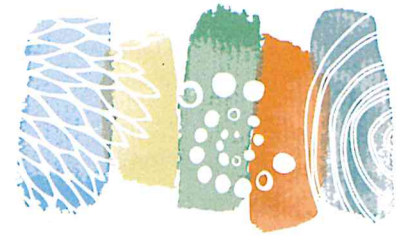


Enquiries: Sharon Meredith
Our Ref: 174_2019_1115
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PHCC | Working Together
Peel-Harvey Catchment Council

18 November 2019

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

[Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary

Product Stewardship Amendment (Packaging and Plastics Bill) 2019 - Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Product Stewardship Amendment 2019.

The Peel-Harvey Catchment Council (PHCC) is supportive of this bill and considers it a major step towards transitioning the Australian public and industry away from their dependency on plastic packaging and forging cooperative responsibility through legislation and enforcement of new standards for the production and disposal of plastic packaging.

The PHCC is the regional body responsible for the Peel-Harvey Natural Resource Management (NRM) Region. The following comments are provided within the context of our mission statement: 'as environmental stewards, we will encourage and enable effective catchment management to create a healthier natural environment in the Peel-Harvey by building community education and capacity, influencing and leading critical thought and environmental pride, and exemplifying and implementing best practice'.

Single-use plastics and the environmental impacts of plastic litter and microplastics on ecosystems and wildlife are significant concerns to the PHCC and our community. Evidence from our community suggests that the amount of all plastic, particularly in and around the Peel-Harvey Estuary and wetlands that comprise the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar Site (Ramsar 482) and waterways that drain into the site is increasing. Data captured and stored on the Tangaroa Blue's Marine Debris Database and through Keep Australia Beautiful Litter Index provides evidence that the most offending items of litter within our local area are single-use plastics, which is consistent with other data across Australia.

Over the past 2 years, in response to growing community concerns, the PHCC has supported a number of local initiatives in relation to litter and single-use plastics and their impact on the Peel-Harvey Estuary and other components of the Ramsar Site.

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*We acknowledge the Noongar people as Traditional Custodians
of this land and pay our respects to all Elders past and present*



One such initiative is the annual litter clean-up event on the Coodanup Foreshore Reserve of the Peel-Harvey Estuary. In 2017, 127 plastic packaging items were collected from this 2 km of estuary foreshore, of which 25% was single use plastic (shopping) bags and 35% plastic food packaging. In October 2019, over 50 attendees (the largest attendance on record) gathered 98.21 kilos of litter from the same stretch of beach with the most offending items being plastic food packaging, plastic lids, and plastic bags.

In October 2019 the “Reel it in” clean-up event was launched across key areas of the Peel-Harvey Estuary. This was a community response to the death of a dolphin calf which became severely injured due to the entanglement of fishing line and plastic netting in the Peel-Harvey Estuary. The event included buy-in by local community groups, local businesses, City of Mandurah, Department of Biodiversity and Attractions, Tangaroa Blue and the PHCC. Over 200 attendees collected 635 kilograms of marine debris from in and around the estuary during the biggest one-day clean-up event to occur in our region. The main offending items identified from the audit of rubbish collected were plastic straws, plastic bottles and lids, and fishing line, which was the focus of the clean-up event.

The City of Mandurah has reported that they are inundated with people wanting to perform clean-ups and asking what is being done to prevent plastics from entering the environment. In response, the City of Mandurah has set up a working group with local community groups, local businesses, and the PHCC to design a behaviour change campaign with the aim of reducing plastics in the Mandurah waterways.

Two other examples of the community’s concerns and actions in regard to single-use plastics and litter are included in Attachments 1 and 2:

- Attachment 1 outlines the concerns of youth in regard to single-use plastics and the establishment of the Heal Peel Campaign
- Attachment 2 provides a summary of the impacts of plastic in the Peel-Yalgorup and International waterways, and a summary of the actions and views of a local community group, the Friends of Rivers, Peel (FoRP) who contribute to the management of the Ramsar Site.

These examples provide evidence that plastic packaging is negatively impacting the local Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar wetlands and that the community recognise the devastating impacts of plastics and they are ready for change.

PHCC believes that given the level of interest and concern from our community the timing for such a bill is right and that establishing a mandatory product stewardship scheme is the way forward.

PHCC feel strongly that manufacturers, importers, and distributors should be required by law to uphold the suggested targets for single-use plastic and plastic packaging stated within the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation's 2025 National Packaging Targets. PHCC is supportive of the following targets:

- 100% of all packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.
- 70% of plastic packaging will be recycled or composted by 2025.



- 30% average recycled content in all packaging by 2025.
- Problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging will be phased out.

PHCC believes that The European Union's directive that bans and restricts the most problematic of single-use plastics should be emulated by Australia and is supportive that the bill applies the same methodology and targets. Enforcing similar targets will increase corporate responsibility and create market solutions to reduce plastic packaging. PHCC is supportive of these proposed measures:

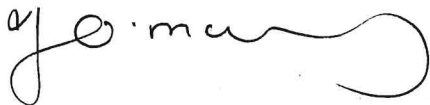
- A ban on the following single-use plastics: cotton bud sticks, cutlery, plates, straws, stirrers, sticks for balloons, food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene, and products made of oxo-degradable plastic.
- Consumption reduction targets for plastic food containers and beverage cups.
- Labelling requirements for plastic food containers and beverage cups; and cigarette filters, sanitary products, and wet wipes containing plastic.
- A container deposit scheme and a recycling target for beverage containers.
- The requirement for industry to cover the cost of disposal, clean-up and public awareness campaigns for food containers and beverage cups, beverage containers, packets and wrappers, wet wipes, balloons, and tobacco filters; and the costs of public awareness campaigns for sanitary products.

PHCC unequivocally supports the Product Stewardship Amendment 2019, viewing the bill as a necessary response to the various industries' seemingly indifferent approach to plastic packaging, the volumes of plastic waste being created and the crisis within the Australian recycling industry.

It is vital that government aim for transformative solutions, and act now to transition the community away from their dependency on plastic packaging by changing the processes, materials and disposal methods used by the packaging industry. This bill is vital in progressing solutions towards reducing the devastating impacts of plastic on our aquatic environment, including the entanglement and death of local wildlife along with the problems attributed with plastic pollution of the waterways.

If you have any queries or would like clarification, please do not hesitate to contact Sharon Meredith on 6369 8800 or sharon.meredith@peel-harvey.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Jane O'Malley
Chief Executive Officer

Encl: *Attachment 1 - The Heal Peel Campaign*
 Attachment 2 – Impacts of plastic in the Peel-Yalgorup and International waterways

The Heal Peel Campaign

In 2017 PHCC partnered with The Makers to support the delivery of the Youth on Leadership Program and for advancing our shared goal of supporting young people to be active in addressing local issues.

The program provides the opportunity for the Youth on Leadership Group to target their community initiative towards addressing the issue of single use plastics and the impact they have on the local environment. This was a priority concern of the youth group and had expressed their desire to develop a project that tackles this issue.

The Youth on Leadership Group spent six months learning about the impacts of single use plastics through a variety of excursions and workshops. The Group were issued with the task to design their own campaign around reducing single use plastics and created the concept for the Heal Peel Campaign.

The Heal Peel Campaign is an innovative and exciting project that is designed to raise awareness to the impacts of single use plastics on the local environment and pilots an enviro-social marketing campaign that aims to reduce the use of single use plastics in the Mandurah community.

The Heal Peel Campaign will run from March 2018 -May 2018 and plans to promote the Youth on Leadership campaign on social media and host an event at the Mandurah Stretch Festival.

Impacts of plastic in the Peel-Yalgorup and International waterways

Rubbish in a wetland environment poses a huge risk to the wetland wildlife and the wetland ecosystem. Marine debris not only directly kills and injures wildlife, but leads to great economic costs and losses to people and communities worldwide, including health impacts. Entanglement and ingestion are the primary types of direct damage to wildlife caused by marine debris; it coats the bottom of waterways and is believed to be a source of toxic substances in the marine environment, (2017, kabc.wa.gov.au)

Marine debris has become one of the major environmental issues worldwide, with 8 million tons of plastic entering the ocean every year. It is estimated that by 2050 by weight we will have more plastic than fish in the ocean. Every year more than six million tonnes of rubbish is dumped into the world's oceans, 80 per cent of which is plastic. In just one square kilometre of ocean 18,000 pieces of plastic are estimated to float within it. In Australia 77 species are impacted by marine debris with 633 species worldwide. Over 75% of litter removed from beaches is plastic.

Plastics over time breakdown into smaller pieces called micro-plastics. Micro plastics and the toxins attached to them pose a direct threat on entire ecosystems (2017, <http://tangaroablue.org/>).

There are serious long term health and environmental consequences associated for people and the environment. Toxins attach themselves to the micro-plastics and these are then ingested by plankton and small fish. The toxins then become stored in the fishes' muscles. The toxins then get passed through the food chain; small fish are then consumed by larger fish and then in turn consumed by people. (<https://www.plasticoceans.org/film>)

Cleaning up waterways, beaches and coastal areas of litter is expensive and time intensive. It has been estimated that it costs governments, businesses and community groups over \$4 million a year to clean up littered plastic shopping bags. (2017, <http://tangaroablue.org/>)

In 2015-16 the NLI (National Litter Index) results for Western Australia indicate a 1.5% increase in litter by item and an 8% increase in litter by volume from the previous year. Butts, beverage containers and glass reduced, Takeaway packaging remained the same, while paper, other plastic, general other litter and illegal dumping increased. Beverage and takeaway packaging combine to be the next most littered item at 13.24 items per 1000m². (KAB Litter Index 2015-2016). Plastic bottles are among the top 10 offending litter items on Clean Up Australia Day. (2017, [cleanupaustraliaday](http://cleanupaustraliaday.com.au))

Local Community View - prepared by Friends of Rivers, Peel (FoRP)

Since 2004 FoRP have been doing an annual clean up of the Murray River from Pinjarra to, and including, the Delta Islands. That's 14 years of rubbish collecting. In addition, Channel Island and surrounding waterways have been cleaned up annually for over 10 years by the Mandurah Over 55s Canoe Club. Plus, the Serpentine River for 5 years with the Canoe Trail Friends of Mandurah and Pinjarra. There has been no noticeable reduction in volume or change in composition of rubbish picked up. In fact, from photos the volume appears to have increased, which is to be expected given the increase in population in the Peel Region. In 2016 a broadened community involvement "Clean up Peel Waterways" program was implemented with 18 groups participating, and in 2017 19 groups. Assistance was generously given by the Peel Harvey Catchment Council (PHCC), Shire of Murray (SoM), City of Mandurah (CoM) and Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW).

While what we have been doing is important and useful in cleaning up the waterways annually, it has not resulted in any apparent reduction in the amount of litter and rubbish in the waterways. Given the planned doubling in population, Green Growth Plan (GGP), the pressure on the Peel waterways will similarly increase, and action is needed now to prepare for that increase.

Unless steps are taken now to curb litter and rubbish entering the waterways, both will be major contributors to the continued degradation of the Peel waterways and be detrimental to the sustainability of the region's aquatic and aesthetic values, including the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified fishery.

Given that what is being done by all agencies and groups currently, is apparently not having any noticeable effect, a new or different approach is needed.