

Submission
No 174

INQUIRY INTO 'ENERGY FROM WASTE' TECHNOLOGY

Organisation: Blacktown and District Environment Group

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Blacktown and District Environment Group as a group is concerned for for the natural environment around Blacktown with a particular focus on the conservation of Cumberland Plain woodland and balanced development in the Blacktown LGA

Submission:

Upper House Inquire into Energy from waste technology

In reference to your Terms of Reference questions:

- A. In the home, families are becoming much better at recycling
At shopping centres and mall there is still a lot of waste on the streets. This seems to be because bins are not emptied often enough or there are not enough bins rather than people dropping rubbish on the ground. It is often seen to be cheaper to clean up afterwards rather than keep clean.
Due to property boundaries much waste drifts and ends up a council responsibility when the issue was generated through lack of bins and servicing bins in shopping centres.
In industry, many businesses in permanent residence (factories, shops, service businesses) do the right thing streaming their waste and this can be managed through government regulation. The construction/demolition industry is an exception as they are not permanent and a lot of resources that could be reused are not and there is little monitoring or regulation over their work sites.
The community expects cleaning to occur and lowering levies and the associated services is mentally self limited by the decision makers. It may also be necessary to use levies and separate organisations to clean up to stop the cost cutting within a business to remove good cleaning service in waste management
- B. Reduce-Reuse-Recycle is the order in which waste should be managed. Firstly, more effort is required in reduce and reuse. This is easiest achieve in industry with their own consumption and in the design of their products. It is also easiest to stream individual waste where it is at highest use/concentration – industry again.
Setting and monitoring standards is required and ensuring importations that do not comply are taxed heavily to ensure domestic industry is competitive.
For solid objects like plastics, steel, glass, carboard and aluminium a circular economy model is most suitable with streaming and stock piling the resource to achieve economic quantities for reuse.
If a waste cannot be recycled then the resource could possibly be used for ‘energy from waste’. This makes sense for food scraps where low temperature anaerobic digestion can be used to make methane for power generation as the waste degenerates over time anyway.
- C. It is clear from overseas examples that government intervention is necessary to incentivise the circular economy and similarly It is too easy in a large land like Australia to dump. As previously stated, the community expects better, on a domestic/urban this requires better service at high use areas and monitoring from the regulators, with fines. At a major shopping centre full bins with product overflowing in the street needs the shopping centre fined. Minimum number of bins needs to be increased in areas. Yes, this will cost but money is better spent in this way rather than advertising to make people feel guilty.
- D. A process maybe considered a good idea but as part of the implementation but location, timing and type of technology needs to be considered. There is no point fixing one problem to create another. Australia is often looking at decades old technology from overseas where mistakes have been learnt from and are now being stopped. Eg. High temperature incineration of plastics are known to have long term health effects in communities even with latest technology exhaust treatment
- E. Energy from waste facilities are highly technical processes and run for profit. As such it is very difficult for local communities to do their own monitoring. Community expects the industry to follow the law and comply with all regulation, including the specific regulations placed on an individual business. Best practice would be for this monitoring to be live data available to the public 24/7.
Penalties for non-compliance need to be big enough that they would have significant effect to the businesses profit in the short term. Multiple non-compliance would result in the business being closed. Non-compliance that resulted in permanent environmental or community damage should result in gaol of the responsible business owners, not the staff, as the owners set the business culture.
- F. The simplest way to achieve this is to improve the minimum standard of legal compliance over time. No clause that compliance is only required to the standard at time of construction. As example, the maximum dioxin level of an exhaust stack should constantly be lowered at filtration technologies improve for ALL of industry.
It is our opinion that a new development with known consequential effects to the local community should not go ahead. Only if further research determines an unknown issue Is raised then the standards should change with expected upgrades by all business in a timely manner.
- G. As community, monopolisation Is not a concern if the industry is compliant and progressive. This is an issue of economics. At any time, the government can choose to intervene or compete against private enterprise and should.
The circular economy model is the current best practice for resource management and government incentive should be used to prioritise this end result. If this requires levies on existing industry then they should be used to fund the incentive.