

# STRATEGIES & OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NSW WASTE INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS

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## BACKGROUND

The Waste Act of 1995 introduced several significant and far-reaching changes into the management of solid waste in NSW:

- the creation of Waste Boards;
- formalisation of the 60% waste reduction target;
- opening for private sector ownership of putrescible waste landfills;
- the creation of SWAC (State Waste Advisory Council);
- introduction of the Supervisory Licence.

Through the Waste Act, the Government established a new platform for managing wastes and resource recovery in NSW. A framework of planning and management responsibility was established and a new regulatory regime was established.

The Waste Act is now 5 years old and by legislative requirement is under review. Setting the scene for that review, the Government has completed a number of major strategic initiatives:

- commissioned the Alternative Waste Management Technologies & Practices Inquiry;
- commissioned the Container Deposit Legislation Inquiry;
- commissioned an independent assessment of putrescible waste landfill capacity and demand;
- approved the first privately owned and operated putrescible waste landfill;
- rejected the target of 60% reduction in waste to landfill by 2000.

In parallel, the private sector has responded to demands for alternative waste processing and management options with:

- the Bedminster system at Port Stephens;
- a composting and residual waste management system at Hastings;
- the mixed waste SWERF at Wollongong;
- achieving approvals for a biodigester waste to energy plant in Parramatta;
- achieving approvals for the Woodlawn putrescible waste landfill.

In the background, the Waste Boards are working to introduce resource recovery waste processing systems for the residual waste stream:

- Western Sydney - pretreatment of residual waste as a precursor to resource recovery;
- Southern Sydney - treatment of mixed residual waste with recovery of economically viable resources;
- Hunter - treatment of mixed residual waste with recovery of economically viable resources.

Through these moves the Government, the Waste Boards and the private sector are working on an agenda for further change in waste and resource recovery management in NSW. There is a noticeable shift away from managing disposal issues to creating an environment for diversion for beneficial use and avoidance. The notion of targets for reduction in disposal has been rejected, but the clarification of landfill capacity has put pressure on the amount of waste that can be tolerated over the next two decades.

The finite capacity of existing landfills was determined and a buffer of capacity created. The Government clearly rejected the notion of permitting excess capacity, to maintain both social, financial and political pressure for diversion and avoidance. Thus there is a collective move from all stakeholders to seek out options for diverting resources into avenues for beneficial use and for minimising waste at source.

#### **WASTE INQUIRY IMPLEMENTATION TASKFORCE**

Within this framework of change, the Minister for the Environment formed the Waste Inquiry Implementation Taskforce requesting the outline for an implementation plan based on the recommendations of the Waste Inquiry.

The working group focused on initiatives required in three key areas – supply side, system integration and markets. It identified key barriers in each of these areas which, if addressed are likely to result in the more efficient use of our resources. The barriers identified were:

- information and knowledge (e.g. data, analytical tools, perception, options, access to data) for decision making by all stakeholders;
- surety of supply – especially in the commercial sector;
- fiscal barriers that prevent resource recovery;
- imbalances in economic settings that favour virgin over recovered resources;
- poor efficiency in logistics (e.g. planning of infrastructure, collection densities, transport efficiencies);
- poor integration of institutional arrangements.

Using the barriers as a starting point a range on specific initiatives were identified which could help to break down the barriers.

To further focus the outcomes into areas where significant gains could be achieved in reasonable timeframes, three key streams of resources which are dominant in the municipal and commercial industrial sector, were targeted - organics, paper & cardboard and wood.

## **BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS**

The overall focus of the recommendations of the Taskforce can be broadly encapsulated within the concept “***breaking down the barriers***”.

In brief, the recommendations aim to:

- break down mindsets which place waste and resource management into boxes according to distinct waste streams called municipal, commercial & industrial and construction waste. This is essential to develop systems which are driven by density of resources available, common collection needs, geographic proximity and market specifications;
- identify synergies between waste generator (municipal and commercial) needs to achieve better efficiencies from existing systems;
- overcome the lack of information and data throughout the system which prevents stakeholders from making informed decisions about market needs and opportunities or best fit collection infrastructure and coverage;
- provide a stronger and clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities of planning and coordinating groups so that they focus on needs and systems across broad geographic areas and waste streams;
- recognise the legitimacy of the full range of resource recovery options which are considered in the context of ESD once people have done all they can to avoid creating waste in the first place.

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Focus on resources, not waste***

The focus should be on efficient use of resources, ensuring that we get the environmental, economic and social balances right. This should carry through to a re-titling of the current Waste Act and waste hierarchy.

### ***Provide targets which focus efforts***

The Minister is required to give consideration to the establishment of new waste reduction targets after 2000 as part of the Waste Act Review. Acknowledging that the setting of performance indicators will in part be dependent on available data, these indicators should also focus the community on recovery rather than disposal and be based on measuring continuous improvement over time against a baseline.

In addition, setting goals for action by particular sectors such as the number of waste reduction and purchasing plans developed or a gradual increase in the recycled content of products purchased, could be considered. It may also be useful to set goals for targeted waste streams rather than waste in globo.

### ***Refine the waste hierarchy***

The current waste hierarchy is a very useful and understandable concept and its continued use should be supported. The pictorial representation of the current hierarchy should, however, be reconsidered. It represents a rigid and linear approach to resource management which always assumes that re-use will be a better approach than recycling or disposal. In fact, the relative benefit of options will change according to the resource, the processes and with time.

It is important that all resource recovery mechanisms are given legitimacy within the hierarchy. Currently, energy recovery is not recognised or seen as a last stage alternative to disposal. Energy recovery was clearly demonstrated in the Waste Inquiry report to be a viable option for consideration for some materials.

In addition, there appears to be a lack of understanding of the full meaning of a number of terms in the hierarchy. For example, both industry and the community find the concept of avoidance difficult to apply. For industry, the concept of reduction is sometimes easier to action.

### ***Focus efforts on priority sectors***

Delineation of the waste stream into “municipal” and “commercial/industrial” is putting false boundaries on the thinking of those designing collection systems and considering market and material catchments. In reality, many materials cut across these categories e.g. paper & cardboard and organics streams. Better outcomes will be achieved through focus on streams of resources, and classes of waste generators with similar service needs.

### ***Establish data sets for decision making***

The lack of reliable information for various sectors of the community is very apparent. Making effective decisions requires appropriate data and information. Whilst in some areas there is a wealth of data, we currently must address shortcomings in the following areas:

- a framework for data acquisition;
- uniform systems for collecting, processing and reporting data;
- appreciation of the breadth of data needed for decision making by different stakeholders; and
- adequate and timely public reporting of and access to that data.

This is one of the fundamental areas where priority action needs to be taken in order for NSW to achieve greater waste diversion. This area is the subject of a number of specific recommendations should be a priority for action.

## RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR ACTION

Avoidance, Reduction & Resource Recovery	In targeted industry sectors, raise awareness and encourage adoption of avoidance, reduction and greater adoption of in-house source separation and resource recovery - especially in small & medium enterprises (SMEs) - transferring home based practices into the workplace by individuals and making resource management a part of doing business
Standardise Systems	Establish standard systems for managing resource recovery in public places, work places and the general community, to ensure a uniform message
Information Quality & Awareness	Improve the quality, utility and general availability of data collected on waste and resources management; develop KPIs for performance measurement; promote wide-spread awareness of available information to increase the utilisation of data resources for informed decision making
Integrate Recycling Collections	Identify and implement schemes to integrate collection and processing of recyclables from SMEs with municipal systems on a fee for service basis – transferring home based practices into the workplace by individuals and making resource management a part of doing business
Improve Services (horizontal markets)	Develop processes to improve resource recovery rates from businesses in common market segments of waste generation, through improved infrastructure and services
Improve Services (vertical markets)	Identify opportunities for greater resource recovery through higher levels of collaboration between related businesses
Single Collection Contracts	Encourage uptake of contract management systems to integrate collections within a geographic area into one contract to optimise diversions
Ancillary Services	Identify and implement opportunities to consolidate ancillary services associated with the delivery of local council waste management services
Buyer Resistance	Develop awareness raising information to address buyer resistance and prejudices towards recycled materials and products with recovered resource content
Product Substitution	Investigate options for the introduction of automatic product substitution in purchasing software used by Govt. agencies to favour selection of recycled resources and products with recycled content
Markets for Products from ROM	Build on the work of the combined Waste Boards in understanding and stimulating markets for products manufactured from recycled organic materials (ROM) and create a market pull for ROM
Leadership and Ownership	Establish clear commitment to leadership and ownership responsibilities, on behalf of the community, to deliver on waste minimisation and diversion initiatives
Resource Utilisation Accounting	Encourage greater awareness to the benefits of full cost accounting of resource utilisation to facilitate more holistic decision making and to bring resource management on-line as a core part of doing business
Imbalance in Economic Settings	Develop a clear understanding of the extent and impact of imbalances in economic settings on markets for recovered resources and products with recovered resource content, and develop options to redress the imbalances