

CSIRO responses to the questions taken on notice
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the
Arts hearing into the Waste management in Australia and the Drink
Container Recycling Bill 2008
2 July 2008, Melbourne

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Senator BIRMINGHAM—Is this an area of increased funding or activity by CSIRO?

Prof. Burn—The funding is targeted depending on the needs of the individual national priorities, at this stage. Our understanding is that waste management is not a national priority so the funding levels—I am being very careful here—

CHAIR—This is not budget estimates, so it is okay.

Prof. Burn—We will take that on notice and provide further information regarding the level of funding and whether it is increasing or decreasing. It is information that I do not have at the moment.

Senator BIRMINGHAM—If CSIRO could provide figures on how much is invested in waste management and waste reduction, and into what areas, that would be most helpful.

RESPONSE:

Waste is a relatively broad term that relates to a wide range of waste streams including, solid, liquid and gaseous wastes. These are generated from various industry domains and the work that we do in this domain may include waste minimisation/elimination, reuse, recycling, recovery etc. This is evident in the range of examples we provided in the submission.

CSIRO's research expenditure into waste management research is across a range of research activities, with a range of targeted outcomes. The figures quoted below are the best estimates the Organisation can prepare on those projects quoted within the Waste Stream submission. There may be secondary and tertiary waste management benefits flowing from other CSIRO research that have not been captured in these figures.

2007/08	2008/09
\$6.7m	\$7.6m

Unfortunately, due to changes in organizational financial reporting and Division mergers, it has been impossible to provide accurate figures on all the projects quoted in the Waste Stream submission prior to 2007/2008 financial year.

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Senator FIELDING—So before the request came in two or three months ago—and the exact date does not worry me—had the previous government requested you to specifically look at plastic bags in any way at all, in any shape or form?

Dr Mak—I do not have that information at hand. We work to a range of priorities in line with national research priorities, and research programs develop from that.

Senator FIELDING—Maybe you could take that on notice.

Dr Mak—We will take it on notice and perhaps come back to the committee on that.

RESPONSE:

[CSIRO has not had a direct request from Government to look at the issue of plastic bags prior to the recent one by Minister Carr.](#)

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CHAIR—A number of organisations have made submissions about the benefits of container deposit legislation and have made claims such as, ‘If there were a CDS, it would save enough water to permanently supply over 24,000 Australian homes,’ and ‘A drink container deposit system like that in South Australia would save millions of litres of water.’ I do not know how that could happen. I know that is not necessarily addressed in your submission, but could you explain from the point of view of scientists what you think those claims might mean?

Prof. Burn—I have not looked at that information to be able to make a valid comment on it at this stage.

CHAIR—Do you have any idea how there would be water savings?

Prof. Burn—We can take that on board. I would have to look at the submissions and where they are claiming their water savings are made to see if there is any validity in the claims.

Dr Mak—I guess it could go back to some of the earlier comments, where it does require a fairly rigorous full life cycle analysis to understand the full range of impacts.

CHAIR—I am not sure that there is any good scientific evidence.

Senator PRATT—I am pretty sure it relates to the energy and water inputs of recycling versus manufacturing from scratch. So in many instances it might not be a local water saving if products are manufactured overseas.

CHAIR—If you have got any information, that would be handy.

Prof. Burn—We can take that one on board.

RESPONSE:

[Without access to the information on which these figures were based, it is impossible for CSIRO to properly assess the claim quoted above.](#)