

Response to Waste Generation and Resource Efficiency

The following response is the opinion of BDC and not necessarily Mareeba Shire Council.

Packaging

From the aspect of living and working in rural Australia, a high percentage of the waste stream is packaging. A retailer must deliver to the customer the products in a good condition as demanded by the customer. Packaging forms an integral part of the retail market. The packaging should be capable of a number of "disposable" options.

- Returned to the product manufacturer for reuse.
- Able to be readily recycled (if facilities are available which in rural Australia is not always the case).
- Able to be composted eg in a waste processing/composting plant.
- Not contain material that can not be readily reused eg replace polystyrene with formed cardboard or plant starch derived material.

Point of Sale Deposits

Point of sale deposits or levies are working for lubricating oil and agricultural chemical containers. This tool should be extended to include scrap tyres, wet cell batteries and electronic hardware and other easily segregated products. Rural local governments are disadvantaged with voluntary collection and reuse schemes because of "distance to markets". This did not prevent the retailer bringing the product to rural Australia as those transport costs were passed onto the consumer. Local governments and ultimately the consumers are paying for the management of these waste products now, though they might not recognise the cost. Where local governments charge a disposal fee for some products, all too often these products are subject to illegal disposal practices.

Value of Raw Materials

There is little incentive in rural Australia to separate and reuse building and demolition material such as timber, concrete masonry, etc. This is a factor of low or no disposal costs at low technology landfill sites plus low value placed on raw materials eg sand and gravel. If greater value was placed on the raw material, the recovery and reuse of this material becomes economical.

The same can be shown for the high incidence of single use pallets for the transport of goods. The more robust CHEP pallets have a well established lease and collection system which could be used as a model for other pallet systems.

Plastic Bags

HDPE plastic bags would probably be the most obvious item in the waste stream. There should be a national project to either tax or ban outright, hdpe bags and ldpe bags. If the hdpe bags were taxed, the incentive to create a new industry supply plant starch derivatives will be created. Local

governments Australia wide should use their buying power to assist with creating a viable base for that industry.

In waste treatment plants such as composting plants, plastic bags are a major operational problem. The bags clog the treatment plant and are a contamination problem in the final product. If biodegradable plant starch bags were used, the bags would break down in the treatment process.

If supermarkets were required to adopt the Bunnings model (charge for bags), consumers could be expected to seek and demand alternatives to hdpe bags.

Tyres

Tyres, mentioned above, should be subject to a point of sale levy. Local governments should be encouraged or required to substitute rubber for concrete in walking and bike paths whenever possible and other such projects. Again, the purchasing power of local governments should be used to create a market for these products. The importation of used tyres from overseas should not be permitted if there is no developed end use for scrap tyres.

Marketing and Transport of Farm Produce

A great deal of produce is packed and transported from the farm to the markets in cardboard boxes. The box has little other use and in most instances, the consumer never sees the box. From Mareeba itself, several million cardboard trays of mangoes are sent to markets each season. These trays are a fixed cost to the grower. While it may be argued that some of these trays find their way into the recycled cardboard circuit, many will be lost to landfill. There is the potential to develop a produce transport system based on reusable containers in much the same way as CHEP pallets.