

24 March 2006

NetWaste
A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission for the Inquiry into Municipal Waste Management in NSW

The purpose of this letter is to submit a submission for the inquiry into Municipal Waste Management in New South Wales (NSW).

NetWaste is a collaborative waste management project sponsored by the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), the Central West (CENTROC) and Orana Regional Organisations of Councils (OROC), located in the central and western regions of NSW. The NetWaste region comprises 28 councils, covering a total area of 317,942 square kilometres and supports a population of more than 300,000 people.

The vision of NetWaste is to establish a waste management model to ensure cost effective environmental best practice for participating NetWaste Councils. This vision has been supported by the waste managers within the NetWaste region, and has resulted in the desire to develop waste management plans.

The development of waste management plans on a subregional basis have recently been completed, and proved to be very effective in drawing out a wide range of practical actions for the ongoing collaborative approach to waste management. Currently, this information is being collated into a regional waste management plan, which is scheduled for completion at the end of June 2006.

In response to the request for submissions into Municipal Waste Management in NSW, NetWaste has attached the conference paper 'Practical Waste Solutions for Regional New South Wales', which provides an excellent overview of the development and outcomes of the subregional waste management plans. If required, a copy of the regional waste management plan can also be forwarded to your office when it has been completed (estimated completion date is the end of June 2006).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, or require any further information.

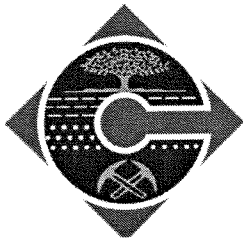
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dara Clayton'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Dara Clayton
Projects Coordinator, NetWaste



Practical Waste Solutions



R.W. CORKERY & CO.
GEOLOGICAL & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

for

Regional New South Wales



Practical Waste Solutions for Regional New South Wales

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Part 1: Introduction

NetWaste is a collaborative waste management project sponsored by two regional organisations of councils, the Central West (CENTROC) and Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC), located in the central and western region of New South Wales, Australia. The region comprises 28 councils and the NSW Unincorporated Area, covering a total area of some 412 000 square kilometres and having a population of more than 380 000 people.

The vision of NetWaste is to “establish a waste management model to ensure cost effective environmental best practice for participating NetWaste Councils”. This vision has been echoed by the region’s waste managers through their desire to have subregional plans, which:

- provide a way forward for the region’s management of waste through effective and affordable strategies;
- seek economies of scale through the cooperative sharing of facilities and resources;
- are consistent with individual Councils’ financial management plans; and
- receive community acceptance.

Since 2001, NetWaste has commissioned four subregional plans covering the Central Western, Mid-western, Eastern and Western Subregions. A joint consultancy between R.W. Corkery & Co. Pty. Limited (based in Orange) and Nolan-ITU (based in Sydney) was selected to prepare each of the plans.

Part 2: Consultation, Inspection and Data Collection

Plan Preparation

For each Waste Management Plan a similar pattern was followed in its preparation, amending it where necessary to meet the requirements of participating Councils. Data and information was collected from a wide range of sources including the following.

- (i) A comprehensive questionnaire compiled by Nolan-ITU sought information on Council Services, LGA statistics, services for green waste, recyclables and waste management facilities in each LGA. This information was supplemented by data compiled from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- (ii) All LGAs were visited which provided an opportunity to inspect a number of waste management facilities and to discuss with relevant Council Officers the current practices and the opportunities to improve those practices.
- (iii) A community consultation workshop was held in each LGA, and in some cases at two or three centres where distances between towns were substantial. These meetings provided an excellent forum to identify issues of importance to local communities and the attitudes to local people to improving waste management.

- (iv) Consultation with commercial and industrial enterprises involved either a separate workshop or a telephone survey for representatives to outline their current waste management practices and expectations / preferences for improvements.
- (v) State Government agencies were approached regarding their views towards waste planning in each subregion.

Each subregion experiences numerous common issues with a number of additional issues specific to the subregion.

Central West Subregion (2001)

(Blayney, Cabonne, Forbes, Lachlan, Orange, Parkes and Weddin LGAs)

- A common issue raised throughout this subregion was the lack of kerbside recycling. Those towns without kerbside recycling attracted the most attendees at community consultation workshops.
- A total of 28 of the 34 landfills in the subregion were open 24/7 at the time of the survey.
- Practices at local landfills varied from very good to very poor. A number of landfills are poorly sited and virtually no monitoring is conducted to understand environmental impacts.
- The opportunity was identified for the sharing of waste collection services to reduce costs and improve the recovery of recyclables from the waste stream.

Mid-western Subregion (2003)

(Coolah, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Warren and Wellington LGAs)

- Tyres are a common problem throughout the entire region, particularly in the Mid-western Subregion. Gilgandra Shire Council has “inherited” 4 000 tonnes of tyres from a failed commercial venture.
- A big success story in this subregion is the Narromine CDEP, ie. a recycling program conducted under the Commonwealth Development Employment Program. This program was funded for many years by ATSIC to employ predominantly Aboriginal persons – up to 75 persons were given work each week. The materials recovery facility provided an opportunity for many small towns to participate in recycling.
- One of the towns participating in the recycling program based at Narromine was Gulargambone – a town with an enormous pride and committed residents. The town has won many tidy town projects and the residents were instrumental in setting up its recycling service based on the fortnightly bag collection.
- Another feature developing in the Mid-western Subregion was the use of rural transfer stations – many of them with key access for 50 to 70 local residents. Early abuses in the use of the stations disappeared after threats of closure.

Eastern Subregion (2004)

(Bathurst*, Blue Mountains, Cowra, Evans*, Lithgow, Mudgee*, Oberon and Rylstone* LGAs) * Prior to amalgamation

- Throughout the subregion, waste management facilities varied substantially with some Councils with high quality facilities and innovative practices and others simply very basic landfills open 24/7.
- Mudgee operates a central landfill and 12 transfer stations (1 supervised) with all wastes / recyclables hauled back regularly to Mudgee.
- Consultation with the building industry initiated actions encouraging builders to recycle building wastes – both through education and financial incentives.
- Councils were spending substantial funds on signs whereas others weren't able to because of the cost.

Western Subregion

(Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Central Darling, Cobar and Walgett LGAs and the NSW Unincorporated Area administered by DIPNR)

- The lack of people and funds was a striking factor in the Western Subregion. Population levels are decreasing as economic conditions deteriorate.
- There is often an interest in recycling and better waste management but the large distances to major centres introduces large transport costs. Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Tibooburra are the only towns allowed to participate in the South Australian Container Deposit scheme.
- Burning wastes is still a common feature of many western landfills – keeping plastic bags under control and maximising the duration of disposal in each trench.
- Many State Government agencies use local waste management facilities at no or little cost and could contribute to resolving local management issues by contributing both financially and in kind.

General Observations

In general, the larger centres like Orange, Bathurst, Dubbo and Broken Hill are managing wastes in a satisfactory manner with Council personnel assigned to both management and operations.

Waste management at the moderate sized centres varies from good to poor, whereas the smaller LGAs offer only a basic service and are honestly not coping. Few funds are available for Council personnel to manage or operate the waste management facilities – one person is often managing many Council services with as low as 5% of one officer's time spent on waste-related matters.

Throughout the entire region, there is an overwhelming willingness to participate in NetWaste initiatives, eg. plastic bag replacement, milk run chipping contracts and contracts for waste steel. There is considerable support for NetWaste to organise contracts for other recyclables.

Variations in the standard of waste management not only reflect funds available but the commitment of Council staff (and Councillors) and communities with a high degree of social pride.



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Part 3: Development of the Subregional Plans

Unique Constraints

Rural Councils face a unique waste management challenge in that not only are they required to provide waste collection and disposal services to their constituents, but they are usually required to own and operate the disposal sites receiving their wastes. Further, these Councils must be able to accommodate wastes which are not under their direct control, generated by local businesses and industrial enterprises in their vicinity. This creates further pressure on long term assessment management.

Whilst this situation was once shared by many NSW metropolitan Councils, rural Councils have always faced the additional burden of long transport distances which have traditionally been addressed through the creation of a number of small disposal sites scattered through Council areas. The result is an increased level of potential long term environmental risks within communities which have low population densities, low ratepayer bases and of more recent times, severely impacted income bases.

In addition, responsibility for waste management services often falls within a Council officer's wider environmental duties which in turn are part of a wider role, often taking in such areas as roads, parks and sewage. Therefore, in developing the four NetWaste subregional plans, emphasis was placed upon developing actions and recommendations to assist regional waste managers by identifying potential synergies, mitigating risks and drawing on existing opportunities.

Actions / Recommendations

Accordingly, actions and recommendations were formulated according to the areas of:

1. Regional profile and waste characterisation;
2. Council Services;
3. Waste Management and Infrastructure;
4. Litter Management; and
5. Education.

Regional Profile and Waste Characterisation

Actions falling within the category of **regional profile and waste characterisation** are aimed at gaining a better understanding of the unique geographic and waste characteristics of each subregion and indeed each Council. It includes:

- Appointing NetWaste staff to promote greater waste knowledge and drive initiatives;
- Mapping of infrastructure throughout the NetWaste region;
- Collection of waste data;
- Research in to regional waste and infrastructure to identify "nodes" or potential synergies;

- Benchmarking and monitoring ongoing performance; and
- Investigating, developing and promoting regional business opportunities including niche or boutique markets.

Council Services

Actions and recommendations relating to **Council services** are aimed at enhancing existing services and implementing new or waste services within each subregion. Accordingly, action areas include:

- Co-ordinating waste collection systems across local government areas and indeed subregions to capitalise on any potential synergies or common service requirements; and
- Enhancing existing services or developing new services for such streams as:
 - kerbside recycling,
 - council clean-up;
 - bulk steel,
 - construction and demolition rubble;
 - commercial and industrial wastes;
 - tyres; and
 - agricultural waste such as spent grain, offal and carcasses.

Waste Management and Infrastructure

Actions and recommendations relating to **waste management and infrastructure** are primarily geared towards consolidating regional resources and assisting regional waste managers to minimise environmental risks. Accordingly, actions relate to:

- reviewing the current landfill situation in each subregion;
- rationalising landfills;
- developing of generic LEMPs and EMPs for use by Councils;
- developing operational and rehabilitation plans for existing landfills and transfer stations;
- investigating transport logistics; and
- monitoring developments in alternative waste treatment technologies.

Litter Management

Litter has been identified as a significant environmental pollutant that imposes high maintenance costs for local governments associated with clean-up efforts, damage to ecosystems and reduced visual amenity. As a result, **litter management** actions are aimed at establishing education and prevention programs based on:

- researching local issues such as litter types and hotspots;
- the type of existing resources used to tackle litter;

- allocation of additional litter prevention resources;
- developing prevention programs such as fines; and
- sharing information and resources amongst NetWaste Councils.

Education

Community and industry education is essential support for Council waste management initiatives, promote waste avoidance, maximise source separation and raise awareness of the various waste management options within rural areas. Therefore, actions and recommendations relating to **education** include:

- appointment of a NetWaste Education Officer;
- researching education programs and resources already available for use;
- establishing and prioritising local education requirements;
- development of an education strategy; and
- development of a communication strategy to increase community and industry awareness.

Examples – Regional Actions

As each subregional waste management plan has been produced, it has included actions on both a regional level and subregional level. Moreover, as strategic actions have been formulated for each successive subregion, they have been largely applicable to most (but not all) of the Councils throughout the NetWaste region. For example, the Eastern Subregion is vastly different from the Western Subregion.

Central West Subregion

Being the inaugural subregion, the main focus of this plan was to lay a foundation upon which other plans could be structured in a cohesive fashion. As a result, some of the key focuses of this plan was the securing of funding for the appointment of permanent NetWaste officers to ensure the co-ordination and longevity of regional efforts. Also of importance was the initial focus placed upon capitalising on significant regional infrastructure.

Mid-western Subregion

The mid-western plan sought to obtain further administrative support for NetWaste while extending regional recycling services to outlying communities. Also contained within this plan were initial recommendations to initiate development of common resources which are able to be utilised by other regional Councils. This included mechanisms to assist Councils to minimise or mitigate their potential environmental liability.

Eastern Subregion

Further emphasis was given to developing common resources within the Eastern plan. This included such actions as leveraging NetWaste's scrap metal collection contract and seeking greater commonalities across regional Councils.

Western Subregion

Perhaps the most challenging plan to date has been the fourth and final Western subregional waste management plan. Being by far and away the largest and remotest subregion, the focus of this plan was obtaining additional support and resources to help Councils implement service improvements such as recycling services, which currently remains largely unviable in the subregion.

Conclusion

The development of waste management plans on a subregional basis in the manner conducted has proved very effective in drawing out a wide range of practical actions for the ongoing collaborative approach to waste management "over the mountains".