

From Harry van Moorst on behalf of Victorians for Smart Waste Management

Werribee, Ravenhall & Wollert — the Waste Hubs of Melbourne!

The draft of the Waste Implementation Plan has been released and indicates that Werribee along with Ravenhall and Wollert landfills will be the recipients of 150 million tonnes of Melbourne's municipal waste — much of it transported through our streets from the East and South East of Melbourne.

“There is an adequate supply of landfill airspace in the north west that could meet Melbourne's overall needs in the long term. (Over the next 30 years around 150 million tonnes will be available which will meet the projected annual landfilling need of 4 million tonnes)” (Metropolitan Waste & Resource recovery Implementation Plan, p.50) “

There are many serious flaws in the Draft Implementation Plan and it is important to let the Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group (MWRRG) know how the community feels about these flaws. These are the main issues of concern:

1. Despite instructions from the Government and promises the MWRRG (Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group) has not consulted with the local communities around these 3 landfills, let alone enable communities to be a part of the decision-making process (which the Government and Sustainability Victoria promised would occur). Instead the MWRRG has continued with exactly the same approach as they have for the past 6 years or more and unilaterally designated the 3 existing large landfills as “suitable hubs”.
2. There is no evidence in the Plan that there will be or has been any serious investigation of the suitability of these landfills as hubs for receiving all of Melbourne's waste (despite promises that such investigations would occur prior to designating infrastructure hubs). We do not want such large landfills (“waste mountains”) in close proximity to our communities — they should be relocated well outside the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) where possible and should definitely not become mountains of unsightly and smelly rubbish.
3. They claim they will act on the basis of “evidence” to determine the Plan, yet the substantial evidence provided by the community that the landfills smell, are unsightly, are a health risk (especially in the event of fires) and contaminate both air and groundwater, is ignored in their actual Plan. In fact, they don't even acknowledge in their Plan or proposed actions any of the issues raised by thousands of residents living near these landfills.
4. They made a unilateral decision to refuse to establish any new landfills (inside or outside) the UGB thereby imposing an even greater burden on the 3 communities surrounding the proposed Landfill Hubs.
5. The Government is committed to “environmental justice” but the MWRRG Implementation Plan only pays lip-service to this and will actually increase the burden by scheduling these 3 landfills to receive all of Melbourne's municipal waste for the next 30 years or more. The communities in Wyndham and around Ravenhall (Caroline Springs, Tarneit and Brim bank) already carry a greater burden than most of Melbourne's communities due to the presence of the landfill and other environmental pressures such as heavy industry, sewage waste, etc.

If the MWRRG was at all genuine about environmental justice they would have discussed this environmental injustice and acted to prevent it.

6. There is a very half-hearted commitment to improve our waste infrastructure through better recycling and composting but no clear targets or timelines. Without these it is unlikely that the Plan will succeed in achieving the Government goals of maximising resource recovery and minimising landfill.
7. There is no suggestion of Government funding (e.g. through the \$400 million Sustainability Fund or by other options such as Government, Council, Community and Industry partnerships) only rather vague commitments to help industry establish some infrastructure by ensuring adequate supplies of waste to make it economically profitable.
8. The Plan is primarily dependent on market mechanisms and corporate investment (which have so far failed to bring Victoria's waste infrastructure into the 21st century) with very limited state encouragement (few real incentives) and is therefore still primarily based on landfill. Instead of alternative financing approaches, such as those mentioned above, it is a Plan based on a strategy that is currently not working well (as seen in the stockpiling of compost due to the lack of a viable market). Meanwhile our 3 landfills continue to grow (making substantial profits for owners) at the expense of the surrounding community.
9. This is further shown by the intention to use the date for the renewal of municipal waste collection contracts to put any major alternatives in place, which underscores a reliance on corporate contracts and a willingness to put off the introduction of effective alternative options until 2021 when the contracts expire). There is no indication of a willingness to renegotiate the contracts or introduce major infrastructure initiatives to reduce the pressure on landfills (except perhaps some organic waste infrastructure assuming the market supports this). There is no understanding of the urgency felt by communities for relief from the constantly increasing size, height and impact of the existing landfills (leaving aside the equally important increasing risk of environmental impacts).
10. The Plan avoids serious discussion of proven effective technologies such as Waste to Energy which could significantly take the burden off landfill and the community for much of the growing quantity of municipal waste without facing significant market problems (unlike the market for compost, the market for electricity is huge and is dependent largely on coal — waste in this context becomes a renewable energy source capable of replacing fossil fuels).
11. The Plan ignores the numerous odour and litter complaints from the community. Instead it assumes that existing buffer zones, odour modelling and monitoring and enforcement regimes are adequate. The evidence provided by the community through their complaints, submissions, petitions and participation in workshops and meetings testify to the flaws in the MWRRG's assumptions about these important matters.
12. There is no discussion of alternative scenarios and no presentation of options: just the unilateral decisions of the MWRRG.
13. There is no discussion of the possible consequences of the Plan, such as the loss of community confidence and community willingness to grant a licence to operate due to the increasing impact on local communities resulting from the increased odour, increased size and height and hence visual amenity loss.
14. There is also the problem of adequate contingency plans due to the sole reliance on 3 massive landfills in the event that even one of them becomes unavailable (e.g. due to a fire, leakage of leachate, failure of infrastructure such as a flare, traffic/transport issues,

industrial action, community blockades, etc.). With each of these large landfills receiving ever increasing waste the risk of such eventualities also increases.

15. Most importantly, there is little, if any, planning to prevent waste by measures such as pressure on the supply chain to reduce/alter their packaging to minimise it and enable effective recycling or waste to energy options or to introduce a Container Deposit System (CDS), no discussion of sustainable design of products etc.
16. Therefore, unless there are very substantial changes to the Plan the community is left to introduce its own initiatives to reduce the landfill burden currently faced. This must inevitably disrupt the smooth roll-out of this unacceptable plan.

Commentary prepared by Harry van Moorst on behalf of Victorians for Smart Waste Management