

Submission on draft MWRRIP

From : Ward Petherbridge, Waste Converters Recycling

Waste Converters Recycling would like to commend the Victorian State Government on the development of the Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation Plan ('the Plan'). The document includes a number of sound initiatives and recommendations for the creation of an enabling environment for reducing waste to landfill in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Victoria has the potential to support a vibrant recycling industry that can set the Australian standard for innovative utilization of waste materials.. This will however require a paradigm shift that allows for waste to be seen as a valuable resource rather than a societal burden. The Plan will be a critical tool for driving this change.

Waste Converters Recycling operates a 35-acre family run recycling depot in Dandenong South, Victoria. The core business activity is recycling timber packaging and building waste. The following waste streams are recycled annually:

- 25,000 tonnes of builder's waste, including soil, bricks, concrete, plaster, tiles and timber off cuts.
- 20,000 tonnes of timber packaging waste, including pallets and crates
- 3,500 tonnes of green waste in the form of trees and stumps.

Waste Converters' manufacturing capabilities enable value adding to take place on site. From the materials received, a variety of recycled products are produced, including timber pallets, crates, boxes, stakes, blended topsoil, mulch, crushed brick, and concrete aggregate. The facility also sorts and sells recycled timber for use in architectural and furniture design. Ninety-five percent of material received at the site is recycled. In 2014, Waste Converters received a Sustainability Victoria, Driving Investment in New Recycling Grant that has been used to expand the capacity of the sites C&I timber recycling and will allow the site to diversify the waste processed onsite to incorporate dry packaging waste including plastics and cardboard.

Waste converters currently employ 45 staff and over 2,000 businesses use their services.

This submission will provide comment on the following key areas:

- Develop planning policies and tools that facilitate resource recovery targeting.
- Develop a Transfer Station Growth Strategy to facilitate a network that can manage growing waste volumes whilst maximising resource recovery.
- Maximise recovery of priority materials identified through Victorian Market Development Strategy by establishing relationships between waste generators and the processing industry.
- Ensure community stakeholders are engaged in waste and resource recovery decision making.

Transfer Station Growth Strategy

As suggested in the Plan, an enabling policy framework is essential for ensuring that the commercial recycling industry can continue providing essential waste services. Every municipality, particularly those with industrial zoning, will require pre-sort and recycling facilities. As such, the development and implementation of the Transfer Station Growth Strategy is a critical component of the plan, particularly in the South-East, due to the impending closures of landfills.

For this strategy to be successful, sites will need to be set aside industrial areas to allow for efficient collection, transport and processing of waste. It will also be important that the plan takes into consideration the co-location of commercially run recycling facilities. If waste and recycling facilities are sited further away from major industrial areas, the current waste recycling model will become increasingly unviable for both businesses that produce and recycle waste.

This is due to the bulky and heavy nature of many waste types and as such transportation is expensive and places a significant burden on Victoria's transport infrastructure. Distances travelled are therefore a key factor in the efficient management of waste services. Last year Waste Converters averaged 30,000 vehicle movements, so the site's Dandenong location has been a significant factor for the company's commercial viability. The concentration of manufacturing and warehousing businesses in the precinct has allowed Waste Converters to conduct most of its business within a 15km radius of the site.

Waste Converters recommends that a priority action within The Transfer Station Growth Strategy is that a significant proportion of the planned stations are located within close proximity of manufacturing hubs and recycling facilities.

Engaging community stakeholders in waste and resource recovery decision making

With the growing need for housing in Victoria, waste facilities have been encroached upon by residential development, eroding buffer zones between waste processing facilities and residential areas. From our experience, local Government planning departments are struggling to strike a balance between providing essential waste services and responding to local residents' objections to living close to a waste facility.

After 30 years of operating in South Dandenong, only over the last 5-6 years have planning issues impacted on Waste Converters' ability to operate. The site is located adjacent to the last remaining prescribed waste landfill in Victoria, operated by SITA. Although the Waste Converters facility handles vastly different waste streams to SITA, both play a vital role in processing the waste generated in the heavily industrialized South-East Region of Metropolitan Melbourne.

In the past decade, 6000 houses have been built within a couple of kilometres of both facilities, and the area surrounding has been recently rezoned from farm land to Industrial 1. Since these changes, the City of Greater Dandenong Council has struggled to provide Waste Converters and other co-located recycling services with a long-term recycling permit. As a result, Waste Converters' future was uncertain for a four-year period, making it impossible to invest in new infrastructure or implement a growth strategy. Understanding and overturning the Council decision was also a time-consuming, and expensive process that diverted us from the company's core business activities.

Considerable time and resources were utilised to:

- educate the local community, key decision makers and government representatives about the essential services provided at the site
- explain that processing solid, inert waste has minimal impact on the local community.
- prepare documentation to overturn planning decisions

Waste Converters supports the Plan's stated action to increase certainty and transparency for industry and community through defining the future role of waste and resource recovery hubs, and through taking measures to establish and protect buffer separation distances. From our recent experience the plan should also include

- education programs for local government planning officers and community stakeholders about the potential impact of different waste streams and the importance of co-located waste recycling services;
- greater support for commercial recycling facilities - in particular SMEs - to assist them to meet their planning and regulatory requirements and negotiate planning and licensing issues that are now more commonplace due to eroding buffer zones.

Maintaining landfill levies

Given the significant role landfill levies have played in the creation of a more robust recycling industry in Victoria, it was surprising to find no mention of levies in the plan. The 2011 levy increase, for example, resulted in a 15% rise in volumes processed at Waste Converters. Businesses were more inclined to recycle their products at the facility because it was 50% cheaper than sending the same material to landfill. These increased levies created both a market for recycling and an incentive for diverting waste from landfill sites.

Waste converters recommends that incremental increases to landfill levies should be a key component in the Plan.

Setting priorities for waste recovery infrastructure

Waste Converters supports the focus on dry waste as a priority material. Our internal market assessments indicate the companies we service require a more comprehensive service model for processing their plastics and paper products. Since expanding our facilities, the site now has the capacity to start accepting cardboard and plastics, and we would welcome opportunities to establish relationships with companies generating dry waste.