want to acknowledge and recognise the minister for her hard work and dedication to reducing the impact of plastic use and plastic litter on our environment. WA is absolutely leading the way. Fast-tracking Western Australia's Plan for Plastics will save hundreds of millions of single-use plastic items from becoming litter or landfill. By the end of next year, we will have taken a major step towards becoming plastic-free by banning, in stages, things like plastic plates and bowls, straws, thick plastic bags, polystyrene food containers, helium balloon releases, plastic produce bags, microbeads and takeaway coffee cups and lids made from single-use plastic materials. Western Australians showed strong support for the Plan for Plastics, with more than 98 per cent of those surveyed saying they supported further action on single-use plastics. It is imperative that we apply this sustainable vision to further aspects within our control as a state government. I ask the minister to share with the house what the state government is doing to continue to reduce the impact of plastic waste in WA to protect our beautiful environment for future generations.

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Environment)** [9.47 am]: I thank the member for Belmont for her grievance this morning and her passion on this issue and all issues relating to protecting our environment. As she pointed out, single-use plastics are cheap and convenient, designed to be used once and often used away from home. They tend to be lightweight, which makes them easily transported in the environment by wind and water. These factors increase the chance of single-use items becoming litter and harming wildlife and the environment.

Australian and overseas waste management practices have not been able to process the vast amount of plastic waste generated, particularly around single use. Only 12 per cent of plastic produced globally is being recycled. Up to 50 per cent of plastics are discarded after one use and as much as 32 per cent of plastic packaging escapes collection systems and ends up in our environment. This has significant economic and environmental impacts on marine, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

As the member pointed out, it is estimated that around eight million tonnes of plastic enters the ocean each year. In June this year, the Premier and I were very proud to announce the fast-tracking of our Plan for Plastics. This new time frame will see Western Australia's Plan for Plastics regulatory actions implemented by the end of 2022, four years earlier than originally planned. The plastic items included in the ban are some of the most littered items impacting Western Australia's environment, including our wildlife. As a result of the bans, hundreds of millions

of coffee cups, plastic lids, straws and other single-use plastics will be saved from becoming landfill or litter. Last year, WWF-Australia rated WA the leading jurisdiction in Australia for action on single-use plastics. These new time frames mean that Western Australia will continue to lead by taking action to get rid of unnecessary plastic. The plan will be rolled out in two stages. By the end of this year, 2021, we will phase out plastic plates, cutlery, stirrers and straws; thick plastic bags; polystyrene food containers; and helium balloon releases. By the end of 2022, we will phase out plastic barrier and produce bags, cotton buds with plastic shafts, polystyrene packaging, microbeads and oxo-degradable plastics.

We understand that some people need single-use plastic items to maintain their quality of life. We established a working group to consult with the disability, aged-care and health sectors to ensure the continued supply of single-use plastics, such as straws, to those who really need them. This group first met in February 2021 and it has been providing an important voice for people who require the ongoing use of these plastics. It is fair to say that everyone across the group supports the ban. There has been a great collaborative approach across the sectors, from the hospitality sector through to the health sector. The group has recently been expanded with additional membership to ensure that all sectors are represented. The fourth meeting of the working group was held in July.

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is working to ensure that all sectors are supported in the transition to a plastic-free future, and that actions are effective and practical. In July and August this year, the department delivered 13 information sessions in Perth and regional areas and online. This has provided a clear understanding of the intent of the Plan for Plastics and has enabled stakeholders to provide feedback on stage 1 items. We are also establishing the “plastic free places” program. There has been strong interest in participating in the program since the announcement. It will be complemented by an engagement and education program for suppliers and retailers to support businesses.

The acceleration of the implementation of banning single-use plastics will have huge environmental benefits. Aquatic environments are subjected to extensive pollution by all types of plastics as a result of general littering and wastewater treatment discharge. Bringing forward these actions will also support our election commitment to make the Swan Canning Riverpark a plastic-free area. This includes \$500 00 for a plastic-free riverpark initiative to phase out the use of single-use plastic by businesses surrounding the Swan Canning Riverpark, which will result in the first plastic-free area in WA with a river care focus.

The Departments of Water and Environmental Regulation and Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions are also working collaboratively to monitor the impact of plastic in Perth’s Swan–Canning Estuary. The research will provide a baseline of plastic pollution and will be used to assess the extent of the problem in the Swan–Canning Estuary, its potential impact on the river’s ecosystem and the success of environmental policy actions. It is also important for state government agencies to show leadership in addressing plastic waste generation. The Premier’s Circular *Reducing the use of disposable plastic* requires state government agencies to reduce and avoid single-use plastics. The policy will significantly reduce the amount of single-use plastics used by state government agencies and support them to make better purchasing choices. A government sector-wide survey has helped understand the use of disposable plastics in government from a diverse range of staff. The survey received more than 1 300 responses and the findings are being used to understand barriers and assist to avoid single-use plastics in government. This includes development of tools to support more sustainable procurement. The department is working with the Department of Finance on these initiatives. The Plan for Plastics is a step in the right direction to reduce single-use plastics and to protect our environment for future generations.

I will consider further measures to reduce the impacts of plastic waste in Western Australia as we roll through the plan. The government’s decisions will be guided by evidence and analysis of the impacts of plastics and our policy interventions. Early feedback from Queensland’s ban on single-use plastic shows a significant reduction in marine litter. I look forward to seeing the results over the coming years, particularly in our waterways.

Consultation with the community and key stakeholders will also continue as additional actions to reduce single-use plastics are considered and implemented. The bans will build on the successful lightweight plastic bag ban in 2018, which was embraced by retailers and the community. As the member pointed out, it is now the new normal. People have very much accepted taking their own bags to the shops. This ban has prevented millions of bags from being littered or harming wildlife.