



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

4 October 2017

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

Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

RE: SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE WASTE AND RECYCLING INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir/Madam

Brisbane City Council (Council) is pleased to provide a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the waste and recycling industry in Australia.

Council contracts waste services and the waste and recycling industry contractors are used to carry out this work. Several of the terms of reference are relevant to Council's waste and recycling activities and comments are provided on those sections below.

a. The quantity of solid waste generated and the rate of diversion of solid waste for recycling

Council collects domestic waste and recycling in Brisbane from the kerbside in wheelie bins and some bulk bins. Residents and commercial operators can also deposit waste and recyclables at any of four resource recovery centres.

In 2016-17, Council collected:

- 317,146 tonnes of general waste (kerbside)
- 90,761 tonnes of recyclable waste (kerbside)
- 21,699 tonnes of garden organic waste (kerbside)
- 51,017 tonnes of garden organic waste (resource recovery centres)
- 13,020 tonnes of recyclables (resource recovery centres)
- 546 tonnes of reusable goods for our tip shops
- 19 tonnes of household hazardous waste (resource recovery centres)
- 12,208 tonnes of waste in kerbside large items collection.

Council's kerbside waste bins are made up of:

- food waste 37%
- garden waste 18%
- recyclables 16%
- general waste 29%.

- 2 -

Fifty-five per cent of Council's kerbside waste stream is organic (garden and food) meaning that more than half of our waste stream could be diverted and reduce the amount of carbon emitted in landfill as greenhouse gases. However, policies need to be in place to assist Council to divert this material. This will be discussed in following sections.

b. The accreditation and management of landfills

Council owns (and contracts the management of) one landfill at Rochedale. The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) appropriately license this facility. Council also contracts waste disposal services to a privately-owned landfill in Ipswich, also licensed appropriately by DEHP.

c. The extent of illegal landfilling

Council is not aware of any significant illegal landfilling in the Brisbane local government area.

d. The role of landfill levies in determining the end destination of material, including the hypothecation of collected levies for enforcement and waste diversion purposes

The Queensland Government introduced a landfill levy (\$35 per tonne) in 2011 and removed it some months later in 2012. There is currently no landfill levy or other instrument in place in Queensland to encourage waste generators to reduce or recover waste.

Council has several views on possible landfill levies.

- A landfill levy must be substantial (at least \$50 per tonne) for it to change behaviour in waste reduction or resource recovery.
- Any landfill levy introduced in Queensland (or regions within the State) will have a net cost to ratepayers. Council is reluctant to act as a tax collector for the Queensland Government.
- Funds collected through a landfill levy must be hypothecated to the waste and resource recovery sectors (including local government) in the first five to 10 years post levy introduction to ensure the sector is robust and able to provide genuine alternatives to landfill.
- A levy is likely to increase the risk of illegal dumping and levy funds would need to be allocated to management of such activities for clean-up, education and enforcement.
- A levy is not effective on domestic waste generators as the price signal is not able to be passed on through the rates directly.

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) has the following policy position on a waste levy and this is supported by Council (LGAQ Policy Statement 2016).

1. *The imposition of a State waste levy on the collection of domestic kerbside waste is opposed by local government.*
2. *A waste levy should only be considered if it:*
 - a. *Directly targets problem waste streams or those where there is potential for considerable gains in terms of recycling; or*
 - b. *Provides industry with the confidence to invest in new waste management and recycling infrastructure and technology knowing that there will be consistent application of principles and standards.*
3. *Funds raised through the introduction of a waste levy should be fully returned to waste related activities.*

- 3 -

Council has a similar view of the waste levy. Applying a landfill levy to domestic waste is challenging as residents cannot avoid the levy in a domestic setting. Council does not have a pay as you throw style of charging so residents are all charged equally.

Any waste levy that is introduced in Queensland should be applied fairly and any funds that are collected should be directed back into the sector to ensure that resource recovery and waste collection options are sustainable in the long term.

e. the role of different incentives and collection methods in determining the quality and quantity of material collected for recycling

Council currently follows the traditional method of collection of recyclables via kerbside. There are several issues affecting (or likely to affect) this collection in the future.

- The Container Refund Scheme (CRS) will be introduced into Queensland from 1 July 2018 by the Queensland Government. CRS eligible containers currently make up 6.31% (by weight) of Council's recycling kerbside stream. Waste characterisation surveys show that there are approximately 1,377 containers per tonne of recycling which indicates a potential \$12,497,789 (1,377 containers/tonne x 90,761 tonnes x \$0.10 per container) in revenue if containers remain in the kerbside recycling bins. It is, however, very unlikely that all the containers will remain in the kerbside system as community groups and charities will all operate as collection and refund points, thereby diverting these funds into community groups. If Council retained only 10% of this stream, it still means that \$1,249,778 will remain with Council. It should be pointed out though that the cost of the scheme (external to local government) will far outweigh any benefits gained but it's a Queensland Government scheme and comments have already been made to this effect.
- Council currently collects 12,208 tonnes of waste from the kerbside large items collection program. This program lets residents place their large items onto the footpath for 'free' collection (costs are covered through cleansing charges applied through the rates). Scavengers and pickers collect 'good' items from this stream and it's thought more than a third of this stream 'disappears' back into the second hand goods market. However, this program costs Council \$6 million per annum (\$491 per tonne) so it's not a cost effective, nor aesthetically pleasing, program. Primarily the stream is made up of old furniture, mattresses and metal household items (BBQs, bikes, etc). Metals are separated where possible but the remaining stream is landfilled. This contributes to more than 60% content of wood material in our self-haul waste stream. There needs to be better management of these streams to prevent them ending up in landfill. The prevalence of cheap, short life furniture is challenging in the waste management sector and needs to be addressed. Mattresses are currently being discussed for a product stewardship program and this needs to be fast tracked to keep these (almost) fully recoverable, bulky items out of landfill.
- Over the last few years, Council upgraded its four transfer stations into state-of-the-art resource recovery centres. Originally, there were only weighbridges at the front gate but with the refit of the centres, a second weighbridge was constructed at each site to allow residents to deposit recoverable resources free of charge and then only be charged for the items they landfilled. This has proven to be successful with a 40% increase in visitor numbers since the resource recovery centres were launched. Staff can help and advise residents on resource recovery and as a result our tonnages have increased. Making recovery easy has been the key to increasing visitor numbers and tonnages and this in turn diverts waste from landfill.

- 4 -

- Council would like to see more product stewardship schemes in place to provide alternate options to landfill for many products. This will be further discussed in a later section.

f. the destination of material collected for recycling, including the extent of material reprocessing and the stockpiling of collected material

Council contracts Visy to undertake the sorting and sale of recyclables collected under the kerbside recycling collection program. Council is not aware of any significant stockpiles of any recyclable material in Brisbane or Queensland.

In recent years, Council has been able to (with Visy) source a few resource recovery options for glass that include use in Council's own asphalt and aggregates section and a private construction company where glass is used as an aggregate substitute. Glass and glass fines remain one of the more challenging products in recycling with commodity prices being non-existent (Council pays to have glass and glass fines recovered) and with limited established markets.

Applying levies or taxes to virgin aggregates would create a level playing field for recycled glass (and other products) and ensure that this commodity maintains a value. Mandating use of recycled products in new materials is also a means of retaining value in the reused products.

g. the current economic conditions in the industry, including the market for material collected for recycling

Council has recently signed a further five-year contract with Visy for the sorting and sale of recyclables. Council is aware that the market for recyclables is not strong at the current time but commodity prices, while low, still provide for a viable recycling program. If commodity prices were to fall any lower, this would no doubt have an impact on the program.

New programs such as the container refund scheme to commence in July 2018 will also impact on Council's recycling program but this impact is currently unknown.

Council endeavours to source alternate recyclable markets to ensure that the entire program is not contingent on the current commodity markets.

h. the transportation of solid waste across state boundaries

Council is not aware of any interstate waste being deposited in the Brisbane landfill. It is, however, common knowledge that there is extensive transport of interstate (primarily construction and demolition) waste into the privately-owned landfills in Ipswich to avoid paying the New South Wales waste levy. This activity is not within the jurisdiction of Council so there are no comments provided.

- 5 -

i. the role of the Australian Government in providing a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to solid waste management, including by facilitating a federal approach

Local Government has traditionally been the end of the pipe in terms of solid waste management. There is very little major influence that councils can have on waste generation as levies, instruments and other tools need to be applied by the state and federal tiers of government. Council's waste contracts ensure exemplary behaviour from our waste contractors but there is still much work that can be done by the Australian Government to assist local government in the waste space.

The Australian Government could have a significant impact on the management of solid waste, most particularly through implementation of product stewardship schemes. These have already seen substantial change in management of waste generated at end of life of televisions and computers, mobile phones, agvet containers, paint, tyres and several other products.

Council would like to see product stewardship schemes fast forwarded for the following products:

- mattresses
- hand-held batteries
- whitegoods/air conditioners
- smaller electronics such as microwaves, hi-fi systems, etc, that are not currently covered under the television and computers scheme – the current scheme could be reviewed to include these items
- photo voltaic (PV) systems – with increasing numbers of households taking up solar power, the PV panels are an increasing waste stream with no current recovery options
- household and commercial furniture.

Soft plastics have emerged as a topic of discussion in the media and need attention. As the world changes and more products are packaged in soft plastics, there needs to be more attention paid to how this stream is managed at end of life. Council's kerbside waste stream consists of 4.7% soft plastics which equates to 12,685 tonnes of this material (approximately 12kg per person per year). Product stewardship responsibility or improved recycling outcomes should be investigated to improve recovery of this material and provide better environmental and reduced litter outcomes.

Council recently purchased the license to use Love Food Hate Waste from the Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP) UK. This program is used successfully in New South Wales and Victoria (license purchased by relevant state governments for use by local governments in those states) but the Queensland Government would not purchase the license for use by local government in this State. Recognising that food waste makes up 37% of our kerbside waste stream and that reducing food waste is a path to greenhouse gas reduction, Council purchased the Love Food Hate Waste license and will roll the program out over the next three years.

Assisting residents to reduce waste through better shopping, meal planning and increased use of leftovers are cornerstones of this internationally successful program. Council will integrate the program into other existing programs to encourage residents to not only reduce the amount of food waste produced, but also, if they generate unavoidable food waste, to compost or worm farm the waste at home. This keeps the material out of the waste bins and ultimately out of landfill.

- 6 -

Should you require further information about Council's submission, please contact Mr Arron Lee, Manager, Waste and Resource Recovery Services, Field Services, Brisbane Infrastructure, on _____ or via email at _____.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Kenafake
A/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER