

Feedback on IV 2019 Recycling and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Report

From: Mark Korvin, Environmental Activist and Recycling Enthusiast

In broad terms the report is good but there appear to be a few key omissions or opportunities not recognised.

There seems to be little or no regard for what might be called 'unmanaged waste' and primarily, litter. Not all waste ultimately ends up in landfill. A lot of waste is dumped in public spaces and outdoor environments. A quick survey of any water body will reveal waste items that could have and should have been captured for recycling e.g. plastic, glass and metal beverage containers. Single use packaging, particularly from fast-food outlets, is another common litter item. The true costs of dealing with waste that has been dumped in the environment should be factored into business cases for establishing recovery and recycling mechanisms. In one dimension there is opportunity to reclaim reusable material; in another dimension there is opportunity to reduce environmental pollution and its associated negative consequences that often require costly remediation.

Similar to the workshops that Infrastructure Victoria conducted in Shepparton, Ballarat and Traralgon it is essential to survey a coastal town or region to understand the impact of tourism and recreational use on volumes of waste produced and recovery outcomes. Seasonal population spikes need to be considered in devising waste management strategies, particularly when waste 'hinterlands' span multiple local government jurisdictions. In addition, business cases for making tourism related investments need to factor in the cost of dealing with tourism generated waste.

From a recovery perspective the report seems to primarily focus on kerbside collection but there is a need to implement multiple collection regimes with associated collection points. Collection points should be established in community hubs like schools, shopping centres and business office hubs. The implementation of these community hubs provides opportunity to both improve waste separation and drive community education. It also allows a phased deployment with operational tuning of an expanded separated waste collection model.

The report seems to regard consumers as primarily being residential/general public. In reality, businesses are often consumers as well. It would be better to distinguish between the roles of product consumer and material consumer. Some businesses play both roles. Businesses can also produce quite different types of waste warranting different recovery regimes. Corporates in particular produce large volumes of high quality (office) paper waste rather than hard waste. [On a related note, there seems to be little regard for the reuse potential of paper beyond cardboard and fibre manufacture. Both high quality office paper and some newspaper can be recycled back into reproduction of themselves.]

The 'Waste Aversion' thread does not get much coverage. There is a role for government in defining and enforcing standards targeting both material consumption and waste disposal which could reduce generation of waste. The report touches on measures to govern use of virgin material but fails to mention the option to impose penalties on producers of inherently 'throw-away' product and/or single use packaging. A waste disposal levy would drive a change in both product design and consumer behaviour.

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