

TABLED PAPERS

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PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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Clerk of the Senate	

ACTION TAKEN ON THE REPORT OF THE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE A.C.T.:

CANBERRA CITY WASTES:
A LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL

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PERSONNEL OF THE COMMITTEE

Chairman : Senator J.W. Knight
Deputy Chairman : Mr. K.L. Fry, M.P.
Senator B.R. Archer
Senator D.M. Devitt*
Senator S.M. Ryan
Mr. M. Baillieu, M.P.*
Mr. M.E. Baume, M.P.
Hon. F. Crean, M.P.
Mr. J.W. Haslem, M.P.
Mr. M.E. Sainsbury, M.P.

Clerk to the : Mr. D.W. Nairn
Committee

Changes in the Personnel of the Committee

- * Senator Georges resigned from the Committee and was replaced by Senator Devitt on 18 August, 1977.
- * Mr. A.J. MacKenzie, M.P. resigned from the Committee and was replaced by Mr. M. Baillieu, M.P. on 6 September, 1977.

1. The Report of the Joint Committee, Canberra City Wastes: A Long Term Strategy for Collection and Disposal, was tabled in both Houses of Parliament on 8 December, 1976. On Thursday, 27 October, 1977 the Senate resolved:

"(1) That the following matter be referred to the Joint Committee on the Australian Capital Territory: To undertake a continuing review of the extent to which recommendations made in the Committee's report, 'Canberra City Wastes - A long-term strategy for collection and disposal', presented to both Houses of Parliament on 8 December, 1976, have been implemented, and the current position regarding matters discussed in the report.

"(2) That the foregoing resolution be communicated to the House of Representatives by message."

Accordingly the Committee makes the report to the Senate and House of Representatives about action so far taken to implement its earlier report.

2. There were 31 major recommendations contained in the Report, along with a number of suggestions. In June, 1977 the Chairman of the Committee wrote to those Commonwealth Ministers whose portfolios covered the areas on

which the Joint Committee had made recommendations. The Chairman sought the respective Minister's views on the implications of, and action taken on, the relevant recommendations. Each Minister contacted provided information as requested, and additional information was provided by the City Manager of the Department of the Capital Territory.*

Recommendations Relating
to the Department of the
Capital Territory

3. The Minister for the Capital Territory replied that the major action taken by his Department on the recommendations affecting his portfolio was the establishment of an inter-departmental co-ordinating committee "to examine, advise and co-ordinate proposals with respect to waste management and resource recovery in the Territory." The major recommendation of the Report, the establishment of a Waste Authority, has not been implemented, according to the Minister's reply, because "with self-government imminent ... it would be wrong to introduce a new authority which might be seen as pre-empting the role of a local administration." The Committee, while accepting the decision as a reasonable compromise, confirmed its view that such an authority is necessary and should be given early consideration by the local authorities after the introduction of self-government.

4. Action has been taken on matters relating to other recommendations affecting the Department of the Capital Territory. The A.C.T. Litter Ordinance, which the Committee had recommended be gazetted, was gazetted on 2 June, 1977.

* Appendix II, List of Recommendations and Copies of Letters from Ministers and the City Manager.

In addition, the Minister announced an anti-litter campaign and the employment of officers to act as Litter Inspectors.

5. The recommendation that the unsightliness of rubbish tips be reduced has been implemented in that, of the three tips closed in 1976 (Deakin, Causeway and O'Connor) Deakin has been restored and the other two have had restoration work begun on them.
6. The consultation between Commonwealth Departments and interest groups, which the Report recommended, when new land-fill sites are being considered, has been followed in that N.C.D.C. has invited "both public and departmental comment" on its proposals to replace the Pialligo tip.
7. In response to the recommendation for monitoring of the water quality of the Territory's waterways the City Manager informed the Committee that the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre would provide major environmental protection for the Basin System. A biological, chemical and physical study of the Murrumbidgee River Basin is also being undertaken.
8. The economic re-use of sewage, which had been recommended by the Committee, is being investigated in a pilot scheme by the N.C.D.C. at Royal Military College, Duntroon.
9. N.C.D.C. advised that it intends to continue to incorporate provision for waste-handling and waste recycling facilities in government offices.
10. In connection with the recommendation for a pilot household segregation and collection scheme for paper, glass and

metal, the Department informed the Committee that both private and Departmentally sponsored paper recycling programs are in operation. A glass recycling scheme is operating at Fyshwick. The Department will also establish a recycling depot for paper, glass and metal at Belconnen Town Centre.

11. The Air Pollution (Stationary Sources) Ordinance and Regulations, which the Report had recommended be enacted have been drafted and are at present still being considered by the A.C.T. Legislative Assembly. The Chairman has said that the Joint Committee would take a close interest in matters not covered by the Ordinance such as motor vehicle air pollution and domestic incinerators.

12. However, according to both the Minister's and City Manager's replies no action, other than review and investigation, has been taken on the other recommendations relating to the Capital Territory portfolio. The Committee appreciates the difficulties associated with current proposals for constitutional development, but recommends that other proposals be kept under continuous scrutiny by the appropriate authorities. Details of action taken on the various recommendations by the Department of the Capital Territory is contained in the letter from the City Manager at Appendix II.

Recommendations Relating
to the Department of
Environment, Housing and
Community Development

13. The Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development indicated, in his reply, that his Department was considering approaches to the management of packaging waste, including the possibility of mandatory deposits on beverage containers, in order to alleviate environmental problems.

14. A proposal by the Committee for the removal of the 15% sales tax on special composting bins was favoured by the Minister because sound composting would reduce the demand for chemical fertilisers through the use of humus, reduce the weight of garbage for collection, and could reduce the frequency of collection if carried out by a majority of households.

Proposals Relating
to the Treasury

15. The Committee's Report suggested that the 15% sales tax on composting bins be removed. The Minister Assisting

the Treasurer replied that if it was removed it would result in only a small saving, and, even then the saving may not be passed on by retailers to consumers. In addition, the Minister Assisting the Treasurer considered that the sales tax served a function in revenue raising for the Government.

16. The Committee appreciates this argument, but in view of the views expressed by the Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development, believes it should be reconsidered and has asked the Treasurer to do this. (Appendix I)

Recommendations Relating
to the Department of
Education

17. The Committee's recommendations for issues relating to waste collection and disposal to be included in school curricula and for funds to be made available for an anti-litter program were considered by the Minister for Education. In reply he pointed out that there was strong competition for inclusion of many topics in schools' curricula. However, the recommendation was seen as falling within a priority program for 1977-78 of environmental education. Materials on waste questions would be considered by schools if they were 'educational' rather than 'informational' materials.

Recommendations Relating
to the Department of
Administrative Services

18. The Minister for Administrative Services replied on two recommendations dealing with (i) recycling Government waste paper and (ii) packaging requirements in its contracts for the purchase of goods. According to the Minister's reply, recycling

of paper and cardboard in Government Departments is being carried out in association with a private firm. The automatic vacuum air conveyance system at the Cameron offices is now being used. The Department reports that the security advisory body favours the use of a hydro-pulper, rather than the shredder recommended by the Committee, because the pulper produces a recyclable product.

19. According to a later reply from the Minister, the Department does not control or stipulate packaging requirements in its purchasing because of problems of liability in handling. The Minister also pointed out that:

Because goods purchased by the Commonwealth are not intended for re-sale and as tenderers are aware that attractive and/or extravagant packaging does not influence our purchase decisions, generally less wasteful practices are followed by most suppliers to the Commonwealth.

Individual Commonwealth purchases tend to be large in quantity or volume so numbers of small unit packages, common in retail outlets, are also largely avoided.

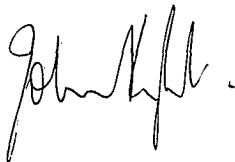
Recommendations Relating
to the Department of Health

20. In commenting upon the report's recommendations relating to the Department of Health, the Minister said that proposals to amend the Public Health Regulations to ensure that the occupier of individual commercial premises is responsible for the regular removal of garbage are being formulated by the Capital Territory Health Commission.

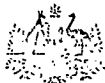
21. Legislation to control the use and disposal of radioactive material is being prepared by the Health Commission. To deal with any emergency involving radioactive material, the emergency services in the A.C.T. now has available a list of specialists to assist, and approaches have been made to the Australian Atomic Energy Commission for special equipment.

CONCLUSION

The Committee wishes to note its satisfaction with progress so far made on the recommendations in its Report on Canberra City Wastes. However, the matters noted in this Report and other proposals contained in the Canberra City Wastes Report should be kept under continuing review by Ministers and further action should be taken where appropriate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John M. H.', is located on the right side of the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'M'.

APPENDIX I



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

2 November, 1977

PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA, A.C.T. 2600
TEL 705

My Dear Treasurer,

You may recall that I wrote to you on 6 June about the Joint Committee's proposal, in its Canberra City Wastes Report, that consideration be given to the removal of sales tax on domestic composting bins.

In replying, the Minister Assisting the Treasurer, Mr. Viner, indicated that the removal of sales tax may not assist the purchaser and would not assist the revenue-raising activities of the Government.

However, the Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development, the Hon. K.E. Newman also commented on this proposal in the following terms:

"Your second point concerns the discouragement of sound disposal practice for household putrescible wastes which may result from the 15% sales tax levied on composting bins. I must say that the short answer appears to be that a lower duty, or its removal, would be desirable from the environmental and resource conservation viewpoints. A wider use of backyard composting, as long as it is carried out at an acceptable hygienic standard for the suburban environment, would achieve three benefits. It would reduce the demand for chemical fertiliser and improve the condition of garden soils through maintenance of the humus content. It would reduce the weight of garbage for collection and disposal. If carried out by the majority of households it could reduce the frequency of collection, and if coupled with other recycling initiatives at the domestic level it could bring about a very substantial reduction in total municipal waste management costs."

In view of the Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development's reply, I feel that a reconsideration of the position outlined in the letter from the Minister Assisting the Treasurer is warranted.

In particular, the Committee would appreciate advice as to the amount of revenue raised by the sales tax on that item.

Yours sincerely,

J.W. KNIGHT
Chairman

Rt. Hon. P.R. Lynch, MP
Treasurer,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600

APPENDIX II

List of Recommendations and
Copies of Letters from
Ministers and the City Manager.