



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**BILLS**

**Environment Protection (Beverage Container  
Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2010**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 13 September 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Senator IAN MACDONALD** (Queensland) (09:57): This is a debate on the Environment Protection (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2010, introduced by the Greens political party. It relates to recycling and deposit schemes that have been in force in South Australia for some time. Because it is a debate, I want to take issue with some of the contributions made by the previous two speakers. Can I say in relation to the last speaker that about the only thing that I agree with her and her party on is that we will not be supporting the bill before the chamber today, for the same reasons as the Labor Party has indicated. I will come back to that later.

I could not contain my mirth when I heard the previous speaker rewrite history yet again in telling us what a great environmental party the Australian Labor Party was. Those who have observed politics and governance for a long time, as I have, clearly understand that Labor's only interest in the environment is the second preference votes they can get from the Greens political party when dealing with the issues of the environment. I still remember then Senator Graham Richardson, the environment minister, up in my neck of North Queensland, in the wet tropics, speaking to a crowd who were about to lynch him because he was destroying their jobs—another Labor government destroying the jobs of workers. He was saying, 'We're here to save these pristine rainforests.' The only problem was these 'pristine rainforests' had been logged for 110 years previously. Yet Senator Richardson was saying they were pristine. Why was he saying that? Because Richo, as we all know, master tactician of the ballot box, knew that they were coming to an election in which they desperately needed the support of the fledgling Greens political party.

Richo did not worry about the workers' jobs. Where was the AWU when you needed them? Where was the CFMEU when you needed them? The workers' jobs just went like that, and none of the great unionists raised a whimper in support of the jobs. It was the same with the Tasmanian forest industry eventually, though I have to say the F part of the CFMEU back in the 2004 days did actually join with the Liberal government to protect workers' jobs. I am always very proud of the F part of the CFMEU for the work they did in 2004 to protect the jobs of workers in Tasmania. Regrettably, the Labor Party have been less than forceful since.

**Senator Feeney:** Michael O'Connor is now the national secretary.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD:** He was excellent. I had a lot of dealings with him. He was genuinely interested in workers' jobs, unlike the present head of the AWU, who says, 'If one job goes from the carbon tax, I'm out of here.' Just yesterday we had 900 jobs in the mining industry up my way. Mr Howes is still there. You could give a litany of jobs that have gone because of the carbon tax. The only jobs that haven't gone are Mr Howes's and those of his colleagues in the chamber.

The previous speaker rewrote history by saying that the Labor Party was so interested in the environment. The Labor Party's interest in the environment is always invoked. The previous speaker went through a list of things that were so-called achievements of the Labor Party. The Labor Party talks a lot about the environment but never does much. Let me give some facts on which party actually works and acts for the benefit of the environment in Australia. Which party was it that prohibited sand mining on Fraser Island, a very substantial step and one of the first environmental battles that the Liberal Party took up on behalf of the nation? Which party was it that actually banned whaling in Australian waters? It was the Liberal Party.

Which party was it that, contrary to the previous speaker, actually introduced the declaration of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park? It was the Liberal-National party in conjunction with the Liberal National Party in Queensland. Which party was it that proclaimed Kakadu, Uluru, Christmas Island and the Coral Sea national parks? Which party was it that had five properties placed on the World Heritage List, including the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, the Willandra Lakes, Lord Howe Island and South-west Tasmania and, in the Howard government, the Heard and McDonald Islands in the Antarctic? Which party was it that took through the passage of the Antarctic Treaty (Environment and Protection) Act 1980 and the Antarctic Marine Living Resources Conservation Act 1981? Which party was it that regulated the uranium industry in the Northern Territory? Which party was it that enacted

major pieces of legislation to control pollution, especially for the protection of the high seas? Which party was it that legislated for the introduction of unleaded petrol as a pollution control measure? Which party introduced the bicentennial waters program, the National Soil Conservation Program, the national tree program? Which party introduced the Natural Heritage Trust and the Green Corps, two practical, on-the-ground activities that actually did something for the environment that we live in? Which party had Australia's first minister for the environment? Again, the answer to all of those questions is the Liberal Party in conjunction with the coalition colleagues in the National Party, when you want real action, not vote-winning action, not action that allows you to strut round the stage and say that, by reducing Australia's 1.4 per cent of world emissions of carbon, we are going to save the world, and look at us, aren't we great—that is so typical of the Labor Party. Up there when the cameras are flashing the rhetoric is always pretty good, but the actual work on the environment is always very limited. I regret to say that, with one or two exceptions, the Greens political party is now no longer a party of the environment but a party of very left wing social, economic and political views. I am a proud member of the Liberal Party, a party that has a record of achievement on the environment.

I also want to make reference to Senator Waters's comment about waste generation in Australia. It reminded me that I was in Rockhampton the other week. The Rockhampton Regional Council, a medium-large regional council in my state of Queensland, have set aside \$3 million for the carbon tax on their landfill operation. That equates to \$68 per rate notice issued in the Rockhampton Regional Council area. You wonder why costs of living are going up. That story is repeated right around Australia. If actions such as the tax on ordinary Australians for landfills were going to make a difference, you could grin and bear it. But everybody knows that what Australia is doing is in fact increasing its emissions by 2020. So it is not going to make one iota of difference to the world's climate. I am one of those people who always acknowledges that the climate is changing, that it has been changing for millions of years and that it will continue to change. But the cost to Australia from this stupid carbon tax, this toxic carbon tax, is just horrendous, and that is why the first action of the Abbott government will be to remove it.

In debating this issue with other speakers, I have not yet come to the Environment Protection (Beverage Container Deposit Recovery Scheme) Bill 2010, except to say that, in this instance, we will be supporting the Labor Party in opposing the bill. Why? Because the environment ministers, as the COAG Standing Council on Environment and Water, at a meeting as recently as 24 August 2012 agreed to move forward and develop a decision regulation impact statement to undertake a more detailed analysis, including regional and other distributional impacts. The meeting on 24 August followed consultation by the standing committee in their December 2011 Packaging Impacts Consultation Regulation Impact Statement.

I think, as other speakers have mentioned, all Australians are concerned about littering and about recycling where that is appropriate. The South Australian government introduced its scheme for recycling of containers in that state back in 1977, and the world has certainly moved on since then. I live in a not so small rural area. It is a shire of about 20,000 people, and the town of Ayr, where I live, has about 10,000 people. For several years now, even our shire has had a waste recycling bin. We have a general rubbish bin, and recently we have achieved a green waste bin. So, right across Australia, Australians, supported by their local governments, have been involved in the recycling of waste products.

I am very pleased that our council, the Burdekin Shire Council, on which I once had the privilege of serving for 11 years, has been at the forefront in the use of not just the ordinary, if I might call it that, recycling bins but the green waste recycling bin as well in recent times. I could not quite understand Senator Waters, but certainly in the case of the Burdekin shire—and I am sure this applies elsewhere—those general recycling bins take beverage containers, paper and cardboard. They have indeed contributed substantially to recycling in our area, but I know the same thing is happening right around Australia. They have certainly assisted in reducing the amount of roadside waste and rubbish of beverage containers, which was, we all might recall, the initial thought behind the South Australian legislation way back in 1977. I congratulate local government right across Australia on the very good job it has done in promoting and developing those kerbside recycling initiatives, which have in many ways reduced the recycling benefit of initiatives such as the container deposit legislation.

There is still a way to go in relation to workplace waste as opposed to ordinary household waste, but that is the sort of thing that the government or the ministerial council is progressing. I am a bit critical of the federal government for failing to progress those ministerial forum discussions as quickly as we might have hoped, but I think they are on the way now and we look forward to a good outcome from that particular forum. The difficulty is, as we all know—and this is not so much the case with South Australia, which, in a geographic sense, is a little bit insular—that with a place like Queensland with its close borders to New South Wales and a place like New

South Wales with its close borders to the ACT, Queensland and Victoria, you have to have in place a national protocol where all states agree.

As with all regulation, it does come at a cost. We should not overlook the fact that these recycling schemes do come at a cost, which is passed through to the consumers in due course. The ministerial council did commission some research in May 2009, and this research was looked at by the Senate committee that reported on this bill some time ago. That report, prepared by consultants BDA Group and Wright Corporate Strategy, had attempted to quantify the cost of the benefits of introducing a scheme of the nature proposed by the Greens political party. In its quantification of those costs and benefits, it reported a total national annual net economic cost to government and the broader community, which took into account all of the compliance and administrative costs mentioned previously in this debate. The BDA report estimated that those costs would be around \$492 million per annum in net terms. Overall it sees an economic cost of \$763 million versus an economic benefit of \$294 million—giving you that \$492 million per annum net cost. Those costs do have to be taken into account, particularly in this time in the nation's economic cycle where things like the carbon tax are increasing costs and reducing employment opportunities and the mining tax substantially reducing employment opportunities. I understand the real figure of people unemployed or underemployed in Australia and looking for work or more work at the present time is in the order of 17.3 per cent. So it is a difficult time for our country, made worse by the additional costs that this government continues to pile upon ordinary citizens day after day. So we do have to bear in mind the costs.

The coalition, along with all of our other significant environmental initiatives, are very keen to see good recycling programs—programs that actually work; programs that do not add to the cost of living of ordinary Australians. We are keen to see the COAG meeting between the state environment ministers come up with its conclusions and we await the recommendations from the DRIS. For that reason, the coalition will not be supporting this bill.