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**This submission is officer opinion only and not endorsed by Council**

## **CITY OF WHITTLESEA SUBMISSION FOR THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY INTO WASTE AND RECYCLING MANAGEMENT**

Recent events, including the shutdown of recycling processor SKM Recycling, China's implementation of its National Sword Policy and growing media interest in waste management practices, have highlighted the challenges involved in dealing with the many million tonnes of waste generated each year. Significant change is needed to improve the efficiency and sustainability of our waste and resource recovery system. Support and investment in waste and resource recovery and government leadership at all levels is critical to achieve systemic, lasting change.

The City of Whittlesea provides the following submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Enquiry into Waste and Recycling Management. Given the Enquiry timelines, this submission has not been satisfied by Council, however is in line with previously adopted council policy.

### **MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The City of Whittlesea's Municipal Waste Management & Resource Recovery Strategy 2012-2020 (MWM&RRS 2012-2020), which was formally adopted by Council on 4 September 2012, details Council's strategic direction for the management of waste materials generated within the City of Whittlesea. The MWM&RRS 2012-2020 provided a set of actions to guide the management of waste based on an assessment of the local community's needs and wants, current environmental and technical trends in municipal waste management, and the economic and social impact of waste disposal and resource recovery practices.

'Whittlesea 2040: A place for all' is our long-term vision for the future to ensure that the City of Whittlesea remains a great place to live. Whittlesea 2040 provides a broad goal to 'Reduce waste, increase recycling' which supports State Government priorities.

### **DISCUSSION**

A system thinking approach to the management of waste and recycling is necessary to achieve lasting, beneficial change to Victoria's waste and recycling industry. Facilitation of this change will require strategic collaboration across all three levels of government, as well as the private sector and the community to ensure we manage our resources sustainably in the short and long term.

#### **Local Government Response**

It is acknowledged that local government can take steps that will strengthen the waste and recycling system, these include:

- Collaborative procurement - In partnership with the State, investigate and support options to collaboratively procure kerbside recycling services with the aim of attracting new

investment in recycling in Victoria. The aim is to enhance competition and attract new investment in recycling in Victoria. It is noted that the MWRRG are currently managing the Recycling Services Collective Procurement process which will facilitate these objectives.

- Community Education - Continue to develop and support delivery of community education that focuses on reducing waste and minimising contamination in recycling bins. It is noted that the Victorian Waste Education Strategic Framework aligns directly with Whittlesea 2040 in that it provides for a robust, tiered strategic framework that addresses 2040 waste goal to 'Reduce waste, increase recycling' and supports State Government priorities.
- Sustainable procurement - Application of the principles of Sustainable, or Social, Procurement to purchasing and the supply chain should be promoted. Wherever possible Councils should support market development via procurement of recycled content for operations, services and infrastructure programs.
- Continuous improvement – Councils should actively explore ways of achieving the best triple bottom line outcomes for the community by frequently reviewing their approach to the provision of municipal waste services. For example, the investigation of stream separation whereby collection services separate glass from the rest of kerbside recycling to reduce contamination.
- Contingency in crisis – Councils to work with the State and industry to ensure contingencies are available in times of crisis as recently exposed with the closure of SKM facilities. Councils should ensure any future contractual arrangement or collective procurement has provisions for alternative disposal in the event of facility closure.

### State Government Response

While Local Government play an integral role in the waste and recycling system, the Victorian Government also have an ability to shape the future direction of waste and recycling in a number of ways, most notably through the allocation of the Sustainability Fund. The 2018 VAGO enquiry into managing the Municipal and Industrial Landfill Levy found there is a potential risk that the levy and sustainability fund are not always used for their intended purposes, and that activities that receive fund monies are not achieving the legislative objectives of better waste management, reduced greenhouse gases or effective adaptations to climate change. Currently the Sustainability Fund is failing to fulfil its intended purpose because the collected funds are not being reinvested in the community. Instead the monies are being held on to by the State; as at 31 December 2017, the balance of the Sustainability Fund was \$562 million. It is noted that short-term funding relief has been used in recent times to cover additional costs arising from the China Sword Policy and the closure of recycling processor SKM, however, in the long term landfill levy funds should be expended on measures that achieve a genuine change in how Victoria manages its waste and captures resources. Key actions could include but are not limited to;

- There is a need to increase capacity in our materials recovery facilities across the state. We saw recently the effects of having one processor (SKM) support more than 50% of Victoria's recycling waste, in that the majority of material was diverted to landfill for a period of three weeks while the SKM sites were shut down by the EPA. The Victorian Government should increase Sustainability Fund investment into recycling sorting and processing infrastructure, plus market research and development to drive demand for recycled products.
- Fund and support market development to drive demand for recycled content. Support research and development to increase uptake of new uses for recycled materials. Set mandatory procurement targets for Australian recycled material by government agencies. Incentivise procurement of Australian recycled content by others.
- Establish greater State oversight of the recycling industry to improve industry transparency and accountability in delivering an essential community service. Access to robust and credible data on market conditions, costs and revenue within the recycling sector is essential to achieve best value for the community. Recycling is considered an essential service by most, yet the few large operators we have in Victoria operate under a veil of secrecy. The State must improve transparency and accountability within the industry.
- Strengthen community education to develop and deliver consistent state-wide community waste and recycling education campaigns. Waste and recycling education should use the channels that most effectively reach the community and apply learning's and an evidence base from other successful government campaigns.
- Introduce a Victorian container deposit scheme. Victoria and Tasmania are the only Australian states yet to commit to such a scheme.

Whittlesea Council contributed a total of \$3.6 Million to the fund in 2017/18 through landfill levy charges apportioned to the disposal of municipally generated waste. There is an equity argument to suggest that the funds contributed by Whittlesea's community through landfill levy charges should be allocated back to local environmental initiatives that provide a direct benefit to community via Sustainability Fund grant program allocations. The City of Whittlesea MWM&RRS 2012-2020 provides a set of actions to guide the management of our municipalities waste based on an assessment of the local community's needs and wants, environmental and technical trends in municipal waste management, and the economic and social impact of waste disposal and resource recovery practices. The actions and advocacy positions detailed within the strategy relating to the use of the landfill levy include:

- The MWM&RRS 2012-2020 identifies the need for a contemporary Waste and Resource Recovery Centre within our municipality. We foresee a tremendous opportunity to utilise the Sustainability Fund and work collaboratively with Hanson Wollert Landfill, the State Government and its associated state agencies, industry and community with the goal of developing such infrastructure
- The position that levy funds collected (both now and into the future) be directed back into local waste management programs for the purpose of improving resource recovery of valuable materials.
- That funds should be used to subsidise programs for the safe and environmentally responsible disposal of problematic hazardous wastes that pose a risk to public health. (e.g. Asbestos products and the like)

The argument forwarded by the Council is based on the premise that funds contributed by local government communities through landfill levy charges should be allocated back to fund the 'future proofing' of the waste and recycling industry and support local environmental initiatives that provide a direct benefit to those communities.

#### Federal Government Response

The Federal Government can also play an important role in reducing waste generation and drive industry change in Victoria. Suggestions include;

- Product Stewardship - Introduce mandatory product stewardship for all products that generate waste. Put clear and binding targets within the Product Stewardship Act to drive action by industry. This approach would align with the polluter-pays principle, incentivising designers and producers to take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.
- Strengthen National Policy, Strategy and Legislation - Strengthen the National Waste Policy in partnership with states and adopt an action plan that includes targets and timelines that fast-track the transition to a circular economy. Additionally, in partnership with states, review the National Environment Protection (Used Packaging Materials) Measure 2011 to impose mandatory participation and binding obligations across the consumer packaging chain. The Federal Government could also regulate or ban the production and importation of hard-to-recycle materials that inevitably end up in landfill or in the environment as litter.
- Standardise package labelling and certify use of recycled content – This would require all consumer packaging sold in Australia to display the Australasian Recycling Label which would improve community understanding of what is and isn't recyclable. The adoption of a certification system for recycled content in line with the US or European models could also be explored.

#### CONCLUSION

As Victoria's population grows, so too does the amount of waste that we generate. Council will continue to advocate for waste and recycling processing outcomes that serve the interest of our community. Council wish to ensure that the waste and recycling in this State is both a resilient and continuously improving system that minimises waste generation, maximises resource recovery, and works towards reducing waste being sent to landfill. The submission outlined above includes a number of high level concepts and it is acknowledged that much work will need to be done to make these happen. Council appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission into this enquiry and looks forward to reviewing the outcomes in August 2019.

