

Opinion Editorial

Councils taking the lead on waste

Tasmanian councils are leading the way when it comes to better waste management and resource recovery. Recently, the City of Hobart made moves to ban single-use plastic takeaway containers, the first capital city in Australia to do so. This action by the Council is a good example of how councils are getting on with job of improving waste management in Tasmania.

As a sector, Local Government has become frustrated with the lack of action by the State Government on addressing waste issues. A State Waste Action Plan has been promised for over 2 years now but has not eventuated. There have been numerous reports on container refund schemes, but with no resulting action. Local Government has been calling on the State Government to address single use plastics since 2017, but as yet there has been no progress.

Why the focus on single use plastics? There are over 335 million tonnes of plastic produced globally each year, with only around 10% of that captured and recycled. It's been estimated that around 8 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans each year. While Local Government doesn't have all the levers for change, we have decided to forge ahead.

The City of Hobart didn't take the decision to introduce the ban lightly. It has only come following the Council making their own transition at the Hobart Aquatic Centre and following business and community engagement. The Council undertook face-to-face surveys with many of the takeaway food business operators in Hobart, and in those surveys the business operators indicated that they choose products predominantly based on functionality rather than affordability. Indeed, the majority were supportive of a state-wide ban. Further, many businesses have already started making changes, with over one third of the City of Hobart's approximately 300 food and beverage businesses already supplying some form of compostable packaging.

Since Council's decision, take away food businesses in Hobart have shifted the conversation and are now talking about how they go about meeting the new requirements. The City of Hobart is supporting them, with waste forums, the development of a business toolkit and further consultation as well as providing a generous lead-in time to any kind of enforcement activity.

The Hobart community has also been surveyed. Ninety percent, of the almost 3000 respondents, indicated they were willing to pay more for food and drinks if it meant that sustainable packaging was used, and with strong support of a state-wide ban.

Other Tasmanian councils are also addressing single use plastic issues head on, with a number banning the use of single use plastics at council events and supporting other event organisers to implement recycling and waste diversion programs.



Tasmanian councils' waste reduction activities are not limited to single use plastic. There is broad recognition that action in the area of organic waste will realise considerable improvements in waste recovery and reuse, leading to less landfilling, decreased greenhouse emissions, and the creation of a valuable resource. The City of Launceston and number of its

neighbouring councils already collect kerbside food organics and garden organics (FOGO), Glenorchy City Council has recently resolved to introduce this service and there are at least nine other councils across the state investigating similar programs for their communities.

Limiting the use of single use plastic and implementing FOGO collections are just two of the many examples of where Local Government is taking the lead on waste. As a sector we are listening to our communities, who are telling us we need to act now.

Local Government, industry and the community are beginning to forge a pathway forward and through LGAT, councils are considering waste issues at a strategic state-wide level. However, councils are often limited by the scale at which they can operate and by uncertainty surrounding the policy environment. It is in both these areas where the State Government must do more.

In order to unlock waste as a resource, so that we can create jobs in new industries and reduce landfill, we need a tangible commitment and action from the State Government. The opportunities to unlock the value of waste at an industry level are immense but require significant coordination and collaboration from our State Government, as well as real on-ground action. Without this Tasmania risks missing out on the significant opportunities that improved resource recovery offers.

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