

# **Towards a National Waste Minimisation Strategy - Summary**

The attached document contains our submission to the Waste Minimisation and Management Working Group on "Towards a National Waste Minimisation Strategy". This section provides a brief summary of the key points that are developed in more detail in our submission.

## **General Comments on the Strategy and Vision/Goals**

We firmly believe that New Zealand's current waste management practices are not sustainable; are causing serious and in some cases, irreversible environmental damage; are devaluing our "clean, green" image, which has serious economic, social and cultural implications; and are lagging behind many other developed countries internationally. Hence, we are strongly in favour of the formulation of a Waste Minimisation Strategy for New Zealand.

We commend the Working Group on targeting the following waste streams: solid, hazardous and industrial waste, sewage sludge, biosolids and wastewater. However, we support broadening the scope of work to include three additional waste streams: stormwater runoff, effluent runoff and air emissions, provided this does not duplicate any other ongoing or planned review processes. If this is not possible, we recommend tackling these waste streams at a later date.

ESR believes an effective National Strategy, backed by Central Government with appropriate legislation, targets and pricing for waste disposal in place, coordinated on a regional and/or national level, and fostering collaborative working relationships between community groups, businesses and local Councils is urgently needed. Furthermore, we believe that this Strategy should adopt a "triple manifesto" as its defining framework, recognising that strategy, technologies, and practices are inextricably linked, with determination of any one of these three elements impacting on the other two (Waste Inquiry, 2000).

We consider that the Strategy needs a stronger vision, that defines New Zealand in at least some of the following ways: an internationally recognised world leader in waste minimisation, environmental protection and conservation, and sustainable resource management; the first country in the world to achieve "Zero Waste"; a truly "clean, green" country. We support the Vision setting quantitative, measurable targets, including a target date. We consider that a suitable target would be to aim for "Zero Waste" to landfill by 2020 (or 20 years from the date of finalising the Strategy), recognising that a generation may be required to achieve this goal.

## **Feedback on Issues**

### **Issue 1: Changing the Way We View Waste**

We support the proposed widening of the focus of waste minimisation and placing New Zealand's efforts first and foremost on

preventing waste. This change in focus is consistent with the preferred hierarchy of waste management and international trends. However, we believe that whilst a shift in focus to waste prevention is desirable, sufficient resources should be provided to ensure that other waste minimisation activities (reuse and recycling) are adequately supported. This amounts to an integrated approach to waste management. Table 1 of our submission lists a wide range of methods for achieving this change in focus.

## **Issue 2: Setting Targets for Waste Reduction**

We agree that both national and regional targets should be set for waste reduction, in terms of quantitative goals to be achieved by a given time. Progress towards these targets should be monitored and reported to the general public using a wide range of media. However, effective monitoring may require establishing an adequate "baseline" first (e.g. national waste database) and resources may need to be committed to achieve this. Table 2 lists a range of suggested targets. Various techniques such as Materials Flow Accounting, sustainability indices, and ecotoxicology may provide useful tools for setting targets.

## **Issue 3: Roles and Responsibilities**

We think that Regional Councils should take on the role of coordinating on-the-ground waste prevention and minimisation initiatives. We consider it essential that a central agency be established if a "Zero Waste to landfill" target is adopted. However, if lesser targets are adopted, a "stepping stone" approach may be followed, such as establishing an interim forum of relevant Regional Council Officers that would have the opportunity to meet regularly and exchange information, and that would review the need for a National Waste Agency three years after implementation of the National Waste Minimisation Strategy. In parallel with these initiatives, we support setting up a "Waste Minimisation Centre" within one of the universities or crown research institutes. We agree that some funding for these initiatives could be provided through a waste levy.

## **Issue 4: Matauranga Maori and Kaitiakitanga**

We believe that Maori tradition has much to offer pakeha society in relation to waste minimisation and care for the environment. Iwi must be consulted and their views taken into account before setting targets and guidelines. Iwi may need their own educational programme to ensure that whanau participate in and promote waste minimisation.

## **Issue 5: Introducing a Waste Minimisation Levy**

We strongly support the idea of a waste minimisation levy. We consider that solid, hazardous and solid industrial wastes could be covered by landfill levies, while liquid industrial waste could be levied through the trade waste mechanism. A levy could also be applied indirectly to sewage sludge, biosolids and wastewater through Local Authority water and wastewater charges. In particular, we consider that the generally low level of landfill disposal fees is a major obstacle to waste minimisation. We believe that landfill disposal costs should be increased and linked to weight so as to more realistically represent the true cost of disposal and encourage waste minimisation. We also believe that a landfill levy should be incorporated into these charges, with the levy being used to fund waste minimisation activities.

## **Issue 6: Deciding What Works Best**

There are a wide range of measures or tools that could be used to rate the relative merits of different waste prevention and minimisation options. In terms of overall targets for solid, hazardous and industrial solid wastes, useful indicators for the amounts of waste generated, recycled and disposed include: municipal solid waste: kg/person.d; commercial and industrial (C&I) waste: annual kg waste/\$100Gross Domestic Product; building and demolition (B&D) waste: annual kg waste/annual \$100 state value of building work done.

In terms of comparing various options “environmentally, socially and economically”, we believe the following evaluation criteria are very useful:

- Technical: technological maturity, input quality flexibility, input quantity flexibility, local availability of technology and expertise;
- Environmental: resource conservation, solid residues, greenhouse gas emissions, risk of water emissions, risk of air emissions;
- Social: community involvement/buy-in, public perception, iwi concerns, amenity impacts, employment impacts;
- Economic: net costs per tonne, cost/scale sensitivity, net benefits per tonne, market availability for products.

## **Issue 7: Identifying Priorities**

We believe that priority should be given to amending existing (e.g. RMA) and/or introducing new legislation, to promote waste minimisation; reviewing waste disposal costs, as previously discussed; educational programmes to raise awareness and change attitudes, and targeting specific waste streams: organic wastes, paper, glass, plastics, used tyres, hazardous wastes, building and demolition wastes, and agricultural/horticultural wastes (refer Table 4 of the submission).

## **Issue 8: Getting Everyone Involved**

We believe that in order to encourage the active participation of all members of the community in waste prevention and minimisation, the waste stream needs to be more accessible; more viable alternatives to waste disposal must be provided, and awareness must be increased of waste issues and waste prevention/minimisation. Many examples of possible initiatives are given in our submission. We suggest the Strategy may need a “kick start” to launch it, given the magnitude of the proposed target and associated required change in attitude and behaviour. Resurrecting the “Telethon” idea, and holding a national weekend fundraising blitz, focused on waste minimisation, may be one way of achieving this.

## **Issue 9: Applying the Principle of Producer Responsibility**

We believe New Zealand must embrace this principle, if we are to succeed in our waste minimisation endeavours. Even though New Zealand is a small trading nation importing a large percentage of already packaged products, importers can put pressure on their overseas suppliers to abide by this principle. Similarly, for products manufactured within New Zealand, producers and suppliers should adhere to this principle. Users also need to be involved, so that they are educated in what is required of them. In particular, the Building and Demolition sector is a core user group to target. Adopting a “producer responsibility” ethic would

also provide a boost to our export sector, with New Zealand actually living up to our green reputation.

We consider that businesses may be challenged by a wide range of methods, which are discussed in detail in our submission. We also believe that local, regional and national government should lead by example on this issue by ensuring that they follow producer responsibility principles and by requiring that their suppliers do so as well.

### **Issue 10: Putting the Polluter Pays Principle into Action**

We believe that the Polluter Pays Principle should be put into practice so as to encourage waste avoidance and to ensure that the cost of containing or eliminating pollution is borne by those who generate or handle polluting or potentially polluting material. This would help to make more people and businesses realise the consequences and environmental costs of their own waste production. At a household level, we believe that waste disposal is undercharged and that households should be charged according to the weight of refuse they produce. However, we recognise that household charges will increase, if landfill disposal fees are increased and a landfill levy introduced, as discussed previously. At a commercial and industrial level, similar measures should be taken, with the charges possibly being linked to pollutant toxicity as well. A broader approach may be taken by introducing environmental taxes, which can play a major role in changing relative prices and give clear signals about what is considered environmentally friendly behaviour. We consider environmental taxes to be a very powerful tool, which may provide the most efficient means of applying the Polluter Pays principle.

### **Issue 11: Other Issues**

We consider it important that the Draft Strategy include a definition of waste, and suggest the following: "Wastes are materials that currently have a negative value to their owner" or "Wastes are all solid, semi-solid, liquid and gaseous materials that the possessor no longer considers of sufficient value to retain". These definitions challenge people to think about waste in a different way, and reflect the paradigm shift in thinking and practice that the Waste Minimisation Strategy is aiming to achieve.

## **Concluding Remarks**

We hope that the Final Strategy will be a significant document, in terms of its vision and content, and that it will be the start of a process that will result in New Zealand becoming a world leader in waste prevention and minimisation, a true "clean, green" country, and the first country in the world to achieve "zero waste"!