

# **R**IVERINA EASTERN REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS

**SUBMISSION TO  
UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO  
MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT IN  
N.S.W.**

*APRIL 2006*

---

*Prepared by: Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils  
P.O. Box 646  
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650  
Ph: (02) 69 319050 Fax: (02) 69 319040  
[www.reroc.com.au](http://www.reroc.com.au)*

**RIVERINA EASTERN REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS  
RESPONSE  
UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO  
MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT IN NSW**

The Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC) is a strategic alliance of 13 General Purpose Councils and two water county councils. The members of REROC are the councils of Bland, Coolamon, Cootamundra, Corowa, Gundagai, Greater Hume, Junee, Lockhart, Temora, Tumbarumba, Tumut, Urana and Wagga Wagga as well as Riverina Water and Goldenfields Water.

REROC has a number of special purpose sub-committees which address specific local government issues. One of these is the REROC Waste Forum, which was formed in 1997 and aims to develop and encourage the implementation of best practice initiatives in waste management.

In 2005 the Forum completed the implementation of its second three-year regional waste management strategy "*Waste Wise Works*". The Forum members are proud of the outcomes achieved through the implementation of the strategy, particularly in relation to community education.

In May 2005 members developed a third regional strategy "*Resourceful Directions*" which will be implemented from 2005 to 2008. This strategy moves away from community based education projects like those implemented in "*Waste Wise Works*", and aims to encourage and foster the implementation of new technologies and the development of local industries capable of processing waste on a regional level. Members are excited about the change in direction the new strategy offers and are eager to meet the challenges it will bring.

It is with this experience and background that REROC provides this submission to the Inquiry into Municipal Waste Management in NSW, responding the Terms of Reference as follows:

**1. *The effectiveness and appropriateness of current municipal waste management***

Our members believe the most effective and appropriate means of managing municipal waste is through local government. In making this statement our members wish to emphasise that municipal waste management solutions cannot be delivered as a one size fits all approach. It is for this reason that local government is best placed to manage municipal waste, councils bring an at-the-coalface understanding of the communities they service and the issues of waste management that other tiers of government or even the private sector is unable to provide.

Local government is therefore in a unique position to provide tailored solutions for waste management. This is particularly relevant in rural and regional

areas where waste management services in a single LGA must be delivered into both large communities as well as small rural villages. Transportation and distance issues can further complicate service delivery. For example in a single LGA a council may have to provide waste management solutions that include kerbside collections but also be forced to provide alternatives where kerbside collection is not feasible or economic. Therefore, not only is a one-size-fits-all response to waste management not appropriate in a statewide context, it is often not appropriate in an LGA-wide context.

Our members wish to emphasise to the Inquiry that the appropriateness of current municipal waste management is totally dependent upon the nature of the community that is being serviced. Services that operate successfully and economically in metropolitan areas or communities with high-density populations are unlikely to transfer to small communities or communities spread over wide geographic areas. For example while kerbside recycling is both efficient and effective in densely populated urban areas, it cannot operate in communities that are small or widely dispersed without substantial government subsidisation.

In order for the Inquiry to resolve its first Term of Reference it must recognise that efficient waste management is only achieved when the service provided is tailored to the individual needs of the community to be serviced, at a cost that can be supported by the provider.

## ***2. Impediments and incentives to best practice municipal waste management***

All REROC members constantly seek to provide best practice management for their waste operations. This is evidenced by their formation and support of the REROC Waste Forum. The Forum provides individual councils with opportunities to work together to identify better solutions and practices for waste management as well as providing a platform for information sharing and problem solving.

The Forum has been instrumental in achieving a number of positive outcomes for waste management across the region including the establishment of regional collection contracts for scrap metal, waste oil and greenwaste. For example, prior to the Forum's involvement, metal waste collectors refused to collect from most of our members' landfill sites and when they did, they often charged to do so. As a consequence of members working together on a regional collection contract councils are now paid on a per tonne basis for the metal collected. The Forum has also run numerous, successful public education and awareness campaigns to highlight individual and household actions that will reduce waste and improve environmental outcomes.

Members of the Forum located in the east of our region joined with non-member councils four years ago to support the establishment of a regional landfill at Jugiong. The establishment of the landfill will ultimately result in the closure of the current municipal landfill sites run by the participating councils.

The Forum receives funding support through the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The funding is important for assisting councils to work together to overcome impediments to achieving best practice outcomes as well as providing incentives for seeking out those outcomes by providing funding for specific projects.

The REROC Waste Forum is a member of the DEC's Regional Voluntary Waste Group. The Group is an important platform for bringing together voluntary waste groups that operate in rural and regional areas to discuss waste issues and to share ideas and innovations. Again this Group receives significant financial support and resourcing from the DEC, which the Forum believes is vital to achieving best practice outcomes for waste management.

Our members believe that an extremely strong incentive to achieving best practice in waste management is for the Government to introduce more legislation and regulations that force producers to take responsibility for the waste they create. There has been much written in support of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) however, our members would rather that the Government committed itself to achieving **Effective Producer Responsibility** instead. Effective Producer Responsibility would require the Government to take action that forced producers to deal with the waste they create through the sale of their products.

While the Government has continued to support voluntary, industry driven arrangements such as the National Packaging Covenant it is clear to local government, who by default are responsible for the disposal of producer waste, that such arrangements are not working. Voluntary producer responsibility arrangements result in inequitable outcomes where the environmentally responsible business bears the cost of doing the right thing and the producer that chooses not to participate simply reaps higher profits. Our members agree that all producers should meet the cost of the waste they produce and that this can only be effectively achieved through legislation.

Our members believe that integral to implementing Effective Producer Responsibility is the introduction in NSW of Container Deposit Legislation (CDL). The *Independent Review of Container Deposit Legislation in New South Wales (2002)* (The White Report) showed that in addition to the strong support that local government and environmental groups had for CDL the community also supported it, as did the recycling industry. The only group that was not in favour of the introduction of CDL was the beverage industry even though the Report clearly showed that CDL would provide net social, economic and environmental benefits for NSW.

The industry has instead brought more pressure to bear on improving kerbside recycling measures the cost and responsibility of which is borne not by industry but by local government. Kerbside recycling is expensive, totally uneconomic in rural communities and importantly only addresses half the problem. The White Report identified that the home market accounts for only 50% of soft drink and beer sales in NSW therefore kerbside recycling is only capturing half the waste that is actually produced.

The Report estimated that the implementation of CDL would double the collection and recycling of used containers, reducing waste to landfill in NSW by approximately 150,000 tonnes per year (over 1.5 billion containers) with estimated benefits worth between \$100million and \$150million every year.

Our members strongly recommend that the Inquiry address the issue of Producer Responsibility and include a recommendation that CDL be introduced in NSW without further delay.

### **3. *Best practice methods, including cost effectiveness, of planning and providing municipal waste management services***

Our members wish to emphasise again that best practice methods for providing municipal waste management services will depend on the community that is to be serviced. One-size solutions are not appropriate and the Inquiry should not focus on attempting to find one.

However best practice methods for planning services can be identified that would broadly apply to all LGAs. Our members believe, based on their experience that working across council boundaries for planning services and even contracting service delivery can achieve solid and sustainable outcomes.

The REROC Waste Forum has already demonstrated this through the development of three regional waste management strategy, each one containing milestones aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of local waste management provision. Interaction with other councils and co-operation supports the introduction of best practice methods for waste management.

The DEC's work that has focussed on running trials and publishing and promoting results of best practice service provision in areas such as organic waste treatment and the use of Alternative Waste Technologies (AWTS) has greatly assisted and supported the communication of best practice methodology. The Forum strongly supports the DEC's on-going role in this area, which provides practical assistance with the adoption of new practices in councils across the State by providing them with real world applications of new methodologies.

Again the Forum's participation in the Regional Voluntary Waste Group meetings has assisted in the planning and delivery of waste management services by providing a forum where councils are able to share the information and knowledge they have gained about waste management practices and issues.

#### **4. The development of new technology and industries associated with waste management**

REROC members are constantly seeking opportunities to identify, and where appropriate, implement or promote the use of new technologies for waste management. The Forum's most recent strategic plan, *Resourceful Directions*, is primarily focussed on identifying these types of opportunities.

The adoption of new technologies often represents the best chance that many smaller communities have of efficiently and effectively dealing with their waste issues. However, it is fair to say that while there are a wide variety of new technologies currently being promoted, few have been tested in a real world environment and fewer still are operating in either a rural or regional location. Our members agree that without more funding being directed at these emerging technologies to rigorously test their capabilities in an operational context their adoption will be haphazard and likely to lack effectiveness.

An example of this issue occurs with used tyres. A new technology has been identified for processing tyres, which won the *ABC New Inventors* program last year. All our member councils are interested in the technology and whether or not it is a viable solution to the ever-increasing problem of tyre waste, however the technology has not been taken up in any significant way and we know of no trials that may be underway in NSW.

Our members would support a more pro-active approach by the State Government to assess these types of developing technologies to determine if they are suitable (economically, environmentally and socially) for adoption in NSW. If an appropriate testing and assessment regime could be introduced then councils could use the outcomes to determine whether or not the technology could or should be established within an individual LGA or indeed to service an entire region. Some work in this area is being undertaken by the DEC, however our members believe there is the scope for more to be done.

Our members are supportive of the work that the DEC has done to disseminate information on the establishment of AWTs. We would emphasise the need for such initiatives to continue, as it is an effective way of sharing best practice methods and technologies across the State.

A significant obstacle to the introduction of new technologies in rural and regional areas for both local government and private enterprise is cost. Small population bases coupled with the costs of transportation often mean that the introduction of new technologies is just not viable, at least initially. Our members recommend that the Government consider the introduction of some form (or forms) of assistance for enterprises (public or private) that are intending to establish new technologies in rural and regional areas that will primarily service rural and regional waste management issues. The assistance could not only include financial assistance but also assistance with business planning, feasibility studies, Environmental Impact Studies and

meeting EPA requirements with the goal of facilitating the establishment of the new enterprise.

#### **5. *Minimising harm to the environment in the provision of waste management services***

It is in the interests of every council to minimise the harm to the environment that may be caused through the provision of waste management services. Councils focus on undertaking activities that increase the “liveability” of the communities they represent, activities that harm the environment run counter to that goal and are therefore not supported or encouraged.

In recent years our members have introduced measures to increase the levels of environmental protection in the REROC region, including manning landfill sites so that the waste going to landfill can be monitored and closing landfill sites that are too remote to be manned.

However the closing of remote landfills causes significant inconvenience for local residents. It is usually the case that in communities serviced by a small rural landfill there is no kerbside collection service, because it is not economically feasible to provide one, therefore if the landfill is closed an alternative waste facility must be provided for the community.

The establishment of transfer stations has provided small rural councils with a viable alternative to operating a landfill. Transfer stations are also important for addressing illegal dumping activities because their size effectively restricts the ability of dumpers to unload their waste. However, the establishment of these facilities is very expensive and one, which at the moment, is totally met by the introducing council. Our members recommend that the Inquiry consider the introduction of financial assistance that would assist councils to close rural landfills and to establish transfer stations in their place.

The establishment of regional contracts for the collection of metal waste and more particularly waste oil has also addressed concerns that our members had regarding the environmental impacts of waste. REROC members worked together to apply for Federal funding to establish a string of waste oil collection points across the region, then went to tender to find a collector to service every collection point. Collections commenced in mid-2004 and since then over 40,000 litres of waste oil have been collected from non-commercial users. Regional projects such as these have significant positive outcomes for the environment.

REROC member councils are continuing to seek opportunities to introduce regional solutions that address local waste management issues.

#### ***Conclusion***

REROC Waste Forum members welcome this opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry. Waste management is a significant issue for local government and one that consumes considerable resources. However our members

believe that councils, working where appropriate with private enterprise, remain the most appropriate and effective delivery point for these services.

Our members support the continuing role of the DEC in identifying waste solutions and facilitating the dissemination of information on best practice methods across the State. We would also support an enhancement of that role, which would result in the DEC taking a more pro-active role in testing new technologies and facilitating their introduction, particularly into rural and regional locations where private enterprise is often a reluctant player.