



FRIENDS OF STEELE CREEK INC. A0031117T ABN 945 397 10877
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Inquiry Into Recycling And Waste Management

We welcome this enquiry and hope that it will lead to the long overdue much-needed changes to our recycling system.

Over many years FOSC has made numerous submissions to government inquiries and been involved in public consultations on the handling of hazardous waste, improving the functioning of EPA and to the review of EPA Act and the review of every waste policy since 2001. Our long-standing interest on waste issues dates back to 1996 when our community was threatened with a hazardous waste dump by the Kennett government.

For decades we have advocated;

- A deposit-recycling scheme, primarily to reduce the amount of plastic litter currently entering every drain to our waterways and Port Phillip Bay.
- Cleaner production processes to eliminate the use of toxic materials.
- Holding the generators of waste responsible for its reuse or destruction and the costs involved in it.
- A ban on the use of known carcinogenic and hormone disrupting chemicals in production processes.
- Using landfills as a method of last resort, as stated in waste hierarchy, yet has never been implemented.
- Public education campaigns that promote better understanding of and adherence to “Waste Hierarchy” and how to reduce their waste as well as recycle effectively.

Up until now we have been bitterly disappointed with the government’s inaction and their failure to use the waste levy to help establish pilot projects for better sorting, cleaning and recycling facilities in our state. We have always supported the principles of the waste hierarchy and are dismayed that sending waste to landfills has continued unabated. Many reusable products could be mined from our landfills!

The new facilities must be located in industrial complexes, away from residential areas, community facilities e.g. hospitals schools child care centres and transport hubs. We need to have a decentralised approach to this so that we are not transporting vast quantities of waste right across the city, as is currently done.

All such licensed facilities must be subject to a far more rigorous regulation and supervision by EPA Victoria. Unannounced inspections must be the norm. Penalties for breaching licence conditions must include jail time and fines must so large they act as a deterrent.

Such facilities must also be also having the capacity to protect communities and our waterways from harm in the event of spills and fires. At a recent fire, the toxic foam and water was diverted to retention system (a constructive wetland) where it was held until it was cool enough to be pumped into the sewer, thus preventing the pollution of Merlynston Creek. **Such infrastructure must be mandated at all recycling facilities and all sites must have appropriate Bunding.**

Given the vast array of available options, because many European countries have already succeeded in building sorting cleaning, reuse of 90% of their waste with the remaining 10% going to energy facilities, we simply request that the decision to build and site such facilities proceed quickly.

At the heart of our waste problem is the type of packaging and production that is currently used. We believe this inquiry must mandate a change so that all packaging for all products is easy, and safe to recycle. The planet has limited resources and our generation of waste needs to drastically reduce.

If the general community knew of the sustained adverse impacts from landfills on the local communities at Ravenhall & Werribee and closed ones such as Tullamarine toxic dump, we think they would be horrified at their part in causing such an unfair and problematic waste system.

As the plastics industry continues to use highly toxic chemicals in its production processes we recommend legislative changes banning such chemicals and imposing high costs for disposal of any toxic waste until there is a safer substitute

There also needs to be a ban on plastic packaging and the use of Styrofoam to force them to come up sustainable packaging. Additionally, single use plastic items must be banned from 1 July 2020 in all retail and food outlets.

Finally we're deeply concerned that in spite of numerous toxic fires occurring between 2014 and 2019 there is no review into the way liquid toxic waste is happening. This serious admission could be overcome by an inquiry into how toxic liquid waste is handled. We welcome the governments recent announcement that waste chemicals will be electronically supervised that is not clear if that includes GPS tracking but that's not going to reduce the use of toxic chemicals it just facilitates their removal from the premises generating the waste. Unless the government introduces costly levies for the disposal of such waste, companies will not change their method of production and we will always be at risk from careless operators and workers will also be at risk.

The fires we have all recently experienced have revealed a fundamental flaw in our legislation and supervision of EPA licence sites. We hope this inquiry will deliver peace of mind to our communities and the government will show leadership in generating the change we must make.

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Spokesperson FOOSC

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