S U B M I S S I O N

TO THE

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S WASTE STREAMS

BY THE

ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

OF THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE

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The purpose of this short submission is to make available two studies that outline the total waste stream in Australia and a comprehensive approach to their management.

The studies involved were conducted by researchers in the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Melbourne and were part of an earlier attempt to convince state governments to base waste management policy and practice on robust analysis rather than prevailing public perceptions. They are attached to this submission as Attachments A and B, detailed as follows:

- *Waste Flows in the Australian Economy,* Connor M A et al, May1995, University of Melbourne (Attachment A)

- *Strategies for the Disposal of Solid Wastes in Australia,* Connor M A et al, November 1995, University of Melbourne (Attachment B)

The first study quantifies and categorises Australia's waste flows.

It shows that urban waste – and in particular the part of the waste stream collected from households – makes up a miniscule proportion of the total waste stream – suggesting the environmental impact associated with its disposal is correspondingly small.

The study concludes:

"Despite the popular belief that reducing the flow of consumer wastes to landfill will conserve resources, the saving is likely to be quite small. Far greater conservation can be achieved by other means."

The study was finalised in 1995 and refers to 1990/91 data. The proportion of the total waste stream made up by household waste would have decreased significantly since then, not because of the success of recycling but because of the increasing quantities of waste produced by other sectors of the economy.

The study makes interesting observations about the availability of landfill (due to quarrying in and around cities) and the large volume of 'green waste' generated by agriculture.

These observations confirm that we are not running out of landfill space – even though landfill reserves are tight in some cities due to lack of planning and foresight.

The second study by the same authors titled `*Strategies for the Disposal of Solid Wastes in Australia'* provides a comprehensive overview of what can be done to manage solid waste in Australia – in the event that policy were to be based on logic rather than sentiment.

It is an assessment unlikely to come from any of the environment agencies as these appear to have chosen to focus on the waste from households and are wedded to the concept of `resource recovery' from that stream regardless of community cost.

The study provides a unique perspective that focuses on optimizing net benefit rather than achieving politically determined targets for what is a relatively small proportion of the overall waste stream.

Please note that page 1 of the document has a table correcting Table 1 in the first study. The new figure for municipal waste (household plus municipal parks and gardens waste) in this table is 5 million tones as opposed to the 11 million tones in the original table. This suggests that household waste makes up just 0.24% of the total solid waste stream or 0.1% of total waste. Yet it is this portion of the waste stream that receives the greatest attention.

NARGA will be making a further submission to the inquiry and would be happy to give verbal evidence.