

4.1 ALGA MOTION – RECYCLING

Submitting Councillor: Brian Little

MOTION:

That Council:

Supports the motion to the Australian Local Government Association's (ALGA) National General Assembly 2023 as follows:

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to call on the Federal Government to implement the actions below in order to achieve a massive improvement in Australia's plastics recycling rates (from 16% / 4% towards the 80% goal set in the National Waste Policy Action Plan) and achieve this in a timely manner. To that effect, ALGA requests that the Federal Government:

- 1. Creates a permanent body consisting of Federal and State Ministers (or their representatives) responsible for plastic waste management and committing to it meeting at least quarterly and once a year holding a Summit along the lines of the 2020 Summit involving all levels of Government (Fed-State-Local) and key representatives of the plastic recycling and packaging industries. Its aim will be to ensure a uniform approach (including legislation) around Australia governing all aspects of plastic waste management, including (but not limited to):*
 - a. A tax on plastic packaging (see point 2 below)*
 - b. Financial incentives for industry to build and run plastics recycling plant (see point 2 below)*
 - c. Investment in plastic recycling infrastructure (i.e. capital available to the recycling industry) and by taking a national view attracting companies capable of delivering very large scale processing plant*
 - d. Processes for collecting plastic waste including soft plastics*
 - e. Commitment to buy products made from recycled plastics (and other recycled materials), such as those made by Replas, whenever possible.*
 - f. Commitment to use recycled materials as part of larger constructions – in particular roads where a significant proportion can be sourced from recycled materials.*
 - g. Container Deposit schemes.*
- 2. In collaboration with the States, introduce a tax on plastic packaging. This could take the form of a bulk tax similar to the UK levied at the manufacturing / import stage (per tonne) or a*

per item tax levied at the retail level (say 10c per plastic package by the supermarkets). The funds raised would be used exclusively to fund plastic recycling (possibly similar to the UK model guaranteeing a price for materials generated by the recycling process and ready to be used in the production of new packaging).

- 3. In collaboration with the States and research bodies such as the CSIRO develop guidelines on the efficacy of different alternate (to plastic) packaging materials, for food in particular. By establishing what alternate materials may be available, their properties (in particular their ability to be composted or recycled and how effective they are in prolonging the shelf life of foods) the packaging and food industries may be encouraged to move to a non-plastic alternative. At present the use and availability of alternatives lies with a number of very small companies offering innovative solutions, some of which look promising if they could be scaled up.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement to submit a motion to the Australian Local Government Association's (ALGA) National General Assembly 2023.

BACKGROUND

This year the NGA theme is "Our Communities, Our Future".

The theme focusses on the critical importance of our communities, how they are the focus of our attention, and how they are at the centre of all councils' work. Our communities are the reason that local governments exist, and it is the health and wellbeing of our communities that will shape Australia's future.

Motions for the National General Assembly are due by Friday 24 March 2023.

DISCUSSION

Research by the Minderloo Foundation Australia and backed by other research organisations has shown that Australia is the most plastic consumptive nation in the world. Each year Australia produces around 70 billion pieces of plastic (around 3000 pieces, or 60kg per person). Since 2017 Australia has attempted to implement initiatives to support the transition to a circular economy for packaging in particular based primarily on voluntary adoption of the codes by the various industries concerned.

The report by the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) in November 2021 however demonstrates that voluntary schemes and targets are simply not working with the rate of plastic packaging recycling remaining stubbornly low at around 16% and soft plastics at 4% (possibly even lower in light of Victoria's recent experience of soft plastic waste being warehoused). The role of soft plastics in waterway and ocean pollution is worth a special mention – being light it is blown into gutters and then stormwater drains where it ends up in our waterways and oceans.

The Federal Government has recently attempted to play an active part in improving recycling rates in Australia, where responsibilities lie primarily with the States and through them Local Government.

The National Plastics Summit (March 2020) a Government led initiative with over 200 delegates from industry, government and community was ground breaking in many respects. The resulting goals that resulted were documented in the National Plastics Plan 2021: these were laudable but as the APCO report shows, progress towards these goals is next to nil. The primary reason for the lack of progress is the current funding model.

Currently State Governments, while collecting hundreds of millions of dollars from Local Government through landfill levies, contribute little, if anything, to recycling costs, which Local Governments have to pay from their rates revenue.

Currently the products from recycling are either not bought or bring in so little revenue that private recycling companies demand three figure sums per tonne from Local Government to recycle their curbside collections. While there is so little certainty there are few incentives for private industry to invest the millions of dollars required to install large scale, modern sorting and recycling plant. Also, while the cost of virgin plastics (both hard and soft) is cheaper than alternative products, or even plastics using recycled material, there is no incentive for the packaging industry (or the food industry) to change.

The only realistic way to change the costing equation is to tax plastic packaging, at or near source, and use the funds collected to support the recycling and alternate product industries. That would both provide an incentive for packaging to change from plastic and provide the surety of revenue to the recycling industry that would promote investment. That would need to be done at a Federal level to be effective and, for legislative reasons, would need the support of the States and Territories – so a vital part of achieving this would be the formation of a standing body led by the Federal Government and including high level representatives from all State and Territory governments.

Other countries are already going down similar paths. The UK is in the process of implementing a tax on plastic packaging of 200 pounds per tonne

at the manufacturing or import level and using the funds to guarantee a revenue of 100 pounds per tonne for recycled materials that can be used in manufacture. Other countries, like France, are looking at banning plastic packaging altogether on some products.

This is an issue that affects all Councils and is worthy of submission and support for submission to the ALGA National Conference in June 2023.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Current advocacy on this matter is being accommodated within existing Council resources.

CONCLUSION

This is an issue that affects all Councils and is worthy of submission and support to the ALGA National Conference in June 2023.