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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications & the Arts.

14 5 08

Dear Sir,

I make the following submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Management of Australia's waste streams.

a. trends in waste production in Australia.

Today we face the huge challenge of how to address the big COW- Climate Change is the most crucial issue ever to have faced humanity.

Oil is now in decline; so how do we replace it?

Water for drinking purposes is a finite resource. Rainfall is in decline in many parts of the world, courtesy of ever worsening climate change and ever growing human population.

Today climate change, the decline of oil and the availability of potable water inconvenience us to a small degree but unless we now start to seriously address these three issues today we will leave the world we borrow from our children in pretty bad shape.

These three issues are linked with every product we choose to manufacture and choose to use.

Today we still manage waste, when the most sustainable choices are to avoid and minimise waste.

In Australia we appear hell-bent on mimicking the American ethos where of the materials flow today only 1% ends up still in use 6 months later.

In "Cradle to Cradle" William Mc Donough and Michael Braungart 2002 state- "The product itself contains on average only 5% of the raw materials involved in the process of making and delivering it."

In Australia recycling is seen as the answer to a consumer's prayer; yet Professor Ian Lowe suggests that a 1% cut in CONSUMPTION is equivalent to a 25% rate of recycling.

To try to address the triple challenges of climate change, oil and water; cutting consumption by choosing to REUSE products again and again for their original manufactured purpose is a "front end" solution- the sort of low hanging fruit we should now be initiating.

I ask you to go through the motions of making the choice between choosing to use a disposable nappy, the single largest item in landfill or a reusable cloth nappy.

A disposable nappy is partly composed of plastic- an oil-based material which is finite and in decline.

You are not allowed to dump faeces in landfill and yet it's ok to dump excrement filled nappies in landfill and allow the excrement to leach into the surrounding land and soil, two of our basic needs.

A reusable nappy is reused again and again many times. When it no longer functions effectively as a nappy it becomes a cleaning rag and when it reaches its use-by-date as a cleaning rag it can be composted.

Consider now the manufacturing inputs of every product we manufacture or choose to use:- raw materials, water, energy, landfill waste generated during the manufacturing processes and air and water pollution generated during the manufacturing processes.

These manufacturing inputs are locked into products that are reusable but are incurred every time a single-use product is manufactured.

Now consider four commonly used and extremely durable materials- aluminium, glass, most plastics and steel. Despite the short-term interests of the packaging industry it would seem prudent to use such durable resources for durable, multi-use products rather than ever more single-use disposables that seem best suited to a throw-away world.



2. Our most precious resources are our children. Do you have children? If so, with ever growing concerns about climate change, the decline of oil and the availability of water, for how much longer do you believe it is acceptable in Australia to continue to use the above durable materials for ever more disposables when durable materials are best suited to products that are reusable or refillable, reliable or even, where possible, repairable and more durable products?

Re durability of materials- a discarded steel can lasts for 100 years, a plastic bottle or an aluminium can between 450 and 500 years and a glass bottle an undetermined number of years, certainly many thousands of years. In Australia there are 7000 hospital admits per year caused by cuts from glass littered in public places and in America bicycle riders pay \$250 million annually in punctured tyres as well as a cost of \$37 million annually to Pennsylvania farmers.

c.
potential new strategies to reduce waste.

Phase out waxed milk cartons as it appears very questionable to continue to import high quality waxed paperboard for single-use milk cartons. (Attachments 1 & 2)

Cardboard egg cartons could be manufactured locally and returned for reuse.

"Volume Based Charging" for the collection of household and industrial garbage. (Attachments 3 & 4)

School and community environmental education about the waste hierarchy. (Attachment 5.)

The establishment of more school/community waste minimisation, resource redirection initiatives along the lines of Aspley Special School's Kingfisher Recycling Centre. Since the program's inception in 1983 the Centre has used the voluntary labour of young people with considerable intellectual and physical disabilities and able-bodied retirees to sort and process materials from the local household and business waste stream either for reuse or recycling. Kingfisher Centre is the world's most comprehensive school/community waste minimisation centre. (Attachments 6 & 7)

"An Integrated Waste Elimination Strategy for "Towards Zero Waste" has worthwhile suggestions including the following from the N.S.W. Greens.
Waste generators to be responsible for its full life cycle. Thus if it can't be reused or recycled, don't make it.
Provide direct incentives for source reduction, source separation and in particular PRODUCT LONGEVITY.
Legislate to allow "point-of-sale return" of products and packaging by consumers (via retailers) to manufacturers.

provide
Tax more damaging products and rebates to less damaging products.
New materials tax to discourage use of new materials in favour of "post-consumer" recycled materials.
Re: landfill fees. Adopt a "half-life" approach whereby the disposal cost is inversely proportional to remaining landfill capacity.

Differential Tipping Fees to further discourage generation of mixed waste and encourage source separation.

f.

Consideration of the Drink Recycling Container Bill 2008.

Container Deposit Legislation has worked very successfully for many years in South Australia and is now seriously under consideration in other States and Territories.

Today climate change, oil and water are barbecue topics as well as footy, cricket and health and education.
Today for the first time for many decades we have a Federal and all State and Territory

governments of the same political persuasion.

All political parties now appear to be showing some concern about the importance of actually trying to address important environmental issues.

So this would be one of the most opportune times in decades to introduce Container Deposit Legislation nation-wide for C.D.L. is a "low Hanging Fruit" initiative that will have genuine economic, social and environmental benefits in which the entire community can participate on a daily basis through the range of consumer products they choose to purchase.

C.D.L. is an important first step that moves us towards a far more fundamental waste minimisation initiative, namely C.D.L. which would then stand for Containers Designed to Last, that is the return of the refillable beverage container.

I enclose (attachment 8) which gives the environmental costs of packaging 1000 litres of beverage.

As a regular retiree volunteer at Kingfisher Recycling Centre I believe the Centre should benefit from the passage of the Drink Recycling Container Bill 2008 and I think it is vitally important that consideration is given to maximising the waste of underutilised and abundant available human resources, be they young people with disabilities or retirees who want to contribute in their local community in a voluntary capacity.

The retrieval of valuable materials for either reuse or recycling is labour-intensive and maximising the use of those who want to be useful in their community is part of the solution towards attaining sustainability.

I cannot stress too strongly my ^{in the importance} belief, or considering the waste of those community members who want to contribute in their community, whatever their age, whatever their ability.

Many machines that have replaced human labour run on fossil fuels and use such fuel only when they are operating. People on the other hand run on renewables; but we use the same amount of food whether we are working and contributing to society or sitting at home bored, lonely and unoccupied.

Jonathon Porritt in "Seeing Green" sums the way ahead thus: "the active participation of people in the work of their society, rather than their displacement from it, strikes me as the sign of a sane and sustainable society."

I wish you well in your deliberations in this era in the developed world facing massive changes.

I would be happy to appear at a public hearing.

All the best in the future you choose for your family.

Yours faithfully,

Harry Johnson
Harry Johnson.

Harold Wright Johnson.

Volunteer, Kingfisher Recycling Centre, Aspley Special School.