

Madam Speaker

I am pleased to stand here today in support of Minister Steel and the Plastic Reduction Bill.

It is absolutely imperative that we act to reduce plastic consumption, which has exploded since the 1950's.

Plastic certainly has many benefits. It's strong, adaptable, stable, lightweight and low cost. But it is also insidious, and creates serious problems. It persists in our environment, it is made from non-renewable resources, and the true cost is born by our environment, waste management and health sectors.

Plastic is hard to avoid, particularly single-use plastic. Plastic also litters our otherwise pristine beautiful bush capital landscape and waterways.

Single-use plastics often end up in our landfills as they cannot be economically recycled. By definition, these items are not designed or intended to be reused.

As Minister Steel said, we know that regulating to reduce plastic works.

Thanks to our single-use plastic shopping bag ban, between 2011 and 2018, we reduced our plastic bag use by 1,132 tonnes. In 2017-18 alone, we reduced our use by 199 tonnes. This is equivalent to around 55 million plastic bags.

The Bill both absorbs, and builds on, the ACT's bag ban. With the evidence in front of us, imagine how much good we can do when we phase out more single-use plastic items.

The first tranches start with items that we are confident can either be phased out or replaced with a more sustainable non-plastic alternative. They are also items that over 90% of Canberrans want us to take action on.

Single-use plastic stirrers, cutlery and expanded polystyrene takeaway food and beverage containers are things that we can immediately go without. Polystyrene in particular is a relic of the past. We are ready to leave this malicious material behind – and from 1 July 2021, we will.

SECOND TRANCHE

Madam Speaker, Government has long been clear about which items it expects to phase out and when. Supported by the results of our consultation, we have a clear plan.

The second tranche of products will be phased out 12 months after commencement of the first tranche.

From 1 July 2022, single-use plastic straws, fruit and vegetable barrier bags, and all products made from degradable plastic will be banned.

Degradable plastic is often sold as environmentally friendly, but instead of breaking down, it just breaks up into microplastics, which can wreak havoc on our environment, such as our aquatic wildlife.

Straws, barrier bags and degradable plastics products have been identified as they also received strong community support for phase out.

Importantly, we will undertake detailed consultation with the disability and health communities to develop an exemption to ensure that people who need straws can retain access to them.

This is why we delayed the phase out of straws to the second tranche. We cannot rush making sure we get this exemption right.

We acknowledge the work of other jurisdictions in this space, and look forward to working with our colleagues who have already undertaken detailed consultation with affected stakeholders.

FUTURE TRANCHES

This Bill is flexible, with consideration given to how we include additional items in the future as our understanding of plastic grows with time and the social licence for its use expires. Through the Bill's regulation-making power, this legislation is future proofed and adaptable to changing technologies and economies.

Our decisive but staged approach recognises that, at this point in time, some single-use plastics are more difficult to phase out than others. Staging our phase out ensures that we are able to limit unintended consequences wherever possible. We don't want to simply replace one problematic product with another.

Items such as plastic-lined single-use coffee cups and lids, single-use plastic dinnerware, boutique or heavyweight plastic bags, and cotton ear buds with plastic sticks remain under consideration for future tranches, from 1 July 2023.

We know there is already innovation happening with plastics and packaging. We thank our Plastic Reduction Taskforce and their members for their hard work in this space, and the milestones they've been able to reach as a result.

But I reiterate Minister Steel's words – manufacturers, suppliers and providers of single-use plastic products are on notice. Phase them out. If they can't be phased out – find a better, and more sustainable alternative.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, the Plastic Reduction Bill is a robust and vital piece of legislation which represents global best practice, in line with community expectations.

The Bill will help to reduce the prevalence of single-use plastics that litter our Bush Capital, while also being flexible to ensure the needs of vulnerable Canberrans can be met via exemptions.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

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