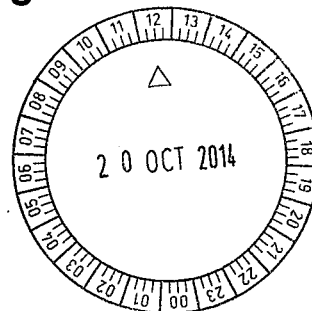




Hon Albert Jacob MLA
Minister for Environment; Heritage

Our Ref: 50-05454



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Simon

Dear ~~Mr O'Brien~~

Thank you for your letter dated 16 September 2014 requesting my comments in relation to *Petition No 53 – Recycling and Composting in WA* tabled in the Legislative Council and referred to the Committee.

I have addressed the terms of the petition generally and the issues raised by the principal petitioner and tabling member below.

Recycling Rates in WA

Recycling rates have increased in recent years, however performance is variable across sectors and there are significant opportunities for further improvement. In 2012–13, the State-wide recycling rate was 40 per cent, up slightly from 39 per cent in the previous year. The recycling rate for metropolitan household waste and commercial & industrial waste was 45 per cent. The recycling rate for construction and demolition waste was lower at around 40 per cent.

The amount of waste sent to landfill between 2011–12 and 2012–13 reduced by approximately six per cent despite population growth of approximately two per cent over the same period. The average amount of waste sent to landfill during the period decreased from 1.6 tonnes per person to 1.5 tonnes per person.

Although waste generation and recycling figures are trending in the right direction, more work is required to meet landfill diversion targets set out in the *Waste Strategy: Creating the right environment*.

Caution needs to be applied in comparing recycling rates between jurisdictions, as the types of waste included in recycling statistics may vary. Nationally reported data for WA differ from locally reported data because of these variations. Although it is difficult to accurately compare waste and recycling rates between jurisdictions, recycling rates in WA are generally lower than most other Australian jurisdictions.

The Waste Strategy was released in March 2012. Some significant initiatives expected to drive a continued increase in recycling rates are in their early stages or are yet to be implemented. For example, the Government's planned increases to the landfill levy from 1 January 2015 will help to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill in the metropolitan area. The increases bring the Western Australian levy rates broadly in line with South Australia and Victoria and will be a key incentive for encouraging recycling across all sectors. The Better Bins Kerbside Collection Pilot program launched earlier this year provides \$7.5 million in funding support for local governments to upgrade their existing kerbside collection systems to improve their performance, increase the degree of source separation and reduce the amount of waste they send to landfill. Sixteen councils from both the metropolitan and regional areas have submitted expressions of interest for the program.

Waste to Energy

In April 2013 I received advice from the EPA and the Waste Authority (Report 1468) on the environmental and health performance of waste-to-energy technologies under s 16(e) of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act).

The advice indicated that, subject to conditions and matching suitable technologies to types of waste input and appropriate plant scale, waste-to-energy plants employing best practice can be operated with acceptable impacts to our community. The advice also confirms waste to energy as a recognised recovery option in the waste hierarchy, which is likely to play an important role alongside other waste management options in contributing to Western Australia's resource recovery targets.

It is important to note the principle that 'waste sourced as input must target genuine residual waste that cannot feasibly be reused or recycled'. This principle is consistent with the waste hierarchy that ranks waste management options in order of their environmental desirability. Adherence to this principle should ensure that waste to energy does not undermine the recycling and composting sectors.

When considering proposals for waste-to-energy facilities, the EPA gives due consideration to the recommendations in Report 1468. This includes during the scoping of investigations to be undertaken to inform an assessment and during the EPA's subsequent assessment of a proposal. At the conclusion of its assessment, the EPA publishes its report and recommendations to the Minister for Environment.

In particular, emissions with the potential to impact on public health receive the highest level of scrutiny during the EPA's assessment process. The EPA uses environmental factors and associated objectives as the basis for assessing whether a proposal's impact on the environment is acceptable. Environmental Assessment Guideline No.8 Environmental Factors and Objectives describe the factors and objectives adopted by the EPA. Notably, the EPA's objective for air quality is to maintain air quality for the protection of human health and amenity, and the EPA's objective for human health is to ensure that human health is not adversely affected. Where air quality and/or human health are identified as key environmental factors for an assessment they are discussed in the EPA's report and recommendations.

The EPA has completed its assessment of the following proposals which have had regard to the joint report to the Minister for Environment from the EPA and the Waste Authority on the Environmental and Health Performance of Waste to Energy Technologies (Report 1468):

- Port Hedland Waste to Energy and Materials Recovery Facility, Boodarie Industrial Estate, Port Hedland (EPA Report 1469).
- Resource Recovery Facility, Red Hill (EPA Report 1487).
- East Rockingham Waste to Energy and Materials Recovery Facility (EPA Report 1513).

Local Context

The Waste Strategy recognises various challenges in Western Australia, including market failure challenges, particularly in regional and remote parts of the State. Market failures are exacerbated in these areas because of transport costs and reduced economies of scale.

The Strategy contains five strategic objectives that respond to the characteristics of the State, relating to infrastructure planning, regulation, 'best practice', economic instruments and communication. Of particular note, the Strategy recognises the importance of planning to ensure appropriate waste and recycling facilities are available across the State. There is an initial focus in the metro area (see Waste Infrastructure Planning below) because the majority of waste is generated in this area, however commitments extend to other parts of the State. The importance of waste in a planning context has been highlighted in the State Planning Strategy, released earlier this year, which includes waste planning alongside other important physical infrastructure such as water, telecommunications and energy.

The Waste Strategy also recognises the importance of approaches such as product stewardship (to share the waste management costs of products) and direct financial support for collection and processing (including through the household hazardous waste program) to improve waste management outcomes across the State.

Adverse Waste Management Events

The comments in Petition 53 refer to various adverse waste management events, including:

- The Waste Control Chemical Fire Parliamentary Inquiry – the key inquiry recommendations for the environment portfolio and the Department of Environment Regulation (DER) have been implemented, including subsequent amendment to the EP Act in 2003 and the introduction of the *Contaminated Sites Act 2003* (CS Act) in 2006.
- The Brookdale liquid waste facility – this facility was closed and vacated in 2004. Since closure, the investigations of contamination at the site have been ongoing, and works continue to progress toward full decommissioning and remediation of the facility.
- Bio-Organics composting site – in December 2013, DER classified the Bio-Organics site as 'possibly contaminated – investigation required' under the CS Act. On 27 June 2014 Bio-Organics' licence was revoked and a closure notice issued.

Waste Infrastructure Planning

An initiative of the Waste Strategy is the long-term planning for waste and recycling processing in the Perth and Peel regions. The aim of this planning process is to provide advice on the waste and recycling infrastructure that may be needed in the region to achieve the Waste Strategy targets and to inform ongoing reform in the waste management sector.

Yours sincerely



Albert Jacob MLA
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT; HERITAGE

16 OCT 2014