



AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

20 October 2017

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) appreciates the opportunity to present this submission in response to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Inquiry into Waste and Recycling Industry in Australia.

ALGA is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country. In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. ALGA was established in 1947 and throughout its history has been closely involved in issues of national significance affecting the local government sector as a whole.

ALGA has enjoyed a close, productive working relationship with the Commonwealth Government, illustrated by its current membership (through its President) of the Council of Australian Governments, and a number of other Commonwealth-State Ministerial Councils including Environment Ministers, both formal and informal, which consider different sets of complex policy issues across many sectors of the economy.

In addition to its representative role on Commonwealth-State Ministerial forums, ALGA's key functions include participating in policy reviews, providing submissions to and appearing before Federal Parliamentary inquiries, and enhancing opportunities for local government to inform the development of national policies impacting on local government.

Most of the issues listed under the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry are based on state-specific legislation, regulation and memoranda of understanding. State local government associations and individual councils will be providing their views and reflections on state-level arrangements and this submission should be viewed as complementing those submissions.

This submission has been developed in consultation with ALGA's member state and territory local government associations. It should, however, be read in conjunction with state and territory local government association and individual council submissions. For any specific issues related to state laws and regulations, please refer to those association and council submissions.

## **Local government and waste**

Local government has a long history and expertise in municipal waste management. Today, municipal waste management services are complex and the range of involvement and service offered to residents and businesses by councils can vary between councils. Services include, but are not limited to, waste collection, waste disposal, kerbside recycling, participation in various product stewardship initiatives, management of landfills, gas capture and co-generation of power, diversion of waste from landfills (for example green waste to produce compost), and management of waste management contractors. Local government also partners with other levels of government on a variety of policy initiatives including for example bans on plastic bags in some states, introduction of Container Deposit Schemes, community education, litter reduction, etc. ALGA also works closely with the Australian Landfill Owners Association on operational and policy matters.

This submission does not address all the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry and state and territory local government associations and individual or groups of councils may be in a better position to comment.

### **a) The quantity of solid waste generated and the rate of diversion of solid waste for recycling.**

The quantity of waste in Australia continues to grow. It is therefore important that there is an efficient, effective and well regulated waste management system in Australia. ALGA strongly supports management based on the waste hierarchy. ALGA believe that it is important that manufacturers need to do more to accept responsibility for the management and production of their waste.

The composition and mix of a range of products entering the waste stream are creating new and complex waste management issues. For example, materials mixed in with the glass cause contamination and prevent efficient recycling. E-waste requires a complicated recycling processes involving disassemble and the break down of complex products into components to be recycled. The cost burden of these processes should not fall on the ratepayer.

Manufactures should do more to support the use of recycled materials. Lack of demand for a number of recycled materials has led to a range stockpiles of these items and their components and weakens public trust in the recycling system.

Local government's expenditure on waste management is poorly documented, but the sector strongly believes that it carries a disproportionate burden of the cost of waste management. This burden should be more equitably shared with the producers of waste and, therefore, ALGA strongly supports effective product stewardship programs.

National data on local government activity and expenditure on waste management is generally poor. The Australian Bureau of Statistic conducted a detailed survey of



councils in the early 2000s. ALGA believes that an up-date of this exercise would be valuable to help inform waste management policy.

**b) The accreditation and management of landfills.**

ALGA believe that landfill sites should be fit for purpose and appropriately regulated and managed. State Environmental Protection Authorities should be adequately resourced to undertake, manage and enforce compliance. Councils that manage small landfills, for example in rural and regional areas, should be supported financially by state government to ensure that landfills are appropriately managed in accordance with legislative requirements.

**c) The extent of illegal landfilling.**

Others would be better placed to comment on the extent of illegal landfilling. Illegal dumping of waste is a problem that has been identified by a number of councils and more effort is required to police and stop it.

**d) The role of landfill levies in determining the end destination of material, including the hypothecation of collected levies for enforcement and waste diversion purposes.**

Incentives and charging mechanism such as levies need to be fit for purpose and there is a need to ensure that the imposition of these mechanisms do not result in perverse outcomes. Harmonization of regulations and waste levies across jurisdictions is generally supported by ALGA. Where state arrangements differ, effective compliance measures including enforcement must be implemented.

**e) The role of the Australian Government in providing a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to solid waste management, including by facilitating a federal approach.**

The Australian Government has a key role to play in providing leadership, and facilitating collaboration between states and territories and local governments, and in the development of a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to solid waste management.

**f) Other issues.**

## **Product stewardship**

In recent years, there has been an increased focus by all levels of government, community groups and industry on the area of product stewardship. While some schemes have shown positive results, the outcomes vary significantly.

Generally, schemes have been underfunded and limited in their geographic application. As a consequence, some councils have been left with stockpiles of waste products without an effective avenue to participate in the schemes.

### **Remote location waste management**

Advice has been provided to ALGA over many years that a key activity that the Commonwealth could undertake in remote communities is to engage with councils to remove large-scale waste such as white goods, televisions and car bodies which are a major challenge for remote communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adrian Beresford-Wylie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Adrian Beresford-Wylie  
Chief Executive