



NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

Protection of the Environment Operations Amendment (Waste Reduction) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 8 March 2006.

Second Reading

Mr GRAHAM WEST (Campbelltown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.05 a.m.], on behalf of Mr Bob Debus: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The New South Wales City and Country Environment Restoration Program was announced by the Premier in November 2005. In line with that announcement, this bill will enable regulations to be made to assist local councils to deliver good environmental management outcomes and high quality waste services in New South Wales. The City and Country Environment Restoration Program is a \$439 million investment by the New South Wales Government to fix the environmental legacies of the past. It builds on this Government's many outstanding environmental achievements. The program will also help New South Wales achieve the targets in the New South Wales Waste Strategy, and deliver a healthier environment and more sustainable New South Wales.

The bill has two main elements. First, it sends a strong economic signal to encourage waste avoidance and resource recovery, reuse and recycling. Second, it provides a major funding boost to environmental restoration over the next five years to tackle our most significant environmental challenges. The New South Wales Waste Strategy was launched in 2003. At the time it was a first in Australia. It provides tough but achievable targets for what we can achieve and action plans for how to get there. The strategy relies on partnerships with industry, with local councils and with those who champion the environment. But we are still facing considerable challenges.

Despite a growing understanding about the impacts our lifestyle has on the environment, there is still an unfortunate trend towards increased consumption of disposable goods, that is, products meant to be used only once. This is not just an Australian problem. It is one faced by all advanced economies. Around the globe, the rate at which we are consuming and degrading environmental resources is unsustainable. A major component of the City and Country Environment Restoration Program is the strengthening of the waste levy—an economic instrument that has existed since the 1970s and is designed to encourage reuse and recycling. Put simply, it provides a strong incentive to manage waste in a more environmentally sustainable manner and to look for alternatives to landfill.

The new waste and environment levy will be collected by local councils and industry. It will create even stronger incentives to develop new sustainable waste technologies. The program includes increases in the Waste and Environment Levy of \$6 annually, plus consumer price index, to apply in the five-year period from 1 July 2006. It is important to note that the impact on households of this increase will be modest. For instance, in the first year, the average household will pay only an extra 4¢ a week, rising to less than 20¢ a week by the year 2011—and every cent of this will be spent on programs to better protect our environment. This modest increase in the levy will allow us to plough an extra \$439 million directly into effective conservation and other environmental programs, including the Environmental Trust. It represents the single largest funding boost for the environment in the State's history.

The economic message sent by the new waste and environment levy will be supplemented by a strong regulatory effort to ensure that good operators in the waste industry will not be undercut by illegal operators. The program therefore includes an \$18 million commitment over five years for a waste compliance and enforcement program by the Department of Environment and Conservation. A number of incentive programs have also been developed as an integral part of new environmental funding commitments. Over the next five years, this program will: help restore and protect our natural heritage through a \$105 million investment in New South Wales RiverBank, a program to buy environmental water to restore our stressed inland rivers and wetlands; \$30 million to establish new marine parks and buy back fishing licences on the Manning Shelf and Bateman Shelf; and \$13 million to establish a High Conservation Value Area Fund to purchase Crown leases in areas of high conservation value.

The program will help create a sustainable future for country New South Wales through a \$37 million Native Vegetation Assistance Package to provide grants for sustainable farming, farmer exit assistance and the creation of native vegetation offset pools. It will help revitalise our urban environments through \$80 million for urban sustainability programs, including stormwater harvesting for recycling, waste reduction and increased recycling, and \$76 million for Environmental Trust grants, including support for local government waste reduction initiatives, plus payments to local councils for achieving waste reduction goals.

The bill amends the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997. It will enable the establishment of a local council waste reduction scheme for recycling, resource recovery and other reduction of waste, including payments to local councils for achieving waste reduction goals set by the Department of Environment and Conservation [DEC]. The bill provides a simple mechanism to enable regulations to be made that will deliver a scheme for recycling, resource recovery and other reduction of waste by local councils, and payments to local councils that meet the standards of the scheme. The Department of Environment and Conservation is working closely with the Local Government and Shires Associations to develop a memorandum of understanding that will underpin the standards for the new scheme and deliver equitable payment arrangements for those councils, in the levy paying area, that meet the standards. I commend the bill to the House.