



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF RECYCLERS INC

THE VOICE OF THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY

Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra NSW 2600

**SUBMISSION NO. 81**

21st May 2006

Dear Committee Manager

The Australian Council of Recyclers (ACOR) welcomes the opportunity to make this written submission to the Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter.

Australia's current consumer choice revolution and increased prosperity has lead to a increase in consumption and a corresponding increase in waste generation. ACOR as the peak body representing the recycling and processing sector in Australia are disappointed that solid waste management is not nominated as a key element along with water, energy, the built environment, transport and ecological footprint.

We need to move from a "take make waste" or "throw away society" to a "recycling and resource recovery society". It is estimated that in Australia 1.6 tonne of waste is generated for every person each year. Australia is currently consuming and disposing of over 32 million tonnes of resources annually to landfill and yet solid waste fails to appear as a key element for inclusion and reporting against in the proposed charter.

Many states have in place State Waste Strategies, but lack implementation plans to move from where we are to where the government, industry and the community believe we should be.

The time is overdue for abandoning the focus on waste management and addressing the sustainable management of our resources. This paradigm shift calls for the cessation of ad hoc waste programs and the implementation of technology and infrastructure that sustains resources in the economy rather than disposing of them into the environment. We need to not only value 'goods', but also the recycling and recyclability of these goods.

The Sustainability Charter needs to set overarching and binding targets on the States based and measured on environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas reduction, energy and water savings, material resource provision and fossil fuel replacement. Currently State Waste Strategies are hampered by a focus on landfill diversion and types of waste streams and materials.

ACOR members currently reprocess and recycle nationally over 11.3 million tonnes of material annually otherwise destined for landfill. Our members are increasingly coming under pressure to abandon recycling opportunities, as these cannot be accessed economically within the existing waste policy and associated regulatory framework. Continuing to value recycled commodities only on the basis of their secondary material market value will not create the sort of conditions necessary to lift resource recovery levels.

A recent cover story in The Economist, entitled 'Rescuing environmentalism (and the planet)', advocated three things needed for a new market based green revolution:

- 'Get the price right' for the services of nature;
- Develop the information that is required to set prices correctly; and
- Embrace the concept of cost-benefit analysis (recognising that some things in nature are irreplaceable).

It is imperative that financial rewards are attached to recycling outcomes, based on the 'true' eco-service benefits provided by resource recovery. These eco-service benefits include waste avoidance, greenhouse gas reduction, energy savings, material resource provision, fossil fuel replacement, soil formation, land and water pollution prevention, human illness prevention, and social amenity preservation. At present eco-service benefits from recycling are enjoyed by the community for no charge.

The reason that government waste targets have not been achieved is because recyclers receive no recompense for the true value of their recycling services. There will only be minor improvements in recycling services and resource sustainability until this underlying 'market failure' is fixed.

A national framework to 'maximum resource recovery and continuous improvement in resource efficiency' would seek to value resource recovery eco-services, create mechanisms to overcome existing market failures, financially reward eco-service provision, improve data collection, improve planning and provision for recovery infrastructure, further develop standards for procurement of products containing recycled content and establish funds for resource recovery industry development.

The Australian government has a great opportunity to provide leadership by incorporating solid waste into the Sustainability Charter.

We welcome this inquiry and trust that our comments will be taken as practical considerations in our joint quest for greater sustainability for the Australian community. We look forward to an opportunity to further elaborate on our submission during the forthcoming public hearing process.

Yours faithfully,



Anne Prince  
CEO