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From: Tegan Perry <web@greens.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 18 April 2019 7:16 PM
To: recyclinginquiry
Subject: Pollution is a health hazard

RE: INQUIRY INTO RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

I, like many other Victorians I know, am deeply concerned about the growing recycling waste crisis and its dangerous impact on environmental and human health. I was first shocked when I learnt that China was no longer buying our recycling as I was not aware that this had been part of the recycling process given that we have recycling processing plants in Melbourne. After this announcement, I expected to hear of some positive changes to the recycling industry. However, the most notable change has been the occurrence of frequent factory fires across the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. Having spent time in polluted cities in China, I have experienced pollution as a health hazard. As many of you working in government would know from your travels, in cities like Beijing, the sky is very seldom blue; it is instead white with smog, the air is thick and tastes horrible, and on some days it is not healthy to leave your home. Here in Australia, we are lucky to have clean air and blue skies. However, we must not take it for granted. On the days when the factory fires have occurred, the air had the same polluted feel as the pollution in Beijing. The pollution and the factory fires that it results from is a human made problem that is the direct result of a failed waste recycling system. Although it is a complex issue, there is a lot that can be done. Firstly, I believe that community education is lacking and should be made a priority. As a teacher, I too often see total disregard for the health of the environment, and although topic that teacher environmental education and sustainability are included in curricula from childcare through to high school, the messages are not getting through to the students and their communities. I believe this is in part due to schools, particularly those in low S.E.S areas, having to manage students of extremely low literacy and the behavioural issues that sometimes accompany low literacy. Environmental education is therefore not as crucial a topic as learning the basic ability to read and write. Schools can have some impact on community behaviour, however, the message must be seen as consistent across the community and visibly come from councils and governments too. Secondly, I support initiatives such as the ten cent refund on bottles and cans, which I have already written to the state government. Although I was please to receive a thorough and personalised response from the office of the Minister for Climate Change, I was not entirely convinced of the government's need to evaluate the efficacy of same initiative in other states before implementing a similar system. I have travelled to countries such as Argentina where it is very common practice to return a glass bottle to the shop it is bought from. The implementation of a refund system in Victoria would require community education but it is possible. Just as people have become accustomed to bringing a bag to the shops, they can similarly learn to deposit recyclables or to live without single-use plastics. Cultural change arises out of human need combined with strong and ethical leadership. To improve waste management in Victoria, we must create change in behaviour at an individual, small business and industrial level. This can be achieved through initiatives trialled in other states and countries such as the plastic bottle refund, and supporting their implementation with community education. I look forward to hearing about the findings of the inquiry.

-- Tegan Perry
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I'm happy for my submission and details to be made public.