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**From:** David\_Bernadine Charles [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 26 April 2019 11:51 AM  
**To:** recyclinginquiry  
**Subject:** Parliamentary inquiry into recycling and waste management  
**Attachments:** Submission re Victorian parliamentary enquiry into waste and recycling.docx

Dear Sir/Madam

I have attached a submission (in the form of a Word document) to the Parliamentary inquiry into recycling and waste management.

Please contact me via email or by phone on [REDACTED] if you have any questions.

Thank you for the opportunity.

David Charles  
[REDACTED]

# PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA - INQUIRY INTO WASTE AND RECYCLING

SUBMISSION BY DAVID CHARLES

## DISPOSABLE NAPPIES....AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

I welcome the *Parliamentary inquiry into waste and recycling*. Waste and recycling have been a hot topic ever since our exports of waste products to China were banned by them in 2017. It will continue to be a hot topic until companies and consumers change the way we produce, pack, market, purchase and dispose of our products. We obviously need to do more to reduce waste. We need to reduce, reuse and recycle to much higher levels than we presently do.

One significant waste management issue that is never discussed is the incredibly large numbers of disposable nappies that end up in landfill. The serious environmental impacts of using disposable nappies is not understood or is conveniently ignored. You can't ignore this significant environmental issue just because it's easier and convenient to throw away dirty and smelly disposable nappies in the bin and ignore the consequences.

This *Parliamentary inquiry into waste and recycling* is a great opportunity to raise this overlooked waste issue, which are a significant contributor to our rapidly growing landfill levels. I believe that the incredibly large numbers of disposable nappies that end up in landfill (over 2 billion each year in Australia) falls within the following Terms of Reference:

- # 1. The responsibility of the Victorian government to establish and maintain a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to solid waste management across the state, including assistance to local councils  
It is not environmentally responsible for governments to allow over 2 billion disposable nappies to end up in landfill in Australia each year, especially when it takes up to 500 years for them to breakdown (see my references below).
- # 3a. Identifying short and long-term solutions to the recycling and waste management system crisis, taking into account the need to avoid dangerous stockpiling and ensure recyclable waste is actually being recycle  
Over 2 billion disposable nappies end up in landfill in Australia each year (which comprises 4% of our landfill waste) and it takes up to 500 years for them to breakdown, according to my references below. Therefore, a long-term solution is needed to fix this problem. This could include public education campaigns and even the banning of disposable nappies. The banning of disposable nappies is not such as radical idea, as countries like Vanuatu are going to do this from 1/12/2019.
- # 4c. Strategies to reduce waste generation and better manage all waste such as soft plastics, compostable paper and pulp, and commercial waste, including, but not limited to banning single use plastics.  
Disposable nappies have many single-use plastic components in them. 2 billion disposable nappies end up in Australian landfill sites each year and they take up to 500 years to breakdown. Strategies to reduce this significant waste generation issue could include a strong public education campaign and incentives to encourage the use of multi-use nappies (such as cloth nappies). Even better, single-use disposable

nappies could be banned, along similar lines to the banning of single-use plastic bags by some states...Vanuatu is planning to do this from 1/12/2019.

I am disappointed to find that my attempts to bring this waste and environmental issue to the attention of the public via letters to newspapers and to political parties have not been successful. The newspapers have refused to publish my letters and even environmental groups such as the Greens have no policy on disposable nappies. My approaches to the Federal Greens and the Victorian Greens have been met with a brick wall as they told me that it is "socially difficult", "too much hard work" and "political suicide" to bring this issue to the attention of the public. Environmental groups such as the Greens have had a long history of raising concerns about difficult environmental issues that may be unpopular with the public. Why is this issue any different? I hope your Parliamentary Committee doesn't shy away from this tough but important issue like others have.

Many people I've spoken to do not like it when I raise this issue, but it's an issue that needs to be raised. A government that claims to be concerned about the environment and wants to reduce its waste should have a formal policy and education campaign that encourages the use of cloth nappies and discourages (or even bans) the use of environmentally damaging disposable nappies.

We have made great strides raising the awareness and subsequent removal from our supermarkets of the serious environmental and waste problem caused by single-use plastic bags, but for some reason, we have turned a blind eye to the equally serious problem of single-use disposable nappies. This is another Al Gore *An inconvenient truth* moment that we must address!

My wife and I have practised what we are preaching. We have four children and all of them wore cloth nappies. We even travelled around Australia with our first two children in cloth nappies....and that was camping! Most other families from my era also used cloth nappies. However now it's very rare to find parents using cloth nappies. It's clear to me that with regards to disposable nappies, convenience is more important than their impact on the environment.

I have done some research on the waste, environmental and financial impacts of using disposable nappies and here are my findings (including the references/sources to my findings)...

**5.6 million disposable nappies are used by Australians each day. That's a whopping two billion, or 2,000 million disposable nappies that goes into landfill in Australia each year!**  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-22/dirty-nappies-a-major-contributor-to-waste-in-act/6489538>

Apart from this significant waste management issue, the many thousands of tonnes of human waste that ends up in landfill leaches harmful chemicals into the environment rather than being processed through our sewerage system.

As waste management is a hot topic with all local councils, state and Federal governments, you should be greatly concerned about this!

**4% of our landfill is comprised of disposable nappies**

That's a big cost to ratepayers and governments, not to mention the environmental impacts. You and the other government representatives should be taking steps to reduce this burden on us ratepayers/taxpayers.

<https://www.australianethical.com.au/news/22-tips-plastic-free/>

### **Disposable nappies can take up to 500 years to decompose**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-22/dirty-nappies-a-major-contributor-to-waste-in-act/6489538>

### **It takes one cup of crude oil to make one disposable nappy**

<http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/You-and-Your-Home/Live-sustainably/Single-use-items/Nappies>

### **Much more water and energy is used in the production of disposable nappies than is used in the production and use of cloth nappies**

Many people I have spoken to that use disposable nappies don't like the thought of having to wash dirty and smelly cloth nappies, so they try to justify their actions by saying that washing cloth nappies uses more water and energy than using disposable nappies. What they ignore is the far greater amount of water and energy that's used in the production of disposable nappies. In fact, 3.5 times more energy and 2.3 times more water is used in the production of disposable nappies than in the production and washing of cloth nappies.

<https://www.babybeehinds.com.au/store/pc/Cloth-Vs-Disposables-d28.htm>

### **The financial cost of using disposable nappies is \$3,250 per child**

The cost of using cloth nappies is only a fraction of this. Many families now claim that times are tough and that it is very costly to raise a child. If they are genuinely concerned about the cost of raising their children, they should switch to cloth nappies to ease their financial burden.

<https://www.babybeehinds.com.au/store/pc/Cloth-Vs-Disposables-d28.htm>

### **Other alternatives to disposable nappies**

Recently I met a young couple who are using cloth nappies that they purchased from <https://buddhanappies.com.au/>

They are a small fraction of the price of disposable nappies (\$449 v \$3,051), are easy to fit on a baby (no need to use safety pins) and more importantly, they are significantly better for the environment than disposable nappies for the reasons I have outlined in this email.

### **If plastic bags can be banned, why can't disposable nappies?**

Some states have banned plastic bags. Vanuatu has gone one step further, banning single-use plastic bags, drinking straws and styrofoam food containers in July 2019 (one of the first countries to do so). Further, they announced on 17/2/2019 that disposable nappies, plastic cutlery and some plastic grocery packing items are being added to the banned list on 1/12/2019!

One of the reasons for this ban is that as a Pacific island, Vanuatu is having to face rising sea levels caused by global warming, of which the disposable nappy manufacturing process is a contributor.

If a small country like Vanuatu can make such a bold step in reducing a wide range of plastic use and waste, why can't Australia?

<https://tuti.nz/blogs/news/why-did-vanuatu-ban-disposable-nappies>

From the above research, you can surely appreciate the serious environmental and waste impacts of using disposable nappies. Given this, I would like my submission to be seriously considered and progressed to the point that there is a recommendation that government adopts a formal policy on this issue including a public education campaign, a recommendation to encourage the use more sustainable alternatives such as cloth nappies and ideally, a complete ban on the use of disposable nappies like some other countries are proposing.

Thank you

David Charles

