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

Dear Committee Manager,

This submission has been prepared to respond to some aspects of the NSW Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works Inquiry into Municipal Waste Management in New South Wales. Specifically, we aim to comment on:

1. The effectiveness and appropriateness of current municipal waste management;
2. Impediments and incentives to best practice municipal waste management; and
3. Best practice methods, including cost effectiveness, of planning and providing municipal waste management services.

## Introduction

The NSW Waste Educators Working Group is a division of the Waste Management Association of Australia. It represents professionals working in the field of waste education and broader education for sustainability. Membership represents a wide cross section of individuals working for local and state governments, industry and academia.

The group works within NSW offering guidance to WMAA members with an education exposure, and advising waste industry stakeholders on education best practice.

Our goals are to connect waste educators to share information and experiences to:

- Identify best practice in waste education and work towards achieving it;
- Ensure the continuity of, and consistency in messages (for waste educators, industry and communities);
- Raise the profile of education and its role in waste minimisation and management (across education stakeholders, industry and the broader community); and
- Unite waste educators in NSW and share our knowledge and resources with the National Waste Educators division.

## Our Feedback

*Our response relates to the need for "consistent" and coordinated infrastructure and industry and community education.*

An issue that has been a continual frustration for educators (and directly impacts the efficiencies or "contamination" in resource recovery) is the lack of a coordinated approach. That is, there is no overarching guidance for recovery systems and public education. Contamination in recyclables is an ongoing impediment to resource recovery and is further highlighted as an issue under the new National Packaging Covenant.

At present we all operate in an environment where local councils, businesses and special event organisers all develop public recycling systems in isolation. This results in a diverse array of systems sending conflicting messages across local government areas, workplaces and public venues, that even waste educators can have difficulty deciphering when away from their own jurisdiction.

To demonstrate, "Colour Coding" of bins is a simple method to communicate to anyone how to separate different materials for recycling. Yet:

- A "red" bin (or red lidded bin) could represent paper recycling at an office, beverage container recycling in a public place (or beverage container recycling at a separate business) and putrescible garbage at home.
- A "yellow" (or yellow lidded) bin can represent co-mingled recycling at home but the yellow lids are the same colour as the clinical waste bins for "sharps" etc. Furthermore, these "sharps" containers are generally branded with the appropriate plastic identification code which in turn resembles the commonly used mobius "recycling loop", which causes a great deal of confusion for the general public who mistakenly identify the symbol with recyclability. Not surprisingly discarded syringes are a common occurrence (and a somewhat hazardous contaminant of recovered resources) at material recovery centres.

The key issue is no coordination in simple colours across kerbside systems, let alone between public place and industry recycling systems. The same people use bins in all of these settings, so the different colours only lead to confusion and incorrect bin usage.

It is understood that Standards Australia is developing a standard regarding colours for recycling services, however this only applies to mobile garbage bins (MGBs) and is a voluntary code.

It is also understood that different bin styles are required across a range of settings to suit different waste generation rates, access restrictions, aesthetic preferences and general standards - however a common colour scheme across all systems, supported by a nationally consistent education program could:

- Significantly improve public **understanding and participation** in recycling initiatives through repetition of a standard message;
- Decrease contamination levels and **improve recovery efficiencies**;
- Provide a **clear support framework** to any organisation implementing a public recycling system; and
- SIGNIFICANTLY **reduce the cost** of duplicated efforts in the development of education systems and public education resources if there was a single, coordinated resource base available.

It is further understood that a common colour scheme for all recycling systems would likely require a few models to account for different levels of "co-mingled" collections. This could be achieved under the umbrella of a coordinated approach.

### What is needed?

- More strategically planned and better implemented waste management services across different sectors - not looking at domestic, commercial and public place recycling systems in isolation - with consistent usage patterns and messages.
- Inclusion of education and communication requirements at the start of the planning process as a core component that is integrated with any planning and engineering discussions - as it will ultimately determine the success of the program. It doesn't matter how good the system is if people don't know how to use it.
- A mandatory system may be necessary, however this would likely require a reasonable transition period so new systems can be introduced with contract renewals or similar.

### What would the benefits be?

- "Cost effectiveness" - with consistency comes greater opportunity for resource sharing. Services with standard coding and educational messages will save considerable time, money and resources for state and local governments. Communications can be targeted, succinct and

standardised from one local government area to another and from one workplace/public place to another.

- "Improved material recovery" - consistent messages across all material recovery systems will help reinforce correct behaviour and reduce contamination levels.
- "Cost effectiveness" - through reducing contamination and hence limiting double handling and disposal fees.
- "Improved environmental benefits" - through improved resource recovery.
- Enhances systems to better support national resource recovery targets.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this response to the Inquiry into Municipal Waste Management in New South Wales.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lara Barclay', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lara Barclay  
Chair  
NSW Waste Educators Working Group  
Waste Management Association of Australia