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From: Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management [REDACTED]
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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The greatest priority for fixing Victoria (and Australia's) waste crisis needs to be in the following areas:

1. Reducing the consumption of product and packaging materials at both the commercial and consumer level.
2. Incentivising reuse systems, such as reusable glass bottles, pallets and so on.
3. Mandating the use of recycled content in packaging and other products.

For too long Australia has relied simply on recycling as the solution to our waste crisis, yet the markets do not exist to take the used materials for recycling, especially now that China and India won't take the poor quality waste we are producing.

As well, it still requires an enormous amount of energy and waste for raw material extraction and processing to make all the packaging and products we are consuming (even when there is some recycled content).

So many of the products and packaging that are consumed in Australia are either totally unnecessary or very hard to justify when the environmental impacts are taken into consideration. Single use packaging is at the top of the list, while there are also many products that are pointless and wasteful because they don't last very long before they are thrown away.

There are many ways to tackle this.

1. REDUCING CONSUMPTION OF PRODUCTS AND PACKAGING

I know it's hard for politicians to suggest that people might buy less stuff! But this is the reality that we have to face because it's impossible for the planet to keep being raped for materials and then the waste just dumped back into the earth and sea.

Here are some ways forward to reduce consumption at source:

- Support the emerging market for second hand goods by providing financial support (or tax relief) to any business or charity selling second-hand products.
- Ban single use plastic products where a non-plastic alternative is available. Target the high-volume problem products first:
 - >> Single-use water bottles
 - >> Disposable coffee cups
 - >> Plastic cutlery and take-away containers
 - >> Plastic straws
 - >> Plastic bags of all types
 - >> Wet wipes, cotton buds, sanitary products like nappies
- Ban specific toxic materials from being sold in products in Australia.
- Look into ways to control the importation of cheap plastic products to block short-life and disposable products from being imported into Australia (it may just be done through product bans such as those listed above).
- Put the charges associated with the "landfill levy" onto the retail price of products - so add a levy based on the volume of non-recyclable and plastic materials in a product, rather than charging Councils the landfill levy.
- Tax the extraction of virgin raw materials, whilst finding ways to reduce taxes and charges for recycled content processing.
- Run education campaigns to shift the way consumers and businesses expect that things will be done - eg phase out single use coffee cups in conjunction with cafes; support the shift to cloth nappies; support the shift to reusable plates and cutlery being provided in food courts and takeaway shops that currently use single-use plastic (alongside a ban of this).

2. INCENTIVISE REUSE SYSTEMS

- Introduce Product Stewardship legislation that makes companies responsible for the packaging of the products they sell.
- Tax raw material extraction and processing (as above).
- Support the mass-scale introduction of reuse systems such as glass milk bottles, glass soft drink bottles, pallets, boxes and more. If the government can lead the system change it will be more likely to succeed, since it can bring all the players on board. Especially since the reuse alternative needs to be consistent across the country eg the same glass milk bottles. We had many of these systems before so it is clear that it can be done!

3. MANDATE THE USE OF RECYCLED CONTENT IN PACKAGING AND PRODUCTS

New markets are needed for the waste materials that get processed in Australia if we are to recycle our own waste.

The government needs to set up processing plants and, if profitable markets are not easily found, then sell or give away the materials for reuse at a loss. This cost can be covered by the waste levy on all non-reusable packaging and products.

To drive demand for recycled materials, mandate that all new products and packaging must contain a minimum of 50% recycled content. If a manufacturer cannot achieve this they need to pay another company to "offset" their use of virgin materials. So this would work similar to the carbon or biodiversity offset schemes that exists. But since we are talking about actual materials, this would incentivise recycled content within many products and advantage companies who innovate and find ways to use more recycled content.

Finally, I do not believe that a container deposit system is required since we already collect those containers via the recycling system. Instead the effort needs to go into shifting to reducing consumption, setting up reuse systems and ensuring recycled content.

More work needs to be done on public place recycling - consistent bins and signage and more education

about this. Or, if public place waste can just be collected and sorted without the need for the consumer to sort it, then Councils et al need to tell us and educate us about that!

Overall there needs to be confidence in the recycling system by householders - that it is actually being recycled!

Yours sincerely,
Suzie Brown

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File1:

File2:

File3: