



**Minister for Environment; Disability Services; Electoral Affairs
Deputy Leader of the Legislative Council**

Your Ref: Petitions 116 and 120
Our Ref: 62-15872

Hon Matthew Swinbourn
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Swinbourn *Matthew*

Thank you for your correspondence, received in this office on 12 August and 15 August 2019, regarding Petitions 116 – Ban Helium Balloons and 120 – Release of Balloons, tabled in the Legislative Council on 9 May 2019 and 6 June 2019 respectively.

I am pleased that we have passionate members of the community committed to improving Western Australia's environment.

In 2017, the Keep Australia Beautiful Council and the Tangaroa Blue Foundation Australian Marine Debris Initiative reported that more than 75 per cent of the rubbish collected on Western Australian beaches was plastic. Research also indicated that across all groups of wildlife, the number of species known to have been affected by either entanglement or ingestion of plastic debris has doubled since 1997.

Expert assessment of the ecological threat of plastics shows that balloons are a significant ingestion threat and balloon strings are a significant entanglement threat to seabirds, turtles and marine mammals.

Many local governments have taken steps to ban the release of helium balloons on council land, and I support this approach. These include the Towns of Cottesloe, Victoria Park and East Fremantle and the Cities of Fremantle and Rockingham.

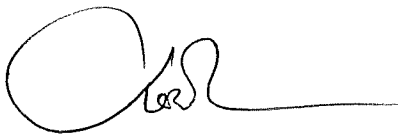
Along with many Western Australians, I am concerned about the environmental impacts of plastic waste. I can advise the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs that the McGowan Government is taking action. Last year, the State Government banned the supply of lightweight plastic bags and the Premier instructed Government agencies to stop buying avoidable single-use plastic items such as cups, straws and cutlery. Western Australia is also working with other jurisdictions, retailers and the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation Ltd to develop a code of practice to phase out heavier weight plastic bags.

The McGowan Government is keen to do more to reduce unnecessary use of plastic, including balloon releases, and has been consulting with the community. There has been strong interest in the consultation process with almost 9,500 responses received to the *Let's not draw the short straw issues paper*. Preliminary analysis indicates over 98 per cent of respondents support further action on single-use plastics.

Options that the community has put forward include bans, sustainable product design and education programs. These options will be considered by Government when the full submission analysis has been completed later in 2019.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SD', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hon Stephen Dawson MLC
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

29 AUG 2019