

## **Inquiry into the Management of Australia's Waste Streams Terms of Reference**

The Senate has referred the following matter to the Committee for inquiry and report by August 2008:



Reply by Keep Australia Beautiful Council NSW

### **Management of Australia's waste streams, with particular reference to:**

#### **a. Trends in waste production in Australia across household, consumer, commercial and industrial waste streams**

Waste Management Companies as well as Local and State government departments have all reported that electronic waste is an emerging waste stream which is difficult to recycle and manage as an increasing waste stream. This also includes printer cartridges (which companies are proposing to prevent from being reused).

The other waste stream concerns are the increase in organics waste contaminating general waste which is difficult to remove from and hence contributes to landfill. It is also clear that organic waste is the major contributor to green house gas emissions.

The issue of plastic bags has also yet to be resolved, although they contribute very little to the waste stream, plastic bags are an avoidable waste which causes various environmental issues.

#### **b. Effectiveness of existing strategies to reduce, recover or reuse waste from different waste streams**

Waste education across NSW still remains extremely fragmented and inconsistent. It is very clear that the waste management hierarchy is well known however people are learning to recycle as a priority rather than to reduce, reuse and then to recycle. Many organisations are pushing the recycling methodology before the first two primary steps. Over consumption is the key problem which we need to overcome.

The effectiveness of existing strategies to reduce, recover and reuse waste has been developing quite well over the past few years in NSW. This has been mainly due to the implementation of AWT's however these have only been developed in metropolitan NSW leaving much of regional NSW with inadequate waste technology. There is a very strong need for regional waste contracts to service less populated country areas.

It is evident that if the community is given the facilities to recycle they will be more cooperative in doing so. However in some quarters people are still ignorant of some sorting measures and need to be more vigilant in how they sort their waste. There is evidence also that the more affluent some consumers are the less committed to recycling and reusing they are.

**c. Potential new strategies to reduce, recover or reuse waste from different waste streams**

Many types of e-waste aren't reused mainly due to liability concerns (even broad council cleanups are now changing due to individual pickups to prevent people claiming items), therefore waste management companies send them to landfill to avoid litigation after they purchase a second-hand product. Introducing a small piece of legislation to protect companies from this liability would be useful as many of these e-waste items can be given to the disadvantaged or even exported to developing countries etc.

An additional strategy is to introduce adopted strategies across all government departments in order for them to have maximum effect. An example of this would be to include them into departments like the department of immigration in the aim to increase non English speaking backgrounds adoption of environmental policies like the waste management hierarchy. Other departments which might benefit are areas like defence, health, hospitality/tourism and Federal Aviation Authority. The health industry produces large amounts of waste which is more often impossible to avoid however areas like hospital meals and cleaning could be addressed. Making sure that all waste is recycled at airports across the country would be very beneficial. In early 2008 it was noted that Virgin Blue would like to recycle their waste but do not due to federal laws restricting this from occurring.

**d. The economic, environmental and social benefits and costs of such strategies**

The economic, environmental and social benefits or sustainability benefits are currently hard to measure so it is recommended that a more formalised sustainability indicator is developed to measure any new strategies which might be put in place.

Environmental education to young people is a cost effective method in implementing various environmental strategies as it has a multiplier effect across a whole community and across generations. It also contributes to so many other key curriculum areas within education syllabuses.

As already mentioned however the real cause for excessive waste centres on two major issues; an increasing population and the way products are manufactured, especially in terms of unnecessary packaging. In other words there is a need to produce products that are more easily recyclable and to encourage the community to favour such products when making a purchase. Waste is a product of affluence to a large degree. For instance, a citizen in Australia is likely to create 35 times more waste in a year than many people living in underdeveloped countries. It is necessary to go to the source of what creates waste as well as developing a strategy for managing it once it is created.

**e. Policy priorities to maximise the efficiency and efficacy of efforts to reduce, recover or reuse waste from different waste streams**

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) has had a positive effect in other countries, especially with items which contaminate landfill like car batteries and energy efficient light bulbs. Other large items such as white goods and e-waste are also expensive items which a small fee could be added to account for their recovery when their lifecycle is complete.

**f. Consideration of the [Drink Container Recycling Bill 2008](#).**

A drink container recycling bill and an associated deposit on drink containers would only address a small part of the waste stream. Container deposits have almost no effect on reducing littering and addressing littering behaviour (although the litter with deposits are often picked up by community groups to raise funds). In addition for everyone to taking their bottles back to a recovery point is far more expensive than a kerb side truck efficiently picking up recyclables together in the one trip. Keep Australia Beautiful's National Litter Index indicates that container deposit legislation and drink container recycling bills do not address the behavioural element of littering and while increasing the recoverability of some waste streams, it decreases recoverability in others.

Undertaking a program to encourage people to reuse their drink containers would be very effective, perhaps even a competition which awards people for using the least amount of bottles.