



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

MWAC Submission on Draft Litter Prevention Strategy for Western Australia

PREPARED BY THE



MUNICIPAL WASTE ADVISORY COUNCIL
"Getting the Environment Right"

November 2005

Organisational Profile and Acknowledgements

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council is a standing committee of the Western Australian Local Government Association with delegated authority to represent the Association in all matters relating to waste management.

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council has been formed through collaboration with Regional Waste Management Councils who are not ordinary members of the Association. The resulting body effectively represents the views of all Local Government bodies responsible for waste management in Western Australia.

Decisions and positions adopted by the Municipal Waste Advisory Council are considered by a board of elected member representatives from each member organisation who are supported by an Officers' Advisory Group (OAG) which has officer representatives from each member organisation.

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council's member organisations are:

- The Western Australian Local Government Association
- The Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council
- The Western Metropolitan Regional Council
- The Geraldton Greenough Regional Council
- The Southern Metropolitan Regional Council
- The South East Metropolitan Regional Council; and
- The Mindarie Regional Council

Table of Contents

Recommendations	4
Order of Actions	5
Developing a Common and Shared Understanding of the Problem.....	5
Best Practice.....	6
Auditing and Evaluation – Specific Schemes	8
Auditing and Evaluation – Existing Data Sources.....	9
Residential Infrastructure	10
National Packaging Covenant	11
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)	12

Recommendations

1. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to show the intended chronological order of actions within the Strategic Plan, for example by listing actions as first, second or third year actions.
2. That the order of implementation of actions be such that actions to achieve consensus about the problem and the outcomes sought will precede coordination and collaboration actions.
3. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include actions to create the capacity to empirically determine what types of schemes, projects and approaches are effective in reducing litter or achieving some other objective(s) of the Strategy.
4. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include actions which aim to promote empirically determined Best Practice by sharing data and analysis about what works and what does not.
5. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce review the Auditing and Evaluation section of the draft Strategic Plan to strengthen the focus on evaluating the effectiveness of particular schemes.
6. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include as an action, the investigation of opportunities to use existing data sets and existing data collection activities to measure the effectiveness of particular litter abatement projects; and Include as an action, the implementation of any recommendations arising from this investigation.
7. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove actions relating to residential waste/recycling infrastructure (Actions 5.6, 5.7)
8. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove as an action, the development of a Policy Statement on the National Packaging Covenant (Action 2.7); and Include as an action, the evaluation of the effect of the National Packaging Covenant on litter from packaging through 2006 – 2008(mid); and Include as an action, the provision of recommendations to the State Government in mid to late 2008 on whether to continue to support the National Packaging Covenant as a viable approach to improving litter outcomes.
9. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove as an action, the development of a Policy Statement on Extended Producer Responsibility (Action 2.6); and Include as an action, the identification of products for which Extended Producer Responsibility schemes may be an appropriate mechanism for managing litter impacts; and Include as an action, cooperation with the Department of Environment to ensure appropriate products are listed on the Department's Priority List of suitable products for Extended Producer Responsibility schemes.

Order of Actions

Following conversations with the Litter Prevention Strategy Coordinator, the Municipal Waste Advisory Council understands that the Strategy is to be followed by the development of an Implementation Plan. Some of the remarks made in this Submission concern the practical implementation of the Strategy. As such, some of these remarks may be addressed by the Taskforce or KABC through the Implementation Plan rather than by modifying the Draft Strategy itself. The Municipal Waste Advisory Council does not wish to imply a preference for changes at the Strategic Plan level over changes at the Implementation Plan level.

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council would support a sequential approach to implementing the Strategic Plan. Under such an approach, the actions of the Strategic Plan could be identified as occurring in some kind of relative chronological order. We add that this type of structure need not completely preclude the implementation of small scale litter abatement projects while work is undertaken in refining the problem and the outcomes sought. Whereas some kinds of actions are dependent on prior actions, we accept that not all actions would need to be locked into the sequential structure we have just described. We propose a simple system of listing actions as first, second or third year actions and recognising a fourth category, being actions which are not allocated to a particular stage.

Recommendations:

1. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to show the intended chronological order of actions within the Strategic Plan, for example by listing actions as first, second or third year actions.

Developing a Common and Shared Understanding of the Problem

The Draft Strategy provides for many actions which have a facilitation, coordination and/or promotional component (eg Objectives: 3.2-3.5, 5.7, 6.5-6.6, 7.3-7.7). It is clear that the Taskforce and KABC perceive a role for themselves in marshalling a more consistent response to litter problems – one which sees different stakeholders delivering programs in an integrated manner. This is an important function – one which the Municipal Waste Advisory Council supports in theory. However, we submit that building a consensus about litter problems and the

right way to tackle them is a task which would properly precede the soliciting of stakeholder cooperation which is implicit in many of the Draft Strategy's Actions.

Part of one of the aims of the Draft Strategy is to "ensure that stakeholders have a common and shared understanding of the problem at hand." A similar outcome: "stakeholder consensus about [the] problem and outcomes that are sought" was recommended by Nolan ITU as a precursor to developing a WA Litter Abatement Strategy (Nolan ITU, 2002, p75). In a letter to Mr Greg Allan, dated 24/08/2004, we suggested that building consensus prior to developing the Draft Strategy was a necessary step to ensure that KABC would be able to properly implement the Strategy. The Municipal Waste Advisory Council remains of the view that the process of building consensus should be one of the first steps in a sequence and that coordination and collaboration activities represent subsequent steps in the sequence.

Successfully promoting particular approaches will rely to a large extent on stakeholders having already accepted a similar view of the problem and the appropriate response. Pursuing shared understandings in parallel to encouraging stakeholders to adopt common practices will frequently be counterproductive as discussions about actions are likely to become sidetracked by discussions about the problem and the overarching approach.

Recommendations:

2. That the order of implementation of actions be such that actions to achieve consensus about the problem and the outcomes sought will precede coordination and collaboration actions.

Best Practice

The Nolan ITU study showed that identifying Australian and International Best Practice is not possible because of a lack of evidence of effectiveness and cost (Nolan ITU, 2002, p74). The study went on to recommend that WA should ensure that it can make its own objective assessment of what works and what doesn't. The outcomes from that study suggest that some parts of the Draft Strategy cannot feasibly be implemented since they rely upon knowing something which currently can't be identified – namely best practice in litter abatement (eg Objectives 3.7, 3.11, 5.4, 6.7). This is an extremely important point. The Nolan ITU study was a

well planned and executed investigation designed to, among other things, identify best practice in litter abatement. Given that the study was not able to establish best practice mechanisms by means of a desktop review, there seems little reason to believe that the Taskforce or KABC will be able to do so either.

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council certainly supports the promotion of best practice –in the areas of Education, Physical Intervention and Incentives, and also in other areas like Auditing. However, we defer to the findings of the Nolan ITU study in believing that establishing best practice in litter abatement for WA will require empirical assessments of what works. In turn that will require the execution of many small-scale projects and the application of consistent evaluation methods. This will be both an expensive and a laborious process, but having established the ambitious aim of shifting litter management from a clean-up to a prevention focus, we would expect that considerable expense and effort have already been recognised as necessary.

By showing stakeholders that a particular approach has the capacity to produce good outcomes, those championing best practice are more likely to succeed in encouraging adoption of that approach. This reinforces the case in favour of undertaking empirical assessments of individual schemes and projects, because it acknowledges that even the very best ideas do not automatically become accepted – they must be sold. Using empirical data to show the effectiveness of a particular practice is a sound strategy for successfully selling the idea. Successfully selling best practice is likely to improve the overall benefit to the community not only because best practice approaches should (by definition) be better than other approaches but also because it increases the common ground shared by stakeholders.

While recognising the challenges, the Taskforce and KABC should appreciate that good performance data is indispensable in first recognising what constitutes best practice and secondly persuading stakeholders that a particular practice should be adopted.

Recommendations:

3. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include actions to create the capacity to empirically determine what types of schemes, projects and

approaches are effective in reducing litter or achieving some other objective(s) of the Strategy.

4. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include actions which aim to promote empirically determined Best Practice by sharing data and analysis about what works and what does not.

Auditing and Evaluation – Specific Schemes

This section of the Draft Strategy undertakes to support the National Litter Audit and proposes to use the National Litter Report to assess key litter issues and trends. We are not in a position to comment on the merit of the National Litter Index, although we have the initial impression that it is a sensible and effective approach to physically measuring litter. The National Litter Audit appears to offer a useful means of comparing the litter performance of different jurisdictions over time. More importantly from the perspective of the Municipal Waste Advisory Council, the National Litter Audit could, in principle, underpin useful analysis of the effectiveness of WA litter abatement programs.

In practice, we are concerned that the National Litter Audit may not suffice to enable the effectiveness of WA litter abatement programs to be properly assessed. Firstly, the main aim of the National Litter Report seems likely to be to provide an overarching perspective on litter outcomes in the nation and in each state and territory. This type of perspective would be relevant to assessing the effectiveness of the State Litter Prevention Strategy, but less useful for assessing the effectiveness of a single scheme deployed within that Strategy. In some cases, WA may be able to use the raw data from the National Litter Audit to carry out this type of assessment, but activity of this kind is not mentioned in the Strategy.

Secondly, we are concerned that the National Litter Audit may not be appropriate for the purposes of measuring the performance of a range of small-scale trials which may be one-off, possibly short-term and likely to be carried out in diverse locations. The Audit is apparently based on repeatable audits of the same sites. The Municipal Waste Advisory Council understands that the number of WA sites proposed to be audited is in the order of 80 different sites (Waller, S., pers comm, 2005). We recognise that this amounts to a significant commitment to measurement and data gathering and we commend the Taskforce and KABC for making this

commitment. Nevertheless, we are not satisfied that the National Litter Audit will enable the majority of litter abatement programs to be quantitatively assessed, since its focus and approach both appear directed at supporting higher level decision making.

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council suggests that the audit and evaluation actions proposed under the Draft Strategy may not be sufficient to assess the effectiveness of particular litter abatement schemes and approaches. The work undertaken as part of the National Litter Audit will, in many cases, overlook the sites which must be monitored to measure the effectiveness of particular schemes. We have already submitted that the capacity to select the best schemes and approaches is dependent upon the capacity to empirically assess what works and what doesn't here in WA. Furthermore, we note that the Draft Strategy states that one of its aims is to "ensure litter prevention and management initiatives are responsive to local and regional needs" an objective which the proposed audit activities are unlikely to be able to support. In summary then, we believe that a gap exists in the Strategy's Auditing and Evaluation section and we believe this gap to be significant.

Recommendations:

5. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce review the Auditing and Evaluation section of the draft Strategic Plan to strengthen the focus on evaluating the effectiveness of particular schemes.

Auditing and Evaluation – Existing Data Sources

A number of litter data collection activities have been undertaken in WA over the last five to ten years and some of these were reviewed by the Nolan ITU study in 2002. These include data collected on an ongoing and/or occasional basis by the Main Roads Department, by the Swan River Trust, by CALM and by BIEC as well as data collected on Clean-up Australia Day (Nolan ITU, 2002, pp21-37). While we recognise that none of these data sets are likely to be suitable for the purposes of making comparative assessments from state to state, or perhaps even across this state, we believe that they may still be of use in specific instances. The Taskforce and KABC should consider whether any of the evaluation functions emphasised in this submission could make use of these data sources to correlate local changes in litter management to local changes in litter outcomes.

The data sets just mentioned might be able to be used in one of the following ways. At an initial investigation stage, desktop analyses could be carried out to establish a case for further investigating particular litter abatement programs. This could be done without any attempt to control the quality of data. At the stage of more rigorously investigating a particular program, quality control measures could be taken to try to verify or improve the internal consistency of data sets being generated by independent stakeholders or the Taskforce or KABC could extend assistance in analysing data collected by these stakeholders. In this way, the Taskforce or KABC would be able to support investigations at a local level without needing to invest the same level of resources as would presumably be required to directly undertake National Litter Audit-style studies themselves.

We stress that using these disparate data sets is not proposed to be an alternative to supporting the National Litter Audit, because the two areas of activity serve different purposes. Finding ways of using these local data sets to measure specific projects and schemes will support particular actions under the Strategy. On the other hand the National Litter Audit seems well suited to supporting the assessment of the Strategy as a whole.

Recommendations:

6. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to include as an action, the investigation of opportunities to use existing data sets and existing data collection activities to measure the effectiveness of particular litter abatement projects;
and
Include as an action, the implementation of any recommendations arising from this investigation.

Residential Infrastructure

The Municipal Waste Advisory Council would like to understand the rationale behind the following Physical Intervention objective: "*encourage the provision of best practice residential waste/recycling infrastructure and services throughout WA, and ensure consistency with respective public place infrastructure*". We read this objective in light of the background remarks

on page 18 which identify residential areas among “areas of particular focus for litter infrastructure”.

While we recognise that residential waste services can be involved in the generation of litter problems we question whether this matter warrants particular attention from the Strategy. Litter problems involving waste infrastructure in residential areas are, on whole, very likely to be the subject of complaint and tend to be characterised by a high degree of community ownership and responsibility. Consequently, litter problems in residential areas tend to be rapidly resolved. The Draft Strategy has already identified a long list of areas of activity, which are likely to heavily stretch the resources of the implementing agency. The Municipal Waste Advisory Council suggests that the final Strategy should omit the actions currently listed relating to waste infrastructure in residential areas.

Recommendations:

7. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove actions relating to residential waste/recycling infrastructure (Actions 5.6, 5.7)

National Packaging Covenant

Action 2.7 concerns the development of a policy statement on the National Packaging Covenant. Since the State Government is a signatory to the Covenant and there is no reason to believe that the Covenant will be reconsidered prior to its review in 2008, developing a policy statement does not seem to be an especially constructive exercise. On the other hand, the Municipal Waste Advisory Council notes that the 2008 review will benefit from analysis of its effectiveness in tackling litter from packaging.

Having conducted some analysis of the effect of the Covenant on litter outcomes, the KABC and the Taskforce would be well placed in 2008 to provide recommendations on the National Packaging Covenant. Since 2008 will provide the State Government with its first opportunity to reconsider its position on the Covenant, it appears sensible that the recommendations of the Taskforce and KABC should coincide with this opportunity. Thus, we believe it would make sense for the Strategy to undertake to evaluate the effect of the National Packaging Covenant on

litter from packaging and then, on the basis of the evaluation, to provide recommendations to the State Government in mid to late 2008.

Recommendations:

8. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove as an action, the development of a Policy Statement on the National Packaging Covenant (Action 2.7); and
Include as an action, the evaluation of the effect of the National Packaging Covenant on litter from packaging through 2006 – 2008(mid); and
Include as an action, the provision of recommendations to the State Government in mid to late 2008 on whether to continue to support the National Packaging Covenant as a viable approach to improving litter outcomes.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

The Draft Strategy lists as an objective under Policy and Legislation: “Develop policy to encourage producers and suppliers to take responsibility for the potential litter impacts of their products”. The Municipal Waste Advisory Council strongly endorses this objective. Litter impacts caused by products which have been discarded by the consumer ought to be taken into account when considering whether an EPR scheme is appropriate. However, we suggest that the Strategy should be reworded so that the process does not duplicate work already carried out and can mesh more readily with processes already underway.

The State Government has a policy statement on EPR and the Waste Management Branch and the Waste Management Board are currently developing a priority list of materials for which some type of EPR scheme might be appropriate. We submit that the litter impacts of products should be considered as part of the existing process for identifying industries that may be suitable for EPR-style schemes. It would be sensible for the KABC and the Taskforce to take a lead role in identifying litter impacts and arguing the case for these impacts to receive due emphasis within the existing priority list assessment process.

Recommendations:

9. That the Litter Prevention Taskforce modify the draft Strategic Plan to remove as an action, the development of a Policy Statement on Extended Producer Responsibility (Action 2.6); and
Include as an action, the identification of products for which Extended Producer Responsibility schemes may be an appropriate mechanism for managing litter impacts;
and
Include as an action, cooperation with the Department of Environment to ensure appropriate products are listed on the Department's Priority List of suitable products for Extended Producer Responsibility schemes.

END OF SUBMISSION