



Promoting Community Right to Know and Environmental Health and Justice in WA

**Submission to the
Department of Environment, Water, Heritage, and
the Arts**

Draft National Waste Policy Framework

**Promoting Community Right to Know and
Environmental Justice in WA.**

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Preamble

The Alliance for a Clean Environment Inc (ACE), Western Australia's peak environmental health, environmental justice and toxics organisation, is pleased to provide this submission to the department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on its Draft National Waste Policy Framework.

ACE and its members have had a long history in the promoting and campaigning for more appropriate and sustainably responsible methods of waste management.

Although ACE is not an "individual, a business, or industry participant" it reserves the right to make a submission to this Draft National Waste Policy Framework.

Key Theme: 6.5.1 Taking responsibility

ACE believes that the issues surrounding "Taking Responsibility" should not be solely viewed as an "end of life" management exercise that needs to be undertaken by business and consumers. In many instances, the producer of a product or waste is the more ideal entity that should be made responsible for the waste that is produced, hence "extended **producer** responsibility". There are countless examples of manufacturers that produce a product that has little or no intrinsic value at the end of its life, but bears a considerable environmental impact, and how simple changes in production methods or materials of construction can result in a product that has a recycling value at the end of its life. ACE recommends that manufacturers or producers need to be included in the list of entities that need to "take responsibility" for wastes that are generated.

ACE is somewhat concerned over the absence of the terms "Container Deposit Levy" in discussions over EPR and "Taking Responsibility". ACE believes that any framework that seeks to be part of the roadmap to zero waste needs to include a Deposit Levy as a mechanism for increasing the collection, recovery and recycling of many recyclable materials and also not just limited to containers.

ACE also believes that there is an absence of other crucial steps in the process. For any program to be successful, there are at least three main requirements:

Leadership: Defines the problem, sets goals, ensures that there are adequate resources to achieve the goals, measures the effectiveness of the program and attainment of goals

Resources: Both human and monetary resources are required to perform all the actions that are required to meet the goal of the program.

Research: Is a requirement of the Leadership aspect (determining the problem, defining the goals, and measuring the effectiveness of the program) and is central to developing the means to fulfil the goals of the program.

In the areas of waste management, the leadership needs to be coming from somewhere, as experience has shown that relying on the leadership from individuals, business, and Local, State and Federal Governments has, in many cases, not resulted in any of the goals associated with Zero Waste or Ecologically Sustainable Development being

achieved, and in some instances the goals have been compromised by political or profit driven motives. This does not discount some instances where individuals, businesses, and the various levels of Government have shown strong leadership in attaining these goals, often in a vacuum of support from other levels of Government, individuals or businesses. It would seem logical that the leadership should originate from the Federal Government or COAG, but the burden of leadership should not be taken lightly. This is a serious and important task.

The allocation of resourcing is also an area that requires attention. Once the goals are set by the leadership, the resources required should be commensurate with the goals. Anything less will only cause the failure of the program.

Research is the key to solving the problem. The establishment of a coordinated network of research groups (CRC's, Industry Associations, Local Government Associations, NGO's) that will be responsible for addressing issues related to generic waste avoidance / management issues and also problematic regional waste issues. As most waste reduction processes are iterative, once a problem is highlighted, studied, addressed and resolved, the process needs to start on the next most problematic waste (and any "new" wastes that emerge or present as a result of other activities).

ACE is generally supportive of EPR as a mechanism to drive change within the waste avoidance / management processes and would be a keen contributor to programs and processes that will encourage the sustainable management of waste streams.

Key Theme 6.5.2 - Improving the market

ACE recognises that there are various market based instruments that can be employed to drive positive outcomes in waste management. ACE is also aware that there can be unintended consequences that result from the use of market based instruments. ACE recommends that any changes to markets or regulation be thoroughly investigated to ensure that there are no unintended consequences (ie: the mandating of the use of MSW derived composts that may contain chemicals of concern on food crops).

ACE has previously submitted its concern over the lack of consistent definitions on what constitutes a waste, and strongly recommends that this issue be resolved as soon as possible. ACE supports the open and accountable labelling of wastes derived products to ensure Community Right to Know. ACE would also be a keen participant in the development of agreed specification, standards, and guidelines that govern the re-use and labelling of products that incorporate waste derived materials.

ACE is concerned over the proposed labelling of a "waste to energy" facilities as anything other than a waste incinerator. A waste to energy incinerator is a device that has the capacity to cause immense environmental damage and should be classified and regulated as such. A waste to energy incinerator does not fulfil our obligations to reduce or eliminate polychlorinated dioxins and furans (ie: it is impossible to reduce or eliminate by introducing a technology that generates PCDD/F's) under the Stockholm Convention. It has also been long established that waste incinerators actually destroy more embodied energy than they recover. The suggestion that a waste incinerator needs only comply with "typical emission and environmental benchmarks" is contrary to any sensible waste management or environmental protection processes. Does it suggest that the burning of tyres or PVC plastics for heat raising for production processes is only required to comply with the typical emission of a natural gas boiler used for heat raising ?

ACE is aware that anaerobic digestion / compost plants can also be referred to as “waste-to-energy” plants, but as the biogas generation processes are not a result of thermal treatment, do not consider them to be as environmentally harmful as thermal or incineration based facilities.

ACE is vigorously opposed to any processes that involve the thermal processing and destruction of any wastes. Any process that would be defined as an incinerator by the EC-Waste Incineration Directive should be defined as such, and should be regulated as such. ACE does not believe that there is a place for incineration within a sustainable waste management program as it destroys valuable resources for very little energy return, generates a vast number of pollutants, violates our responsibilities under the Stockholm Convention, and discourages more sustainable waste management processes.

Key Theme - 6.5.3 Pursuing sustainability

ACE is generally supportive of composting processes, with the proviso that the siting and technology criteria are suitable, there is sufficient source separation, industry support for the recycling / reprocessing of recyclables, adequate regulation of facilities, and ongoing research into methods of waste reduction and the management of problematic wastes.

ACE is concerned over the proposed or potential use of “biochar” in any waste management processes. To produce a biochar requires a thermal process that ACE would vigorously oppose. The thermal processes required are entirely contrary to the idea of “pursuing sustainability”

Key Theme - 6.5.4 Facilitating investment

ACE suggests that this Key theme be renamed to be “Demonstrate Leadership”. The description and directions for change seem to describe the need for increased government leadership rather than facilitation of investment. ACE understands that if the government generates the demand for recycled or recovered products that procurement and investment will follow, but this aspect was sufficiently covered under “Improving the Market” which specifically listed “infrastructure investment” as a goal. There is, however, very little discussion about the need for all levels of society to demonstrate their own leadership when it comes to sustainably managing our own waste from point of purchase through to disposal / recycling.

Key Theme -6.5.5 Reducing hazards

ACE has previously expressed its concern over the distinct lack of classification of hazardous wastes. ACE supports the development and introduction of a unified process for determining the hazard classification of wastes and would also advocate the development of national standards for labelling manufactured goods and consumables with reference to hazardous material content.

ACE is also supportive of the development of national hazardous waste infrastructure that would be capable of sustainably and responsibly treating hazardous wastes. ACE believes that Australia has to be responsible for the hazardous wastes that it generates, and needs to be more responsible for its treatment. The concept of a national infrastructure is worth consideration and will assist greatly in providing a variety of facilities (base catalysed

dechlorination, supercritical water oxidation, gas phase chemical reduction) that will provide the best environmental outcomes in dealing with particular hazardous wastes. This does not, however, discount the problems associated with a particular producer or manufacturer that generates a hazardous waste or by-product. This would ideally be the responsibility of the producer to responsibly manage rather than to leave it up to the rest of the community to have to deal with.

ACE would be a keen participant in the development of an approach to developing agreed standards or guidelines for appropriate recovery, reprocessing and safe disposal of hazardous wastes in Australia.

Key Theme - 6.5.6 Reporting on performance

ACE is supportive of any mechanisms that will increase the understanding of the amounts, types, sources, and destinations of wastes in Australia. This form of research is crucial to the development of appropriate mechanisms to manage and recycle wastes.

Key Theme - 6.5.7 Tailoring solutions

ACE is encouraged by the acknowledgement of regional, remote and Indigenous communities in the framework. ACE is however not encouraged by the suggestion that scalable waste-to-energy plants are advocated for these communities. ACE is vigorously opposed to any thermal processes for the treatment and destruction of wastes.