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Submission to the Local Government and Environment Select Committee on the Waste Minimisation (Solids) Bill

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 38 nationally organised societies, and women from 31 branches spread throughout the country. NCWNZ works to promote the interests of women and families, and to engender understanding of issues of national interest through study and discussion.

This submission is a collation of opinion from members of the Environment Standing Committee, a few individuals and almost every branch and organisation; the topic is one that generates a lot of thought and opinion amongst the NCWNZ membership. We have had an interest in reducing the generation of waste, and in its disposal, for decades; a 1970 submission dealt with the question of litter prevention, and subsequent submissions in 1989 and 2001 on how to deal with waste products endorse introducing programmes for their re-use and recycling, as well as educating the public on ways to reduce the production of what will become waste material. A resolution at a national meeting in 2000 supported the concept of a zero waste policy, but in the six years since then, even though 2002 saw the publication of the New Zealand Waste Strategy, nothing much seems to have been done that would indicate that a zero waste policy has been adopted.

General Comments

Over the past few decades, population growth, the shift from rural to urban living, changing patterns of distribution of goods, different ways of doing business, the rapid changes in information technology requiring constant updating of the tools of communication, changing means of transport and the trend towards being an acquisitive society, have all contributed to an obvious growth in the amount of waste generated.

Older members of NCWNZ have observed this, and commented on it in their responses. Several respondents thought that the problem was urgent and must be tackled with resolution, while we still have, by world standards, a very small population which can be educated, persuaded, coerced or taxed into being individually responsible for waste reduction. It seems that voluntary codes are not enough to change behaviour; a system of reward and punishment would be much more effective.

Specific Comments

NCWNZ members were asked the following questions:

1. Do you think that a centralised Waste Minimisation Authority is necessary?

As was expected, opinion varied. The majority of responses agreed that a Waste Minimisation Authority would be helpful because it would:

- help increase accountability for waste production and disposal;
- support implementation of the NZ Waste Strategy;
- encourage and assist local bodies as they carry out the actual work of minimising waste;
- have a strong and steady educational role for the whole nation;



- have a monitoring role in seeing that local bodies are making progress or if not, giving them support to improve their performance;
- work out ways of giving incentives;
- sponsor research into better ways of reducing waste;
- achieve control of what is a national problem by integrating and coordinating the national effort; and oversee the administration of a waste levy.

This group, favouring establishing an Authority, also supports the provisions of **clause 12 Eligibility for appointment as member of Authority**, that the members should have a balanced mix of knowledge and experience, and there should be even representation of the sectors outlined.

Those not in favour of establishing a Waste Minimisation Authority cited as reasons for their objections:

- that there is the risk of its being a toothless tiger, with no real power to enforce compliance with government policy;
- that it would probably mean rates rises; another layer of bureaucracy would be costly;
- the Ministry for the Environment is already undertaking many of the functions proposed for the Authority;
- some local bodies already have excellent waste management systems and need little or no help from anyone; robust legislation with the use of economic instruments will be more effective;
- regional authorities could undertake all the cited functions.

2. In what way could the impact of a waste minimisation policy on such industries as the packaging industry be lessened, while being mindful that we must reduce waste?

The suggested Extended Producer Responsibility Programme, **Part 6 Extended Producer Responsibility**, appears to focus on the management of products throughout their lifetime, without questioning whether they should be produced at all, while **Organisational waste minimisation plans** and **Public procurement policy** focus on reducing waste rather than encouraging organisations to look at different ways of going about their business so that there is less waste. If businesses could be run with minimal use of materials, waste management would not be an issue. However, since industry is all about producing material things, their plight, if stopped in their tracks, must be considered.

NCWNZ members believe that one of the causes of waste production is the use of material goods to excess, and a good start to minimising waste would be as suggested in Part 7, that organisations (and individuals) plan their activities and events with waste reduction in mind.

Many of the things of a material nature that we use should be made from elements that are recyclable, or re-usable. One respondent suggested that retailers should not automatically supply carry bags, but should only supply them upon request and at a small cost, as happens in Ireland.

If consumers were to avoid using packaging made of non-recyclable or once-only usable materials, the packaging industry would quickly respond by producing goods that could be recycled or re-used, so it comes down to a question of educating consumers to avoid accepting what will become waste.

Retailers such as supermarkets could introduce schemes for returning packaging that could be used again, as happens in Japan and Germany, and the packaging industry could be instrumental in the recycling process, given incentives.



3. New Zealanders have for many years been urged to reduce, re-use and recycle, but the concept has not yet entirely entered our psyche. Do you think the proposals in this Bill will help establish an atmosphere that promotes and allows appropriate behaviour?

NCWNZ members' responses were generally positive to this question, but the emphasis was always on educating and informing. The Bill will not in itself change behaviour, but it will play a part in reinforcing changes that are already happening.

The provisions in **Parts 7, 8 and 9** will oblige those who work in public organisations or businesses to focus on waste minimisation in the course of their work, and if they are not already doing so in their private lives, what they practice publicly they may well do privately.

It was suggested that there be incentives for some sorts of waste minimisation activities, such as refunds given for the return to source of recyclable products, which is allowed for in **Clause 54, Product stewardship programmes may include deposits or fees.**

One response made the pertinent comment that within regions, conditions must be created that encourage and create opportunities for the public to minimise waste. Those who live in apartments have no opportunity themselves to practice composting, so Councils could issue bins specifically for the collection of organic material which could then be composted at some central depot. Older people often have no means of carrying materials that they want to recycle to a recycling depot, and councils could arrange special days when collection of such materials from the roadside is undertaken. In many rural areas, there is little opportunity for recycling, while for small towns, economies of scale do not operate.

Prohibition on disposal of some materials may work, but there needs to be a lead-in period, as full understanding and implementation of what would be a major change for many waste disposal operators could take some time.

4. Some industries, such as the building industry, have real problems with waste disposal. How could they be helped to adopt practices that minimise waste production?

There is a programme called Rebri (Resource Efficiency in the Building and Related Industries) that gives advice to the building industry on waste reduction. This should be encouraged and expanded. Other industries that produce waste could have remedial programmes developed and made available for them. Builders are encouraged to re-use materials that are in good condition, and materials that are surplus on one site can be transported for use on another, rather than carted off to a landfill.

One suggestion is that in the review of the Building Code, there be added a section on minimising waste generation. The building industry is one where the imposition of a waste disposal levy would probably be most effective. This industry alone contributes 40% of what goes to landfills.

5. Have you any suggestions for ways to change the perceived expectation in our society that someone else will take away and dispose of our wastes?

Education and economic instruments are suggested. Schools already teach good practice in waste disposal, but it will take parental backing and modelling to engender in children an attitude that waste must be minimised.

Dealing responsibly with waste takes time and energy. People need good reasons to convince them that they should expend time and energy in, firstly, seeking out the goods they want that are most likely to be recyclable or re-usable, and secondly, disposing of what they no longer have use for in a manner that is least waste-producing. Information on how to dispose of some goods that are perfectly able to be used again is not easy to find, and it seems easier simply to take them to



the tip. Regional authorities could introduce programmes to schools and businesses to educate on waste minimisation, and give practical instruction too.

6. Do you have any other comments?

Many comments were forthcoming, showing that NCWNZ members are often very well informed on the situation in their own areas, and also on what happens with regard to waste minimisation initiatives overseas.

One branch outlined the Government 3 programme already running, which encourages Crown organisations when procuring materials for their use to choose those goods which are recyclable or re-usable. The branch suggested that such a procurement policy be mandatory for public organisations, rather than a preferred option as in **Part 8, Public procurement policy** of the bill, although of course there must be due regard given to an unreasonably large cost differential.

Some NCWNZ members have had access to the report from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, "Changing Behaviour: Economic Instruments in the Management of Waste" and cited sections from it in their responses. Whereas there is some anxiety that introducing waste minimisation law may have an impact on our rates, there is a strong indication that many of us feel that economic rewards and punishments, especially the latter, would have an immediate and positive effect on behaviour. So we are particularly supportive of the provisions in **Part 5, Waste disposal levy**, even though we recognise one of the effects of introducing a levy on landfill use could have many waste companies and individuals dumping material illegally in out of the way locations.

Conclusion

New Zealand's record on dealing with waste is not admirable; for a country with a small population, we punch above our weight in producing waste materials, and it is time that a tough stance was taken. NCWNZ supports the intention of the Bill to introduce a regime which will result in minimal production of waste. We believe that a combination of education, information and economic instruments is needed to bring about a change in will and attitude. Many of the responses from which this submission has been collated have excellent insights, and they are available if any select committee members wish to see them.

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