



Submission on Draft National Waste Policy Framework: “Less waste more resources” Discussion Paper

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (The Association) would like to commend the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and the Waste Policy Taskforce on the development of the Draft National Waste Policy Framework. The Association feels that the Framework has identified a number of key issues relevant to Local Government and the Northern Territory, and is particularly pleased with the recognition of the vital role of Local Government in Waste Management, through the inclusion of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) in the policy endorsement process.

This Submission has been prepared by officers of the Association and is taken to represent the view of Northern Territory Local Government. However, individual Local Governments may have views that differ from the positions taken here.

Due to meeting schedules and the short timeframe of the consultation, this Submission has not yet been endorsed by the Association’s Executive Committee or the Environment, Transport and Infrastructure Reference Group; however it will be put before these groups at the earliest opportunity.

Without reiterating comments submitted on the draft strategy paper in May of this year, the Association would like to strengthen our position and update the taskforce on the following points.

National Policy

All levels of government, industry and the community have a role to play in delivering against national priorities for waste. It is important to emphasise the necessity of locally relevant targets and priorities. A national policy should help guide markets, facilitate innovation and remove economic barriers to improve waste management services.

Vision and Scope

The Association is supportive of the vision and scope of the Framework, particularly in the focus on fit for purpose technologies and minimizing risk to environment and health. Whilst other jurisdictions may set ambitious recycling and recovery targets, waste management in the Territory is still centred on the issues of health and risk management. Processes and technologies that are highly efficient in other regions may be superfluous or inapplicable to remote and regional Australia.

Targets

Any national targets should be set at the local level, and be comparative to past practices and performance, rather than between incomparable jurisdictions. Continual improvement should be the aim rather than across the board reaching of identical goals. Little baseline, or other, data exists in the Territory and so an initial collation of data would be necessary before additional targets can be designed.

Market Arrangements

The Association agrees that historically market arrangements have been very “end of pipe”, with little focus on the responsibilities of the producers of waste. Current market arrangements in the Territory are negligible, with most disposed wastes being unaccounted for. New local government structures in the Territory are making waste disposal practices more transparent and accountable; however it is a slow process to move from essentially free disposal of waste to a producer-pays system.

Logistical barriers contribute to the challenge of market arrangements in the territory as the costs associated with processing and transporting recyclable materials generally results in a financial situation that favours all materials being sent to landfill.

It is important to note that the Northern Territory Government is seriously considering the introduction of Container Deposit Schemes across the Territory. The Association is strongly supportive of this approach to container waste, and encourages the Minister to consider an Australia-wide Container Deposit Scheme.

Maximising Benefit

Processes that deliver multiple beneficial outcomes are highly favoured by the Association. We certainly agree that reducing overall waste production and managing waste as a resource will facilitate innovation and drive new processes and industries. This is particularly important in the Territory, where conventional waste reduction systems do not necessarily deliver the same benefits as in other jurisdictions.

Product Stewardship

The Association notes that the terms “Product Stewardship” and “Extended Producer Responsibility” are used interchangeably, and would like to see a clearer definition of these terms, highlighting the differences between the concepts.

There is also some concern about how product stewardship initiatives may play out in the Territory, due the logistical barriers of delivering these kinds of programs in remote communities. The Association would like a clear indication of the roles and responsibilities of industry in these programs.

Legacy Emissions

The Association commends the exclusion of legacy landfill emissions under the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), and encourages the Minister to continue to ensure that the CPRS does not hinder innovation and industry development in the waste industry.

Tailoring Solutions

The Association notes the theme of building capacity in regional, remote and Indigenous communities (6.5.7), however not enough importance has been devoted to outcomes in this area. All of the Territory is considered to be regional, most of it is remote and communities facing the greatest challenges in waste management are predominantly Indigenous. Waste management in the Territory, and across most of remote Australia, requires a radical change in thinking if the Australian Government expects to improve the standard of living for Indigenous Australians, and to deliver a national standard of waste management to all Australians.

Concluding Remarks

The Association reiterates our support for the Minister in the direction of the National Waste Policy. We encourage the Minister to pursue ambitious targets and to move towards a more accountable and transparent waste management framework for all of Australia. There is a great opportunity for innovation and industry development in this arena, particularly with a national approach to market arrangements. We appreciate the opportunity to comment at this stage of the process, and look forward to future consultation.