

From: Kim Mueller [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 10 May 2019 2:18 PM
To: Michael Baker
Subject: North East submission into the inquiry on waste and recycling
Attachments: North East 2019 submission into the inquiry for recycling and waste management.pdf

Importance: High

Good afternoon Mr. Baker,

I am writing on behalf of the North East Local Government Forum who wish to submit a joint response to the letter they were sent in relation to submissions into the inquiry for recycling and waste management.

Please find attached the above letter which has been written in collaboration between the 7 Councils and 3 Alpine Resorts who represent the North East Region.

Thank you for allowing the Region to have a voice in these matters.

Kind Regards,

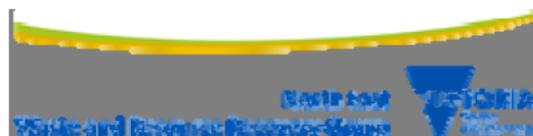
Kim Mueller

Engagement & Project Manager

Please note that I am in the office Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

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10/05/2019

Correspondence No:500/2019

Michael Baker
Michael.Baker@parliament.vic.gov.au
The Secretary, Environment and Planning Committee
East Melbourne, VIC, 3002

(Delivered via email)

Dear Mr. Baker,

RE: REQUEST FOR SUBMISSIONS – INQUIRY INTO RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

The North East Local Government Waste Forum (NE LGWF) consists of seven Councils and three Alpine Management Resorts who have agreed to provide you with this joint submission towards the Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management. The North East Local Government Forum which is run through the North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group (NE WRRG) ultimately provide State Government with access to Regional consultation and representation.

It is likely that you will receive individual submissions from Councils and Alpine Resorts from the North East Region, as the group is aware of both its legislative objectives as outlined in the *Environment Protection Act 1970* (EP Act) Sections 49G and has a strong appetite to work in collaboration.

The Local Government Waste Forum wish to provide integrated and local knowledge to the Government; with information that highlights the opportunities and challenges faced by Local Government and Alpine Resorts in relation to waste and resource recovery services and infrastructure. It is our understanding that the Alpine Resorts: Falls Creek, Mt Buller/Mt Stirling and Mt Hotham did not receive this letter. This is disappointing.

The letter the Local Governments received addressed six key points which the NE LWGF responds to below:

- 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.*

The 'waste crisis' that drew significant public attention earlier last year has compounded misconceptions and has had a negative effect on our current systems. Even though Victoria in most instances has implemented best practice, perceptions in relation to recycling, resource recovery and waste costs have been detrimentally affected.

It is disappointing that after committing time and resources to the sector strategically that the State Government has not actioned this through appropriate funding of infrastructure, the development of end markets and adequate assistance to local Councils or Alpine Resorts.

Federal and State Government are crucial in influencing the reduction of packaging and single use plastics, mandating purchasing policies which contain recycled content and focusing on local markets. Government should also consider funding for local processors who can recycle materials on shore without intensifying their environmental footprint on countries who are ill-equipped to deal with these materials in an environmentally sound and safe manner.

2) *Whether the China National Sword policy was anticipated and responded to properly;*

The China National Sword Policy was not anticipated by most Councils or Alpine Resorts. While the North East Region was somewhat 'buffered' by the on-flow of costs, many contractors unexpectedly and exorbitantly raised their gate fees, while other markets were unreasonably inundated.

The Government's response was a stop gap measure to assist Councils (and Alpine Resorts after significant lobbying) through that period of renegotiating contracts and did not go far enough in addressing the real issues behind why the problem occurred in the first place. To hear that some Councils in Victoria were forced into the extreme measure of advising residents not to put recyclable materials into their yellow lidded bins; undermined the industry and decades of public education which have been heavily invested in recycling.

It is imperative that the Government sees the industry holistically and determines ways that Victoria can deal with the waste we produce internally – it is a shared responsibility and one that must be taken seriously.

3) *Identifying short and long terms solutions to the recycling and waste system crisis, taking into account:*

- a. *the need to avoid dangerous stockpiling and ensure recyclable waste is actually being recycled;*
- b. *the cleaning and sorting capabilities and the processing capabilities in Victoria and the potential to expand the use of recycled materials in local manufacturing;*
- c. *how to better enable the use of recycled materials in local manufacturing;*
- d. *the existing business model and economic challenges facing the existing industry;*
- e. *the quantifiable benefits, including job creation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, of perusing elements of a circular economy in Victoria;*
- f. *the existing Sustainability Fund and how it can be used at fund solutions to the waste crisis*

a) Stockpiling has unfortunately become a more widespread practice which has attracted attention through the most recent fires at a number of facilities in Victoria. Clearly this is a highly dangerous practice for both human health and safety, as well as environmental risk. While the Combustible Recycling and Waste Material (CRWM) guidelines attempt to address the problem, they have also created problems for facilities who stockpile yet are not termed 'MRFs' who warrant or have the footprint to comply with the guidelines. While guidelines are needed, a 'one size fits all approach' is not appropriate and broader consultation with all stakeholders is required to ultimately obtain improved outcomes.

Ensuring all recyclable waste is being recycled is ambitious; the industry has a history of not being properly regulated. There needs to be full consultation within the chain of supply; engaging with all the crucial players so the bigger picture is understood. The sector is a complex one which is compounded by factors outside of Local Government/Alpine Resorts influence such as: consumerism, location, cultural and peer norms.

b, c, d & e)

There are many opportunities and significant potential to enable the local recycling industry. As an example, in the North East Region there is an MDF factory which requires used (clean) timber. During the process of manufacturing dry fiber, garden waste is used to heat their boilers. Currently they use (clean, chipped) pallet timber waste mixed with virgin material. While this could be sourced locally, the clean timber is currently transported long distances to satisfy the company's needs. Yet, garden and timber waste which are plentiful materials in the North East area, simply sit in stockpiles at transfer stations and cost Councils money to mulch.

This timber, including garden waste could be transported to these facilities if it was collected on a hardstand (a concrete slab) and gross contaminates (pot plants/bags of rubbish/metals) were removed. If money was available from the State or Federal Government to progress these facilities towards better practice this would advance the recovery of materials and improve the economic challenges facing both local government and industry.

Compounding this are funding programs which often discount industries or investment in local companies who could potentially work in partnerships with local communities or Councils and Alpine Resorts.

The cost to Regional areas in the transportation prices alone should be a major consideration; large geographic distances are a huge impost to small Councils and Alpine Resorts and users of services in these areas.

The most environmentally and economically sustainable approach to the existing business model (which is clearly failing) is to support new enterprises in local Regions to manage, process and utilise recycled products locally. We are certain that if there was real investment by Government in localising the industry that it would create a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, increase local employment and have other flow on economic benefits.

f)

We do not believe that the existing Sustainability Fund has met its own legislated purposes or met its strategic purpose. For years Councils and Alpine Resorts have lobbied for more of the Sustainability fund to be released given the MILL was established to ensure that the waste levy was reinvested as “an important mechanism to reduce the amount of waste to landfill” and “foster environmentally sustainable uses of resources and best practices in waste management to advance the social and economic development of Victoria”.

The most recent recycling crisis in Victoria demonstrates the failure of State Government to obtain best practices in waste management.

Most of the fund should be made available to Councils, Alpine Resorts and industry who are attempting to upgrade their waste and resource recovery facilities to improve operations to gain better diversion from landfill and improve end product quality for maximum reuse and recycling opportunities.

Similarly, aggregation through a spokes and hubs approach would mean that Regional areas are able to consolidate materials and achieve economies of scale; cutting back on transport, costs to the community and environment whilst diverting hazardous and problematic materials from landfills. This requires funding and commitment from the State Government as Regional and Rural councils and resorts simply cannot afford to do this independently.

4) *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:*

a) *Product stewardship;*

Product Stewardship plays a significant role in the sector. This is an element that the Federal and State Government must step into and take a strong leadership role in. Councils and Alpine Resorts have very limited influence in this space and a coordinated, strategic and overarching approach to product stewardship is a must if any change is desired

b) Container deposit schemes;

CDS or CDL continues to divide opinion, however to make a beneficial impact it should be introduced as a national scheme as opposed to a State focused approach. Nationally consistent standards with effective controls, transparency and independent monitoring of the benefits of such schemes are required. Furthermore, in terms of the waste hierarchy, these containers which still have intrinsic value ideally should be reused over being reprocessed. European models demonstrate reuse at POS systems are far more effective than CDS and require less resources compared to recycling.

c) Banning single use plastics;

Banning of single use plastics is strongly supported and should be led by Federal and State Governments to gain the traction and awareness it deserves. There is a strong desire from communities that this occurs and in many cases community groups have impacted the way industry behaves by making district choices about ethical purchasing. It is time Government and industry catch up with consumer demands, especially around the way in which our food is packaged.

d) Government procurement policies

Government at all levels have already demonstrated that they can lead the way in modelling sustainable procurement. Purchasing policies that entail the use of recycled products is completely supported at local government level (including alpine resorts). It should by now be mandatory that all Governments have purchasing policies that entail a percentage of recycled product. In this way end markets are strengthened, and further extension of newly recycled products become viable for enterprising companies to begin to enter the market.

5) Relevant reviews, inquires, reports into the waste and recycling industry in other Australian jurisdictions and internationally;

The China National Sword policy has highlighted the problematic nature of shipping our wastes off shore and using third world countries as dumping grounds. While the issues are particularly apparent in Victoria, this is, and will continue to become, a national issue that is the Federal Governments responsibility to lead. This is the time to deal with waste and recycling as a national issue and change practices which are both irresponsible and environmentally detrimental to cease.

6) Any other related matters

Victoria has made in roads with it's Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan and subsequently the Region's Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation plan. However, after all the focus on strategy to improve the waste and resource recovery sector, there has been very little action in terms of delivering key priorities; both at a State and Regional level. Why spend so many resources on strategy if there are no resources to deliver? The State must follow up their own strategic approach with action and this requires adequate, appropriate and timely funding.

Conclusion:

The NE LGWF believes it is time for the State Government to lead the change and shift to a long term and sustainable approach to waste and resource recovery. This requires real investment in Victoria's capacity to deal with the waste it produces both Regionally and Statewide.

We trust this correspondence provides constructive information for better outcomes for our State, the environment and public.

Yours sincerely,



Cr, Libby Hall
Chair – Local Government Waste Forum