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Submission

WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE RECOVERY POLICY File Reference PSC2007-3163

Introduction

We observe that the revised policy on exhibition is presented without any explanation of the changes (to the current 2018 version) or context, other than some notes in Version History, which most readers would not easily find. This makes a mockery of public consultation – the public should be given at least the same explanatory material ‘up-front’ as was provided to Councillors on 13 October 2020. We are able to comment substantively only because we have been following the issue – others seeing the item in the Public Exhibition section of Council’s website would have no idea what changes were being made or why, unless they knew to look at Version History at the end of the Policy.

We have no objection to this submission being published in full and unredacted.

Council’s own operations

Targets and performance measures: The Policy is largely descriptive and ‘aspirational’. It does not include any targets or performance measures. If Council is serious about the objectives of the policy, we submit that it should include measurable targets, and explicitly include a monitoring and reporting regime. Overall, while unobjectionable ‘as far as it goes’, the Policy lacks ambition and urgency. The changes from the existing (2018) Policy are largely cosmetic or technical.

Councils' waste collection and disposal services are generally highly regarded in the community, at least in the Tomaree peninsula where most of our members live. Both the regular collection services and the drop-off facilities at the Salamander Bay waste transfer station generally operate well.

The free drop off services of toxic waste and problem waste are very important to retain as free to residents. Port Stephens has many bushland areas which are already dumping grounds for some of this waste. Correct disposal should be encouraged.

Green waste: Many residents have questioned why Council does not have a regular 'green waste' collection with separate bins, as is the case in many other Council areas. Many households generate large quantities of green waste which has to be disposed of either by taking it to the Salamander facility (and paying significant charges except on the occasional free days) or, more commonly, by placing it in the general waste red bins. Lack of easy green waste services encourages dumping along bush reserves and vacant land, including the old Gan Gan army site. Landcare groups report the continual dumping of green waste in bush areas, encouraging weed growth and fire hazards. A green waste bin would help alleviate this problem.

Public place waste management: Generally good, but on too many occasions, particularly in peak visitor times, **waste bins in popular recreational and tourist destinations** overflow before they are emptied. This is not only unsightly but also a health hazard, and discourages people from 'doing the right thing'. While we acknowledge the difficulty and cost of more regular emptying, it must be given higher priority.

There is a similar problem with **litter on road verges** throughout the LGA. Some stretches of major access roads such as Nelson Bay Road and Port Stephens Drive are routinely disfigured by unsightly litter, which can often persist until in some cases it is 'minced' by Council mowers. Many local landcare and other groups, and individual residents, remove roadside litter on a voluntary basis but this is not a sufficient solution. As with public waste bins, we acknowledge the cost of increased litter removal, but again submit that it must be given a higher priority.

Similarly, litter and other waste escapes into drains leading into our bays and waterways. Some drains are netted, but most aren't. The feasibility and advantages of netting all drainage into the bays should be considered with routine cleaning.

Advanced Resource Recovery Technology (ARRT) facility: The Policy refers to Council's ARRT facility which we understand was a 'first' in NSW when introduced in 1998. However details of this operation have not been explained by Council, and setbacks were reported in relation to the use of compost generated by the facility. If the ARRT facility is as positive an initiative as is claimed, we submit that Council should do much more to explain and promote it. It should not be left to Suez to provide information on their website <https://www.suez.com.au/en-au/who-we-are/suez-in-australia-and-new-zealand/our-locations/waste-management-raymond-terrace>. Council should report on the performance of the ARRT facility, including the level of success in diverting recyclable materials from landfill.

Compliance and innovation: Section 5.2.10 of the Policy on **Legislative Compliance** hints at opportunities beyond mere compliance, such as participation in local and regional initiatives, and we note that as a member of Hunter Joint Organisation (HJO) Port Stephens is presumably committed to the valuable ‘Circular Economy’ project of the JO’.

Council should visibly embrace the NSW Waste Hierarchy – Avoid, Reduce, Recycle, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, Recover and Dispose – and consider reporting its own and community operations against these practices as a current benchmark and future targets.

Council has already trialled the use of recyclable material in road building. This is an excellent initiative which could be extended to the use of much construction and demolition waste. The West Australian government has committed to material recovery of 75% of this waste by this year.

We submit that rather than limiting itself to mere compliance, the Policy should expressly commit to best practice and leading edge innovative approaches to waste management and resource recovery in Council’s own operations. This is sufficiently important that Council should include a new policy section, ‘Leadership and innovation’, and outline policy initiatives in which it plans to innovate and move forward to improve its own operations and community performance.

Responsibilities: Section 6 of the Policy on ‘Responsibilities’ has been revised to remove the specified delegations, leaving only the overall responsibility of the Community Services Section Manager. This is unfortunate and should be reversed – clearly allocating and publicising responsibilities for delivery of the various specific implementation areas improves transparency and accountability.

Integration with non-Council waste recovery initiatives

Council has recently adopted a *Climate Change Policy*, is developing a *Sustainability Action Plan and Roadmap*, and is revising its *Environment Policy*. We have argued in relevant submissions that Council should be taking a leadership role in the wider community beyond the impact of Council’s own operations, and this has already been accepted in part in the *Climate Change Policy*.

We submit that Council should take a similar leadership role in relation to waste management and resource recovery, which is closely related to Council’s other policies.

The policy claims that it ‘outlines what waste services are provided to the residents, ratepayers and businesses of Port Stephens *as well as Council's overall position on waste management*’ (*our emphasis*).

We submit that the draft does not sufficiently achieve the second objective.

There is no reference in the draft policy (or briefing paper to Council on 13 October) to non-Council waste management and resource recovery initiatives, other than a clause relating to a separate policy on ‘financial assistance for the disposal of waste to charitable, not for profit or benevolent organisations’, which is only about reduced charges for use of council waste facilities. (5.2.6.1).

Other relevant non-Council initiatives include:

- The **Salamander Bay Recycling Centre** – an NGO
<https://salamanderbayrecycling.org.au/>
- the State Government ‘**Return and Earn**’ scheme <https://returnandearn.org.au/> for recycling some glass, plastic bottles and cans, which is operated separately with a few ‘drop off’ locations in the LGA. While useful (not least as a source of funds for local charities), this scheme has major deficiencies (inc. too few collection points often in odd locations that discourage their use, and noise/amenity problems) – there seems to be little or no relationship between this scheme and Council.
- **Clean up Australia Day** and other periodic ‘clean up’ events (e.g. **Plastics Free Port Stephens** <https://plasticfreeportstephens.com.au/> , **Take 3 for the Sea** <https://www.take3.org/>)
- Tangle bins for fishing waste installed at several foreshore locations by **Coastal Care Initiatives Port Stephens (OCCI)** <https://www.facebook.com/oceanandcoastalcareinitiatives/>)
- The many locality-based **land care** groups in the LGA which while operating under Council auspices are powered entirely by volunteers, who regularly pick up litter while undertaking vegetation management. Other non Council groups such as Friends of Tomaree National Park perform similar services.

A comprehensive waste management and resource recovery policy would take into account these private initiatives and attempt to integrate them with Council’s own activities to achieve the maximum overall contribution to the objective of:

‘facilitate the delivery of waste services that are both convenient and cost effective and that maximise the diversion of waste from landfill’ (1.1 Purpose).

A wider scope would also complement the clauses of the policy addressing Community information (5.2.8) and Development Planning (5.2.9), and ‘encouraging ... producer responsibility schemes’ (5.2.2.1)

As an example, in the area of Council’s policy regarding Information and Education (5.2.8.1), possibly community groups could assist with workshops on recycling and composting. Some Councils offer discounted composting facilities to households. Darebin Council in Victoria offers these discounts to encourage household composting through worm farms, compost bins or Bokashi bins. This Council has partnered with *Compost Revolution* to provide online tutorials about composting linked to Council’s website. Coffs Harbour Council offers free kitchen compost bins to every household. These incentives encourage conversations about household waste and how to reduce it.

We urge Council to include an explicit community leadership role in the Policy and address the relationship between Council’s own operations and other waste management and resource recovery initiatives in Port Stephens.
