




Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Tuesday, 11 October 2011

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING BILL

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.57 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Waste Reduction and Recycling Bill 2011, introduced on 3 August by the honourable member for Sandgate. It was subsequently referred to the Environment, Agriculture, Resources and Energy Committee, albeit for a short period which amounted to about eight weeks. Honourable members would recall the shameless move by the new minister to intervene in the due process of the bipartisan committee system in the same week as the new committee commenced. Surely a bill of such substantial nature deserves the allowable six-month time frame for bills. To truncate the period to suit this government's political agenda, which in no way benefits the good folk of Queensland whom they pretend to represent, is a disgraceful act of arrogance.

Why should we—or Queenslanders for that matter—be surprised? I guess we could be forgiven for thinking this new Minister for Environment, the honourable member for Sandgate, was merely being used as a patsy to do the Premier's bidding—a scapegoat, the person upon whom the blame falls. She certainly proved she was out of her depth in question time this morning. If the minister is not a patsy, will she tell all of the small businesses, manufacturers and tourism operators in Queensland that she is proud of the nasty, early Christmas present she has in store for them? On 1 December, when Christmas stores will be decked with holly, this minister will be responsible for wrecking their peak trading with this new tax.

This bill will create new waste management legislation with the following purported objectives: to promote waste avoidance and reduction; reduce the overall impact of waste generation; promote resource recovery and efficiency actions; promote the sustainable use of natural resources; encourage the use of recovered resources; and ensure a shared responsibility between government, business and industry and the community. Subsequent amendments will be made to the Environmental Protection Act 1994, and the Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Policy of 2000 will be repealed along with changes to a number of other associated acts.

I commend the shadow minister, the honourable member for Glass House, for his well-measured address to the parliament and his genuine concerns regarding this bill. As the shadow minister for tourism, manufacturing and small business, and given the enormous implications this legislation will have on Queensland businesses, my comments will be directed to provisions relating to the proposed waste management strategy. In June 2010 the state government released Queensland's Waste Strategy 2010-20: Waste Avoidance and Recycling Consultation Draft and the accompanying Proposed Industry Waste Levy Consultation Draft for public comment, which closed on 16 September 2010. There were 96 submissions received and 44 stakeholder consultation briefings were held. However, having read a number of key submissions I observed major concerns with the proposals of where collected levy funds are to be redirected, the true cost implications of the levy on businesses and the impact of the impending carbon tax.

Clause 26 states that a leviable waste disposal site is any waste facility owned by state or local government or privately owned which has leviable waste delivered to the facility where the operator is required to hold a registration certificate for waste disposal, and waste delivered commonly includes waste destined to become landfill. The bill also allows for an application to be made at the chief executive's

discretion to exempt certain waste from the levy, including waste that has been received by charities as part of donations or collected by an organised event. The rate of the waste levy is to be prescribed under a regulation. However, the draft waste levy consultation paper did specify the price per tonne for disposal of each stream of waste and these prices were reaffirmed during the public departmental briefing. They ranged between \$35 and \$150 per tonne for the higher hazard regulated waste. It was also interesting to note that these fees will rise with annual CPI increases but without Gillard's carbon tax being factored into the setting of these new fees. Clause 41 details that the waste levy is to be calculated on a monthly basis and to be paid by the landfill operator to the state. How the landfill operator recovers levy costs does not appear to be prescribed in this legislation. However, the explanatory notes state that leviable waste—for example, commercial and industrial waste—will attract a \$35 per tonne levy on its delivery to the leviable waste disposal site.

In answer to question on notice No. 1170 of 2011 the Minister for Environment stated—

The levy will drive behaviour change by creating a price disincentive to dispose of waste to landfill.

The logical turn of events, then, would be to provide incentives for recycling. Yet recycling residuals will also be taxed by this new levy system, albeit at a discounted rate of 50 per cent but this discount will be removed after two years. CCIQ's submission to the draft consultation papers really highlighted the inadequate facilities and resources for recycling in small towns and country regions across Queensland, which is not the fault of a lack of industry investment, as the government's explanatory notes suggest, but a direct failure of this long-term toxic Labor government to adequately resource our towns and regions. It is the duty of government to provide these services where it is not feasible or economical for private industry to do so. It is grossly unfair that this government can rake in the taxes from businesses in these areas, not supply any services and then propose to tax the businesses further even when they have no options. A whole-of-society approach is needed to drive behavioural change.

Meanwhile, Queensland businesses are leading the field in waste recovery in the commercial and industrial stream, accounting for 48 per cent of recovered waste in 2006-07 compared to 36 per cent from the municipal stream. Importantly, the results of CCIQ's canvassing of the business community across Queensland has found that most businesses display a general willingness to support recycling and sound environmental practices. However, the majority believe they have little to no opportunity to increase their recycling and recovery capacity. Again, this highlights a fundamental flaw in this incompetent government's policy of introducing a tough levy on businesses before providing the adequate facilities and resources to enable change.

Undoubtedly, the department consulted widely on this particular legislative reform. However, it would seem that it was just a front, as, despite some very convincing arguments against the government's strategy, little has changed from the draft to the final product. This callous attitude to small and large businesses reveals just how out of touch the Bligh government and its ministers have become. They are grinding businesses into the ground and could not seem to care less. In terms of cost impacts, CCIQ has advised that all of its previous consultation, and indeed the government's, was done prior to the introduction of the looming federal carbon tax—another Labor disaster that will see costs skyrocketing for businesses and consumers. The imposition of a carbon tax on top of this proposed waste levy means a double whammy for Queensland businesses. Consultants believe the base waste levy of \$35 a tonne could increase to \$60 or \$70 a tonne. With the uncertainty surrounding the impact of the carbon tax on Queensland business, this is an unacceptable time, especially before Christmas, to be introducing such a burdensome tax which has essentially the same purpose as the carbon tax. This was a sentiment shared by many of the contributors at the public hearing.

I understand that this week in Canberra the debate on the carbon tax is underway—a tax the Prime Minister promised Australians she would not impose. Due to the impact it will place on so many Queenslanders, it is important to place on the record that not one Labor member of this parliament has stood up for their constituents to oppose it. The Labor members representing the Gold Coast—Burleigh, Broadwater, Southport and Albert—have shown contempt for the people they are supposed to represent, whilst the Minister for Tourism, Manufacturing and Small Business has openly supported this carbon tax and now this waste levy regardless of the devastating effects they will have on Queenslanders, especially those in her own tourism dependent region.

This government estimated that the additional cost to a regular business would be \$101 a year and between \$118 and \$227 for businesses generating regulated hazardous waste. However, after consultation with members, CCIQ believes that these costs are grossly underestimated. To put it in some perspective, CCIQ estimates that the waste levy will cost the average restaurant an additional \$3,120 a year just for their waste collection. How can the average struggling small business be expected to survive this new 'Scrooge' tax? Many smaller businesses will simply not be able to pass these costs on and in the unpredictable hospitality industry this could be the straw that breaks the camel's back, forcing more job losses and closures on top of an already tough year.

On listening to the public hearings, there was an overwhelming message from the various affected industries that the bill will not achieve its stated objective but send business to the wall and result in a perverse and unstable market. Worse, their concerns were falling on deaf ears. Their frustration can be understood. Many of the presenters were from award-winning organisations leading best practice in the industry. But why would Labor listen? It is typical for it to totally discard the views of business. We will be opposing this bill.