

HON. ROBIN CHAPPLE MLC

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC, Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House

Via Email: lcco@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC

Petition No.046 – Banning Plastic Bags

I tabled my Private Member's Bill, *Environment Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags and Other Things) Bill 2018* in Parliament on 29 March 2018. I tabled this bill and presented this petition to address: the gaps in current legislation that do not protect our natural environment from the ever-increasing amount of plastic pollution; and the present flaws in policy which monitors how much plastic pollution is entering the environment.

The purpose of the bill is to prohibit plastic bags, plastic drinking straws, and balloons with the exception of medical or health-related products, policing or security products, meteorological balloons, passenger-carrying hot air balloons, and plastic bags made wholly from biodegradable material suitable for composting. The Bill seeks to prohibit plastic microbeads, which are manufactured plastic particles less than 5 mm in size—found in cosmetics, personal hygiene products (including toothpaste) and household detergents—and packaging made wholly or partly of polyethylene or polystyrene.

More detailed information of the bill is contained within the Explanatory Memoranda and the Second Reading Speech, both of which are available on Hansard.

The items listed in the bill are the main single-use plastic items that end up in our waterways. All plastics that end up in a marine environment have a detrimental impact on its ecosystem. Alternatives to these single-use plastic items already exist but either the consumers, manufacturers or businesses are not aware of them and/or have no incentive to use them.

The government is taking great steps towards tackling the problem of single-use plastics through the implementation of the plastic bag ban and the container deposit scheme, as well as consulting with the community and industry on the waste management plan. However, the rate at which the government is moving on this issue is out of step with the community.

These measures come at a critical time in addressing the issue of single-use plastics.

Plastics are made from non-renewable natural resources such as crude oil, gas, and coal. The energy consumed in the life-cycle of one plastic bag is estimated to be equivalent to 13.8 millilitres of crude oil, or about a teaspoonful.

There is increasing concern regarding microplastic consumption by sea life. Shellfish consumers could be ingesting up to 11,000 microplastics a year. This is a particularly troubling outcome, as plastic is very efficient at absorbing harmful pollutants.

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After one month of cleaning up Western Australian beaches, the Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Campaign Australia collected 15,000 plastic items over an area of 4.5 square kilometres. During 2017, 2000 volunteers gathered 196,000 plastic items covering 37 square kilometres. Far more plastic remains uncollected.

Australians dispose of an estimated 4-5 billion plastic bags every year. These can be recycled, but only approximately 3% are.

Plastic has remained the most common category of rubbish picked up on Clean Up Australia Day over the last 20 years. It never breaks down; the pieces just get smaller until they enter the food chain.

It is predicted (on the most conservative estimates) that by 2025 there will be enough plastic in the oceans to cover 5% of the earth's surface in cling wrap, and that by 2050 the volume of this plastic will be greater than the volume of sea life.

Plastic production has surged over the last 50 years from less than 15 million tonnes in 1964 to more than 311 tonnes in 2014, and is expected to double again over the next 20 years.

The Government's plan to ban plastic bags by January 2019 is an unnecessarily long time frame and does not solve the problem, as it has just opened up the market for heavier-weight plastic bags that take even longer to breakdown.

By implementing a ban, consumers are effectively given more choice as retailers are forced to provide more options.

The public are already moving in this direction. People are already rejecting single-use plastic in favour of reusable options. There is a groundswell of action on this issue.

I implore the Committee to recommend the Legislative Council support the bill and the monitoring mechanisms it provides so that we as legislators can lead the direction in which the country, and rest of the world, is heading. Instead of playing catch-up, WA should be taking the lead in how we reduce, reuse and recycle our waste.

Yours sincerely,



The Hon Robin Chapple MLC
Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region
19 April 2018