



PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING  
COMMITTEE

**Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management**

Submission by:  
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**Darebin Creek Management Committee**

Darebin Creek Management Committee is a community-driven partnership between community groups and Councils whose purpose is to restore, protect and enhance the social and environmental values of the Darebin Creek linear park.

DCMC has a direct interest in the management of waste produced by Melbourne's industries and residents because every year we work with teams of volunteers to remove literally tonnes of waste plastics and paper from the Darebin Creek. These potentially recyclable or avoidable contaminants pollute and clog our precious waterway, and their unsightliness degrades the amenity value of the Darebin Creek corridor for thousands of local residents.

The management of waste in landfill is of interest to DCMC because we manage the Darebin Parklands on behalf of Darebin and Banyule Councils, which is the site of the former Northcote Tip. We have an on-going responsibility for capture and remediation of leachate from the former tip to prevent pollution of Darebin Creek and the Yarra, and to manage waste materials when these work their way to the surface. We also work with upstream landfill sites to contain their leachate in order to avoid contamination of the creek.

DCMC is also greatly concerned by the recent spate of fires at recycling stockpiles, and the threat contaminated run off from these poses to the health of the creek.

**How Waste Management Affects Darebin Creek**

A dedicated team of volunteers, the Darebin Creek Sweepers, remove literally tonnes of rubbish from the creek each month. Much of this waste is potentially

recyclable. Much of it is non-degradable single-use packaging. The Government needs to do more to promote recycling by the public through education and incentives. The Government needs to make it easier for people to recycle by promoting the proliferation of recycling bins in public areas like shopping centres. The Government, through COAG, should work with other States and the Australian Government to phase out single-use non-recyclable packaging.

Most Victorians who conscientiously sorted and yellow-binned their recyclables, expected these items were being sorted and recycled in Victoria, providing jobs for Victorian workers, and reducing the residents' overall environmental footprint. Most Victorians were shocked to find that these materials were being shipped in bulk to China, with no obligations imposed on China to recycle and no ability to control or understand the fate of the recyclable materials. Victorians, acting in good faith, could be forgiven for feeling let down.

With that convenient avenue of disposal closed by China, the Government has failed to take back responsibility for managing all recyclables and has instead conveniently handed this over to private contractors some of whom, unable or unwilling to fulfil their contracted obligations, have stockpiled the recyclables in inappropriate facilities in residential areas. These stockpiles pose an unacceptable risk through fire to human and environmental health as clearly demonstrated by the July 2017 fire in Coolaroo, and astonishingly, the July 2018 fire at the same plant.

Systemic failure to appropriately manage other types of waste, by allowing contractors to stockpile them in inappropriate facilities, has resulted in a number of recent fires posing similarly unacceptable risks including:

- January 2016 – Broadmeadows tyre recycling facility;
- April 2017 – Tottenham car parts recycling facility;
- August 2018 – West Footscray liquid industrial waste facility; and
- April 2019 – Campbellfield liquid industrial waste facility.

Fires at these facilities pose a direct and immediate risk to human health through their potential to spread to residential areas, and via a plume of toxic smoke that can affect a much larger population over a large and unpredictable area. To reduce this risk, emergency services try to contain and then extinguish the fire by dowsing it with millions of litres of water containing fire retarding chemicals. The storage sites are usually not built to contain anything other than minor spills, and so the resulting highly toxic cocktail of water and burnt materials runs away from the site to the nearest waterway.

Containing the August 2018 West Footscray fire caused several million litres of toxic run off to flow directly into the Stony Creek, the lower Yarra and Port Phillip Bay. This toxic plume had a devastating effect on plant life, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians and fish. It may take years for parts of the Creek to recover. For the local community, the toxic, stinking black sludge lining the Creek posed a risk to their health and that of their pets, and severely degraded the amenity values of the Creek's Parks.

The situation for the Merlynston and Merri Creeks could have been much worse as a result of the April 2019 Campbellfield fire, but for the remarkable luck that the fire was close to the source of the Merlynston where the run off was intercepted by Melbourne Water. Had the fire been two blocks to the east, the run off could not have been contained and would have flowed directly into the Merri Creek, the Yarra and Port Phillip Bay.

How many such incidents are required before we decide that we, as a society, must take responsibility for the appropriate management of the waste our society produces?

### **What Should the Victorian Government Do?**

It is encouraging to see that the Government has recently launched The Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan 2018. There are a number of ways the Government can act to achieve the objectives of this Plan:

- Legislate to remove single-use materials as far as practicable;
- Where recycling is not technically possible encourage the development and use of degradable packaging;
- Cradle to grave stewardship for products and their associated waste must vest with the manufacturer;
- Find ways to put a monetary value on waste plastic and so encourage recycling of the widest range of plastics possible, and the collection of plastics from the environment;
- The considerable legislated powers of the EPA should be used to their fullest extent. In particular waste storage sites should be fit for purpose and situated sufficiently far from residents and waters to allow fires or other disasters to be managed safely;
- Minimise waste going to land fill, and strictly police requirements for contamination to be managed on site;
- Public education program to reduce contamination through co-mingling of waste and recyclables;
- Support Local Government to improve their recyclable waste collection and separation services
- Support innovative approaches to manufacture and market products made from recycled materials
- Establish dedicated facilities where recyclables can sorted and baled that will meet the more stringent standards recently imposed by China if this is can be justified economically and ethically.