
REPORT BACK ON WASTEMINZ CONFERENCE

1. Purpose of Report

For Councillor Wade-Brown to report back to all Councillors on the Conference she attended including the subjects covered and her opinion of the value of attendance by Elected Members.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*

2. Background

This was the Wasteminz Mid-Year Round-Up, rather than the more substantive annual conference. It covered various aspects of resource recovery, waste minimisation and hazardous substance management. A particular focus was on the first stages of implementation of the Waste Minimisation Act, particularly which priority waste streams the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) should work through and the role of the new Waste Advisory Board

The two day conference was held at the Brentwood Hotel in Kilbirnie, on April 29th and 30th 2009. There were about a hundred attendees. Several staff attended from Wellington City Council, sharing the registrations across different sessions. We ensured that between us we covered different workshops where possible.

3. Discussion

3.1 Subjects Covered

Rob Fenwick, Chair of the Waste Advisory Board, was the first speaker. He recapped the role of the Board. Firstly, an independent board is needed regarding the distribution of the nationally contestable part of the waste levy fund. We gathered that hypothecation of this levy has been a challenge for Treasury – though why this is any more difficult than the hypothecation of road user charges and petrol tax for transport expenditure was not made apparent. Secondly, they provide advice to the Environment Minister

regarding product stewardship schemes, criteria for funding and the creation of an effective national waste database.

Members of the Waste Advisory Board are Chair Rob Fenwick, Lynne Kenny, Morris Love, John Pask, Sheryl Stivens, Lesley Stone and Nandor Tanczos. Their primary relationship is with the Minister rather than the Ministry, however their secretariat is seconded from the Ministry.

We had an update of the MfE restructure which noted that the work areas of Bioethics, Household Sustainability and CarbonZero Public Service will cease operation on 30th June. In the waste area, programmes will be scaled back so that savings may be made and the focus will be on implementing this Waste Minimisation Act, which has Government support. When preparing Waste Minimisation and Management Plans, Councils must have regard to the existing New Zealand Waste Strategy. The strategy is considerably wider than the Act and includes safe disposal and contaminated land issues. The MfE has run a range of workshops round the country on the discussion document, available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/waste/waste-minimisation-discussion-document/index.html>.

One workshop considered targets for the Waste Strategy, due to be finalised by the end of this year. Our group agreed that there should be fewer targets while recognising some were difficult to measure. Some could be national and some up to Councils. Attendees emphasised that Councils were only responsible for a portion of waste, for example, construction and demolition material may go to cleanfills, home composting will not register, some Councils do not have a landfill within their district, and re-use, while highly desirable, would always be hard to quantify. The OECD review of New Zealand's environment highlighted a lack of waste information. From what facts can be gathered, while the population grew, there has not been a significant increase to landfills over the last decade.

There was discussion on whether cover material should attract the levy. This is necessary to reduce odour and pests. Some landfills have material available on-site from quarrying to create the landfill, others have to import it. If material does not go over the weighbridge, it is very hard to quantify anyway.

A session on bioreactors and landfills was successful in provoking lively discussion despite its post-lunch slot. The management of moisture, gas collection, energy conversion and public opinion were all complex issues. A sanitary landfill stops the spread of pathogens but there was scepticism about the maximum percentage of gas able to be collected. Some landfills run as bioreactors produce as much as 20 megawatts of power with estimates of them running for 100 years. Others suggested that the post-closure period can be shortened and gas emissions reduced by more intensive management. Adding moisture can increase seep and make leachate collection harder. Creating negative air pressure means that cover material would not be needed. There was also debate about the costs of each method over time. The comparative value of composting versus gas generation was equivocal. Composting produced material of value to land but examples were given of European situations where the compost was unusable and had been stockpiled. The question of whether hazardous waste could be broken down by the diversity of microorganisms was

canvassed without conclusion. More surface testing of landfills is essential to confirm what percentage of gas is captured. Heated discussion arose about the benefits of composting, even assuming it was done well. Anaerobic composting (poorly managed slimy home compost can be a troublesome example) produces poor quality residue for the land/garden and methane to the atmosphere. On the other hand, reduction of nitrous oxide from inorganic fertiliser is beneficial. Each circumstance, particular mix of ingredients, sewage sludge unique to each city, temperature, rainfall and permeability of landfill base, needs to be assessed before a conclusion can be drawn. Production of energy from biosolids (sewage sludge, meat waste, horticultural waste) pyrolysis was also explored and we were given an update. An estimate of New Zealand's total putrescible waste was 2.7m tonnes per annum. Several ventures are looking at BioChar production to sequester carbon but all seem in fairly early stages in New Zealand. Net carbon emissions were described as "being part of the problem", carbon neutral was "not part of the problem" and carbon capture/sequestration was "part of the solution".

Mark Glover emphasised that there was a consensus between local government, non-governmental organisations, industry and recyclers that a move from waste management to resource recovery was occurring. While zero waste was a way off, the idea that existing resources should be used ahead of virgin resources would be effective. A developed economy recycles steel or copper rather than mining virgin ore. Reclaimed resources should be used for their highest and best value. Climate Change is "the mother of all market failures". This is not the time to choose the wrong contract since we do not have thirty years to mess around. If society paid the same attention to discarding as to procurement rather than the "conscientious 20%" of people, as people already do to cars and houses it would transform the waste problem. A service economy, a dematerialised economy, would move away from ownership to services so material wastage could reduce. Some materials are close to their peak – not just oil. For example iridium is down to decades of known reserves, tantalum (used in all mobile phones) is known in only two deposits – one in the Congo.

Sue Coutts spoke about delivering value through Community Contracts. There is now a community recycling network of some 34 groups, employing more than 500 people. They provide meaningful work and local economic development. She regards recycling as a "vehicle for change". She also emphasised the role of a Council's procurement policy. Public spending could bring or ignore wider public benefit. She analysed the economic effect of using a local, national or multinational provider of recycling services. The more local the organisation, the higher proportion of the dollar returned to the community for further economic value.

One workshop discussed priority products for stewardship schemes. The MfE had suggested agricultural chemicals, waste oil and refrigerant gases. Generally people thought that three schemes were far too few to start with and the public needed to see some immediate and visible gains. Tyres, e-waste, cars and containers were proposed as at least as important as the MfE's proposals. We noted that Waste Oil's first stewardship scheme was already complete. There was also discussion of criteria and co-benefits for particular products/waste streams.

3.2 Material for Circulation

I was advised of the Wasteminz member-only section of the website which I am happy to share with other Councillors if they want to find out further information. I will bring a few issues of Waste Awareness, a Wasteminz publication, to the Strategy and Policy Committee meeting to circulate. This is a very useful round-up which I will now receive on the Wellington City Council circulation list. See www.wasteminz.org.nz for up to date material.

3.3 Benefit to Council / Elected Members

It was a very specialised conference which I found useful. The timing was excellent given Council's engagement with waste matters. While some sessions were highly technical and proponents of different methods did not universally convince the audience, I felt that our recent decisions to landfill sewage sludge but continue to compost green waste were both defensible given the state of the art. The conference helped me to see how we could move forward in implementing the local government aspects of the Waste Minimisation Act. Another valuable part was seeing where rural and metro councils agreed on priorities for product stewardship.

The networking with community organisations involved in innovative ways of reducing the cost to local communities while creating local employment was particularly relevant and a case of social, environmental and economic benefits co-existing happily. I look forward to more community and business involvement in waste solutions locally. I was reminded of the importance of Wellington City Council procurement principles including cradle-to-grave or cradle-to-cradle logic.

This conference helped inform my contribution to our submission on the MfE's discussion document on May 14th and to our plan for development and implementation of a Waste Management and Minimisation Plan as brought to Strategy and Policy Committee on June 4th.

Our local model of the "Waste Forum – Wellington Region" seems to offer a local opportunity for keeping up to date with opportunities and challenges in the waste reduction and minimisation area that did not exist elsewhere in the country and confirmed that ongoing dialogue between MfE officials, local government, community organisations and commercial business is essential.

3.4 Costs

There were no additional costs incurred over and above the registration since the venue was a pleasant cycle ride away.

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