

Keep Australia Beautiful NSW

**RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY
COMMISSION INQUIRY DRAFT REPORT ON
WASTE MANAGEMENT**

21 July 2006

Keep Australia Beautiful NSW welcomes the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Waste Generation and Resource Efficiency but wishes to express concerns in relation to the use of HDPE plastic bags as outlined in the report.

- Plastic bags are a persistent and highly visible part of the litter stream along with other materials such as cigarette butts, fast food packaging and drinks containers that appear consistently in litter surveys.
- By highlighting plastic bags as an environmental issue, awareness of the wider litter problem is also created that helps to raise consumer awareness about the environment as a whole and change long-term behaviour.
- Keep Australia Beautiful NSW agrees that plastic bags are highly visible in the environment and do not readily breakdown. However any plastic bag that is not part of the managed waste stream creates a litter issue – no matter how small in comparison to the total level of waste generation. Australians use about 4.5 billion plastic bags per year, 1 per cent or 45 million bags end up as litter on our streets, parks and beaches.
- 45 millions bags in the environment creates a sizeable litter problem, regardless of the difficulties in calculating the precise effects of these bags on the environment eg the number of wildlife that are directly affected through ingestion or entanglement.
- The focus should be on reducing our reliance on plastic bags by seeking more sustainable alternatives such as bags that can be re-used, or questioning the need for bags in certain circumstances eg when only a few items are purchased.
- Through a successful partnership between Keep Australia Beautiful NSW and Bunnings Warehouse, Bunnings customers have responded to a 10-cent levy that was introduced in September 2003 by cutting down their use of plastic bags by 99%.
- Keep Australia Beautiful NSW would like to see this measure introduced by all retailers, with Government legislation to back it up if widespread voluntary measures are not adopted quickly enough.
- The introduction of a 10-cent fee on plastic shopping bags would help to fund environmental projects whilst reducing the unnecessary and profligate use of plastic bags.
- The 10-cent environmental contribution would reflect the *true environmental cost* of plastic bags usage, not just the intrinsic cost.
- Keep Australia Beautiful NSW has been campaigning against all forms of litter for over 30 years. We believe that all sectors of the community have a responsibility to ensure that all forms of waste products, including plastic bags, are disposed of responsibly and do not contribute to litter in the environment.