

ITEM 20: LMM 24/09/2019 - City of Newcastle submission to 20-Year Waste Strategy for NSW

MOTION

That City of Newcastle:

1. Notes that the NSW Government, through the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, including the EPA, is currently calling for submissions regarding the development of a 20-Year Waste Strategy (20YWS) for NSW;
2. Recognises the need for a comprehensive Waste Strategy for NSW, particularly regarding the future of recycling, which is currently being impacted by the China 'Green Sword Policy', noting the Morrison Federal Government's vow to establish a plastic recycling industry in Australia;
3. Notes Newcastle Herald article 'Problems with plastic that can't be ignored', which outlines that only 12 per cent of the 103 kilograms of plastic waste generated per person in Australia each year was recycled, mostly overseas;
4. Prepares a submission for the NSW Government's 20YWS, including:
 - a. Strong support for the establishment of a plastic recycling industry in Australia;
 - b. Calls for continued government assistance to further support organics recycling strategies for local government;
 - c. Noting the need for additional resourcing requirements for Assisted Household Waste Collection Service for elderly and disabled ratepayers, particularly given our ageing population;
 - d. Noting City of Newcastle's continued commitment to weekly kerbside general waste collection.
 - e. Noting that Recommendation 4 of the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Planning and Environment report 'Energy from waste' technology report states that "the NSW Government hypothecate 100 per cent of the waste levy funds contributed by local councils back to these organisations to provide waste management services, including waste reduction, avoidance and re-use programs, and environmental programs to encourage the development of innovative waste management technology."

Related previous decisions:

- LMM 27/08/2019 – City of Newcastle Organics Recycling
- LMM 25/09/2018 – NSW Waste Levy Fund Hypothecation

Background:



20-Year Waste Strategy for NSW

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, including the EPA, is leading the development of a 20-Year Waste Strategy for NSW.

We are building an evidence base to ensure that the Strategy is built on a comprehensive understanding of problems and issues that are confronting the waste sector, local government, communities and the environment today.

This work is also identifying issues that are likely to emerge over a 20 to 40-year outlook so the Strategy can guide robust decision making about our future. We are drawing on expert advice and the insights of our stakeholders to build this evidence base.

Since the 2019 election, the appointment of a new Minister and a clear commitment on coordinated waste reforms at the federal level, the NSW Government has amended its timetable for the delivery of a strategy.

This will allow the strategy to align with progression in waste policy at the federal level, as well as new state-based initiatives, such as the NSW Plastics Plan.

We anticipate releasing an issues paper about the strategy and potential reform directions towards the end of 2019, with a draft strategy to follow. These phases will be accompanied by stakeholder engagement which will inform the final strategy.

Our focus for the 20YWS and accompanying policies is centred on:

- Sustainability – the NSW waste industry is self-sustaining, delivers improved environmental outcomes and avoids the human health impacts associated with poorly managed waste
- Reliability – the bins are always collected, and our waste is managed in accordance with community expectations where our recycling is recycled for example
- Affordability – waste services are delivered at a reasonable cost and with the customer in mind.

To inform the strategy we are interested in a variety of perspectives from across the sector about the problems facing the NSW waste industry and what options there are to address them, including understanding stakeholder priorities for the industry.

Anyone with an interest is encouraged to provide written feedback with your ideas and solutions by Monday 23 September 2019.

Please send your [feedback via the online form at https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/20-year-waste-strategy-for-nsw](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/20-year-waste-strategy-for-nsw).



Editorial: Plastic pollution requires massive change at the local and global level

Most of us put our recycling in a yellow-top bin and feel like we're doing our bit for the environment.

But most of us have no idea where the plastic ends up. We should probably pay more attention because, as Prime Minister Scott Morrison has pointed out, there are serious problems with recycling in Australia.

Many will be shocked to learn that only 12 per cent of the 3 million tonnes of plastic waste produced in Australia each year actually gets recycled.

Significant amounts of recyclable material ends up in landfill. Some is sent to Asia for recycling, where it can end up in rivers and the Pacific Ocean.

In the Hunter, a large amount of plastic waste is sent to Malaysia for recycling.

Up until a couple of years ago, it was being shipped to China. Then China decided it no longer wanted to accept the world's garbage.

Other Asian countries could, at some point, follow suit.

Roger Lewis, chief executive of Hunter Resource Recovery, supports Australia starting its own recycling industry with the creation of local jobs.

But he points out that this won't be an easy task, given the industry's economics.

Plastic can be recycled overseas at a lower cost than in Australia. Cheaper wages in Asia are a key factor in the matter.

Furthermore, recycled material can be more expensive than original material. Another problem is that plastic is made from oil, which comes with requisite concerns about climate change and pollution.

One of the buzzwords in recycling now is the concept of a "circular economy".

The federal government's National Waste Policy states that "all Australians have a role to play in implementing a circular economy, supporting resource recovery and recycling and reducing the generation of waste".

"The choices we make in what we buy, how we use products and how we dispose of them is central to improving the way we manage waste in Australia," the policy states.

The policy says we can all choose to avoid buying products with excessive or unnecessary packaging; repair or reuse items rather than throwing them away; buy products we can use multiple times and that are long-lived, rather than single-use or poor-quality items that are thrown away quickly.

It says we can also improve our recycling habits by sorting our waste properly into recycling and compost bins and use products that are recyclable.

But with the way society runs, some of these things are easier said they done. Another concern is making sure that alternatives to plastic require less energy from fossil fuels to manufacture and distribute.

It's clear that regulators, business and consumers have a big role to play in creating sustainable change. Plastic contamination is increasingly posing health risks to humans, animals and the biosphere.

Rational changes are needed from all of us.

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Newcastle plastic expert on the push for Australia to recycle its own plastic

A Hunter recycling expert says Australia should be recycling its own plastic waste, rather than sending it to Asia.

The comments come amid concern about the future of kerbside recycling in Australia and plastic pollution in the Pacific.

The Morrison government has vowed to establish a plastic recycling industry in Australia, amid concern about plastic going into landfill or being shipped to Asia.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison recently raised concerns that some of Australia's plastic exported to Asia ends up in rivers and the Pacific Ocean.

He said only 12 per cent of the 103 kilograms of plastic waste generated per person in Australia each year was recycled, mostly overseas.

Malaysia has become an alternative destination for plastic waste after China banned imports of such waste last year.

This led many recycling factories to emerge in Malaysia, some of them illegal.

Some of these factories burnt the plastic that was unsuitable for recycling, releasing toxic chemicals and threatening human health.

The Malaysian government said it had moved to shut the illegal factories.

Roger Lewis is chief executive of Hunter Resource Recovery, which handles recycling for Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland and Singleton councils.

Mr Lewis said plastic collected from the Hunter council areas was mainly sorted at Gateshead.

"The product then goes to Polytrade in Sydney at Enfield where it's separated into categories - there are seven classes of plastics," he said.

"The product is then exported to Malaysia and recycled. Polytrade has two licenced and approved facilities that operate in Malaysia."

He said Polytrade "work closely with the Malaysian government to ensure quality standards".

"The product is inspected by the Malaysian government on import," he said.

Mr Lewis said there were "a number of unauthorised, illegal plastic facilities that are operating through Asia".

As well as Malaysia, such factories had operated in Vietnam and India.

Additionally, the Malaysian government recently raised concerns about contaminated plastic being sent from Western countries, including Australia. This meant it could not be recycled.

The Malaysians vowed to send contaminated waste back to the countries of origin.

Mr Lewis said Hunter Resource Recovery had "never had any containers rejected".

But he believes countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia - following China's stance - are tired of receiving Australia's garbage.

"We would like to see plastic recycled in Australia. We should be doing it ourselves. We fully support a circular economy and the use of recycled products here in Australia," he said.

However, fair trade agreements between Australia and other countries could prove to be a problem.

"It comes down to whether manufacturers - the packaging companies - are prepared to pay more for their raw stock," Mr Lewis said.

Recycling plastic in Australia would "cost four to five times more to produce the same stock" as foreign competitors.

"We would have to compete with the imported product. It's not viable. Our salaries and wages are much higher than in Asia," he said.

"If you're going to ban the export of plastics, you have to also ban the import of plastics."

That aside, he said the "best thing that could happen is consumers look at their buying habits".

"They could stop buying single-use plastics," he said.

He added that synthetic clothing - such as polyesters and nylon - was the cause of most plastic pollution in the ocean.

"Every time you wash your clothes, these microfibrils and microplastics end up washing out into the waste stream," he said.

He said the problem in Asia was also complex.

"I've been in most parts of Asia - the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia - and you see their waterways are used as garbage tips and disposal points," he said.

"Those countries, while they're looking at restricting the import of plastic, also need to look at what they're doing at home."

He had travelled extensively through Vietnam.

"It's just gobsmacking how people dispose of their waste there. They burn their rubbish on the street or just tip it in the bush or pour it down the river," he said.

"It's so Third World for a country that's trying to advance itself. What they need is a proper waste service."