

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (MISCELLANEOUS) AMENDMENT BILL

30 April 2008

The Hon. A.L. EVANS: I rise to indicate the support of Family First of the second reading. This bill has a particularly South Australian history, with our former premier (Hon. Don Dunstan) in 1975 being the first in the country to introduce such a scheme. Indeed, today only South Australia has a fully fledged scheme, with Western Australia now having set up the framework for a similar scheme. At a federal level, Family First Senator Steve Fielding has been predominantly responsible for pushing a nationwide rollout of container deposits and was recently caught walking around the grounds of the commonwealth parliament dressed as a recycled bottle. Perhaps, Mr President, he is trying to cut Mr Xenophon off at the pass with a stunt or two!

Certainly, the container deposit scheme is supported by Family First as a sensible and practical way to reduce waste and pollution. It is a win for the environment, because it ends up with container recycling lifting from 38 per cent to 85 per cent, according to some estimates, which would result in 15 per cent less litter on the streets and in our waterways and over half a million less tonnes of waste each year. It is also a win for the community, with a cleaner looking environment, and local community groups can also 'clean up' financially by participating in the scheme. I note that last year the South Australian Scouts organisation earned something like \$7 million from container and other recycling initiatives, even under the 5 cent refund scheme. Family First is confident that a national container deposit scheme would:

- lift drink container recycling from 38 per cent to up to 85 per cent;
- recycle an extra half a million tonnes of waste each year;
- reduce litter by at least 15 per cent;

- reduce greenhouse gases by 1.38 million tonnes (the equivalent of switching about 180,000 people to 100 per cent renewable energy);
- save the average family \$30 each year on kerbside recycling;
- create more than 2,000 new jobs;
- save 5.6 gigalitres of drinking water each year (enough to supply about 17,000 homes); and
- allow community and sporting groups and our kids to earn pocket money while cleaning up the environment.

I note that the federal Environment Protection and Heritage Council recently met on 17 April to consider a national rollout of the scheme but ended up deferring the matter to a working group. I do not believe that South Australia can wait for a national response to the fully hashed out plan. Family First is grateful for Peter Dolan's briefing on this bill. Peter is the Director of Science and Sustainability at the EPA, and he attended the meeting with Peter Watters. We agree with their conclusion that a national rollout could still be five years away. We are not prepared to wait that long.

The central element of our scheme, although not mentioned in this legislation, is to increase by regulation the refund on Category B containers from 5¢ to 10¢. The vast majority of all containers are Category B, and these are containers that must be brought to a recycling depot to claim a refund. Supermarkets and other stores prefer not to have to run such schemes because of the cost of handling and bottle storage requirements involved.

Therefore, category A containers, for which a deposit is redeemed in-store, are now very rare. I understand that there are now only one or two very specialised beverages that fall under category A (including a type of exotic German soup drink). These are low-turnover beverages for which it is not economically viable to set up a depot recycling scheme.

There are now approximately 120 collection depots in South Australia for category B containers, and 110 (or thereabouts) of these are represented by the Recyclers Association of South Australia, which employs 900 people. In turn, these depots send their collections on to one of four 'super collectors', which at the moment are, in order of size, Statewide Recycling, run by Coke and Cadbury-Schweppes; Marine Stores, run by Lion Nathans; Visi Recycling, which processes milk cartons; and Flag Can, which is an agent for Statewide.

We have a system set up now whereby, if a beverage container does not conform to recycling requirements, the sale is prohibited. For example, I understand that there was a Nestlé flavoured milk container made from a composite sandwich of plastic and carbon black to stop light penetration and, although it was a good concept because the milk lasted longer, the EPA would not allow the container's sale until suitable recycling could be provided, and that is appropriate.

A question arises as to whether or not the scheme could be expanded to other containers, such as food packaging. I am often concerned to see McDonald's containers left at the side of the road. A deposit of even 1¢ or 2¢ might go some way towards recycling that garbage.

On a strict reading of the legislation, wine bottles would seem to be covered by the act, but deposits are still not levied on wine. I would appreciate it if the minister could advise during the committee stage whether any investigations along these lines have been carried out and, if so, the conclusions reached regarding any expansion of the scheme.

Family First believes that the 5¢ deposit should have been increased long ago. By way of comparison, in 1977 the container deposit was 5¢ and a *Sunday Mail* cost 10¢. Thirty years later, the container deposit has remained at 5¢ while a *Sunday Mail* now costs \$1.70. If the 5¢ deposit had been increased by only the CPI each year, the container deposit would now be 32¢. So, this is a change that is long overdue.

The mechanics of a changeover would be very complicated. I am advised that there are several options, including a change in rebate for all containers returned following a certain cut-off date. This would be by far the simplest scheme to implement, but safeguards must be introduced to prohibit hoarding of old cans and bottles until that cut-off date.

The other proposed solutions are almost too painful to contemplate. Those solutions would see each can or bottle having to be individually handled and examined to determine the deposit payable. Unless this could be done on a bulk or estimated basis, that strikes me as a terrible waste of resources.

As I have indicated, the deposit increase and this new framework are long overdue, and it has our support. I indicate Family First support for the second reading.