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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on
Environment and Communications
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SUBMISSION WASTE AND RECYCLING INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA - LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (the Association) appreciates the opportunity of making comments to the Senate inquiry into Waste and Recycling industry in Australia.

The Association is the peak body representing the interests of, and providing a voice for, the 12 regional and shire councils and 5 municipal councils in the NT. The Association is also represented on the Board of the Australian Local Government Association, which represents the interests of Local Government Associations nationally.

Local government in the Northern Territory makes a significant contribution to the Northern Territory economy by:

- collectively employing 3,000 people
- managing and controlling assets valued at over \$900 million
- receiving and expending over \$380 million annually.

Waste management in the Northern Territory provides local government and industry a number of challenges. Logistics in the provision of waste services and recycling has significant impact on financial, social and environmental costs. In the Northern Territory and I would suggest in regional and remote areas throughout Australia, the tyranny of distance of the regions, the expansive demographics and the growth of remote townships is providing challenges that local government cannot not address alone and in isolation with governments.

Solid Waste Facilities

Most of the waste in the NT comes from the Greater Darwin Regions (Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield Council areas). The Shoal Bay Waste Disposal Facility (owned by the City of Darwin) services these councils with estimates indicating that it receives about 98% of the waste from the region, thereby acting as a default regional waste facility.

There are a number of smaller licenced landfills owned and operated by councils and both Katherine and Alice Springs councils are further investigating capacity and business plans around expanding to regional waste facilities, even though land availability is limited and in some cases subject to native title.

It is estimated that there are about 300 unlicensed landfills in remote areas across the NT, mainly Aboriginal lands, many of which were established decades ago with little consideration for the surrounding environment, located near water sources or they are seasonally inundated by surface water. Leases and land tenure over these sites creates a significant barrier to local government being able to comply with licencing requirements.

a) The Quantity of Solid Waste Generated and the Rate of Diversion

Waste disposal (landfill) facilities generally include an open pit for rubbish disposal, with separation of green waste recycling/mulching, metal/whitegoods recovery, building material recovery, hazardous waste disposal and other various separation/recovery/recycling schemes.

Recycling options are readily available in the municipal areas of Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy but recycling rates are still significantly lower in these areas compared to the rest of Australia.

Major centres have capacity, weigh bridges and processes in place to ensure rigor in data and volumes of waste separation. Licence conditions imposed, require reporting of throughput to the waste facility and these are reported to the NT Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA). This captures facility specific information on waste acceptance.

Data collection in regional remote areas is minimal for a number of reasons, unmanned facilities, no weighbridges nor processes in place. Although the rigor in the data can be questioned there are attempts through regional groups of councils, in Central Australia and Big Rivers (Katherine) through the Waste Management Coordinators Working Groups to improve in this discipline as it drives the business plans for regional collaboration and initiatives.

The Association has been working in collaboration with Northern Territory government agencies and the NT Environment Protection Authority to ensure continued improvement at regional and remote waste facilities to ensure improvements in public health outcomes in communities and protection of natural resources and surrounding environments. This is in a regulatory environment with large demographics and limited resources of all participating stake holders.

b) The Accreditation and Management of Landfills

Historically, the Northern Territory government has only required communities with a population exceeding 1,000 to acquire a landfill licence so the Association developed guidelines for waste management for communities with a population of less than 1,000 and these have been adopted as policy by the Association.

Regional councils in the Northern Territory, with the amalgamations of local councils in 2008, 63 councils to 17, inherited major legacy issues and are continuing to manage such sites with limited resources and capacity to do so.

Past unlawful practices of asbestos disposal in these legacy waste facilities is of great concern to councils.

There have been significant improvements in the management and separation of waste in remote waste facilities through the regional waste coordination working groups in Central Australia and Big Rivers (Katherine) regions. Both these projects have developed operational guidelines that have been adopted as policy by participating councils and recognised by the NT EPA.

The Association acknowledges the legislative framework that councils have to abide by to minimise risk and ensure compliance.

The Association has and will continue to work with government agencies and the NT Environment Protection Authority around self-regulation and continued improvements which would release limited government resources to ensure compliance on high risk facilities and support councils in continued improvements as a collective.

Without this collaboration, the regulatory framework especially in remote regions will not work and raises questions on the integrity and effectiveness of the supporting legislation.

c) The Extent of Illegal Landfilling

The volumes of material disposed through illegal operations are difficult to quantify. In the NT, this is particularly problematic for inert materials generated by construction and demolition activities in remote areas with the vast demographics.

Anecdotal evidence from various voluntary clean up campaigns Keep Australian Beautiful, Clean up Australia and the Clean-up Darwin Harbour indicate there are still high volumes of waste being disposed of illegally. Illegal dumping is more prevalent where there are changes to operations, charges and levies to waste facilities.

Central Australian councils experienced significant increase in illegal dumping of building and demolition materials when they implemented charges on contractors for dumping such materials at waste facilities. But with education and communication strategies with contractors and government agencies funding such housing programs have seen these practices reduced.

Derelict abandoned cars are a major problem in the Northern Territory which is driven by market pricing and cost of disposal to consumers.

d) The Role of Landfill Levies in Determining the End Destination of Material, including the Hypothecation of Collected Levies for Enforcement and Waste Diversion Purposes

There are no Northern Territory government waste levies. Waste facilities are managed by local government in the NT and councils have the legislative ability to set levies which are tied waste facilities and or the rehabilitation of sites.

Given the experiences of other states where imposed levies are tied up in wheels of government processes and funding of government agencies leading to significant funds in surplus, local government would not support such levies through the Northern Territory government. Due to the socio economic demographics of remote indigenous communities such levies are not possible.

e) The Role of Different Incentives and Collection Methods in Determining the Quality and Quantity of Material Collected for Recycling

The Association supports strategies around preventing waste getting to landfill by the reuse of post-production and post-consumer products without any change to the form or composition of those products (reuse).

Directly addressing relevant market failures and distortions throughout product life cycles will assist markets to achieve the right balance between waste avoidance, resource recovery and disposal.

To encourage sustainable collection of waste resources from landfill, there is need of incentives and a cultural change to encourage consumers to participate in:

- appropriate infrastructure for collection and processing
- motivation for the public undertake waste diversion activities, can be value based, related to an incentive or a wish to avoid a fines through regulations
- a communication and engagement program, so waste generators have a knowledge of the system they are supplying.

f) The Destination of Material Collected for Recycling, Including the Extent of Material Reprocessing and the Stock piling of Collected Material

Stock piling of resource material and product is common practice in the Northern Territory and it is a significant issue in remote communities. Recent audits carried out in remote communities has identified up to 350 derelict vehicles in some smaller communities.

White goods and listed waste such as tyres and batteries are stored at waste facilities at some risk to councils and waste facility operators. The reasons for such stockpiles are:

- market forces and commercial gain
- transportation and distances
- limited interest from recyclers commercially to service remote communities
- lack of appropriate infrastructure.

This has become more problematic for member councils as their operations improve and separation of waste out of landfill which has led to more product being stored.

The recycling industry do not support such strategies as there is a risk of contaminates and recyclables they say have significantly higher recyclable value if they are capture early and not allowed to contaminated with other waste product. This is problematic for regional areas with limited resources and less than mature processes.

The Association is concerned that if the markets, stewardship programs and recycling companies do not work in collaboration with councils to remove separated products councils frustration and limited land and facilities will see the return the bad habits with the only perceived solution being all rubbish into landfill.

g) The Current Economic Conditions in the Industry, Including the Market for Material Collected for Material Collected for Recycling

As in other states most of the recycling companies are national and are dependent on international markets especially scrap metal. Councils in the Northern Territory are now looking at shredding tyres and sending to South Australia.

h) The Transportation of Solid Waste across State Boundaries

Given the Northern Territory geographic isolation and limited capacity to reprocess product recovered, limited local markets, majority goes interstate.

Government both NT and Commonwealth with industry should look and investigate opportunities in the Asian markets through the Darwin port with a road and rail transport model.

i) The Role of the Australian government in Providing a Coherent, Efficient and Environmentally Responsible Approach to Solid Waste Management, Including by Facilitating a Federal Approach

The Australian government should play a leadership role in facilitating relevant reforms and where appropriate, develop sound national consistent policies and programs that supports regional areas not discriminates as stewardship programs have done in the past.

The Australian government's primary role is to support and coordinate national activities to support the *National Waste Policy* through administration and implementation of product stewardship programs and subsidiary legislation and regulations.

Other Related Matters and Final Summary

The Northern Territory is unique from other State jurisdictions with a current population of around 245,000 people located across 1.35 million square kilometres of land. The majority of the population is within the Greater Darwin Region. Population densities throughout the rest of Territory are very low and sparse with great distance between communities and regional centres. This makes collections in many instances for recycle non-viable (both in terms of recovery cost or carbon terms) where the materials cannot be locally used.

Throughout the Northern Territory there is evidence that the existing waste disposal infrastructure is now incapable of managing these complex waste streams. Management of waste from source is critical for a strategy when looking at reuse, recycling or disposal.

Local government believes there is need for a strategy to identify recycling at the source before entering waste facilities or landfills and that responsibility should be with industry generating the waste especially around listed waste.

The focus should not only be about encouraging more recycling and reuse of product, but ensuring that there are sustainable long term markets for products collected and processed in the Northern Territory.

The Commonwealth can support regional areas of Australia by a review of policy around *Regulatory Impact Statements* based on a cost benefit approach which automatically discriminates and marginalises regional remote areas of Australia.

An example of this was the *Regulatory Impact Statements* for tyres was a voluntary product stewardship scheme that did not allow for or address illegal disposal and in regional/remote areas transport to markets.

Roll out of the stewardship schemes to rural and remote areas will be difficult but the collaboration and a regional approach between local government, industry and government agencies is critical for the success of such stewardship schemes

LGANT Policies

LGANT has policies that relate to CDS, the role of beverage companies and financial incentives for recycling.

7. Environment

7.1. Role in National Policy

a) *LGANT supports the principles of ecologically sustainable development.*

- b) *LGANT will promote the importance of regional cooperation between councils, as well as more effective liaison with industry and community organisations, as a means of enhancing its own capacity to deal effectively with environmental issues and contribute to national policy.*
 - c) *LGANT supports the traditional owners of land being consulted and actively involved in environmental planning and management processes.*
- 7.7 NT, State and Federal government responsibilities.

7.5. Waste Management Hierarchy

- a) *LGANT supports the management of waste within the framework of the following priorities:*
 - *avoiding the creation of waste (reduce)*
 - *minimise the creation of waste (reduce)*
 - *the reuse of post - production and post - consumer products without any change to the form or composition of those products (reuse)*
 - *the recycling of organic waste and post production and post- consumer goods into new products (recycling)*
 - *the responsible disposal of waste to environmentally acceptable means (disposal).*

7.8 Industry Responsibilities

- a) *LGANT supports the principle that those who create waste should take full responsibility for that waste. In the case of industry, local government supports the imposition of legislation, regulations and incentive schemes which will compel industry to:*
 - *introduce policies which will enable sectors of industry to reach mandatory waste reduction targets within a specified time frame*
 - *accept cradle to grave responsibility for the products, waste and litter it produces, at both the production and post- consumer stages*
 - *adopt closed loop processes for the products and packaging it creates*
 - *reduce the unnecessary packaging of goods*
 - *use at least a specified percentage of recycled material in their production processes*
 - *use only packaging materials which are capable of being recycled and have a marked as recycled material.*

7.9 Recycling and Separation

LGANT supports the following:

- *the use of financial incentives such as the NSW Council Recycling Rebate Scheme as a means of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill*
- *the concept of free disposal of separated domestic vegetation and green waste at landfills where this waste will be recycled for domestic and commercial use.*
- *the development of domestic and export markets for recycled products and recovered materials*
- *encouragement and assistance of research and development projects to enable the greater use of recycled products*
- *internal purchasing policies which maximise the use of responsibly packaged and recycled goods*
- *regular, regional industry-sponsored chemical collection campaigns which ensure the environmentally responsible disposal of chemicals*
- *community education to assist the public in reducing waste.*

7.10. Waste Disposal

- a) LGANT supports public control of landfills and other waste disposal facilities so as to ensure that waste disposal and management complements an overall waste minimisation strategy.
- b) LGANT believes that landfill and other disposal facilities should maximise their efforts to separate and divert materials for reuse and recycling.
- c) LGANT believes that waste disposal guidelines should ultimately ensure that environmental quality and public health are not compromised.
- d) Licence and approval regulations/requirements for landfills and other waste disposal facilities should:
 - be sufficiently flexible to account for site characteristics (such as permeability, isolation, the assimilation capacity of the surrounding environment and cumulative effects);
 - be performance based; and
 - reflect consideration and assessment of the likely costs of compliance.
- e) LGANT supports the following principles:
 - siting of a radioactive waste facility in the Northern Territory should not be on the basis of political convenience;
 - a site within Australia should be chosen on proper technical and environmental criteria; and
 - appropriate community consultation should take place prior to the final decision being made. (Adopted at Executive Meeting October 2005).

Contact person for the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory on this matter is Peter McLinden, Manager Transport and Infrastructure Services on _____ or email _____

Yours sincerely

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