

## **8.1. MM01 Reducing waste and its impact on the environment**

The North Sydney Community Strategic Plan- Vision 2040 places environmental sustainability at the centre of all of Council's decision-making, plans, policies, and services.

Council has recently adopted, as part of the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, the regional waste strategy.

Across Australia, people are asking for more ambitious action on climate change. Reducing waste and its impact on the environment is one of the key actions that councils can take to lower our emissions.

Across the Sydney metropolitan area, 55 per cent of household and commercial waste goes to landfill each year, resulting in loss of valuable resources, costing businesses and households more than \$750 million in waste levies each year.

Sydney councils must meet ambitious resource recovery and waste reduction targets, while also meeting the community's expectations for uninterrupted services and public health outcomes. The time has long passed when councils collected rubbish and transported it to a landfill where it would slowly rot away.

Achieving the overhaul of the industry that is needed requires strategic input from Mayors, Councillors, GMs/CEOs, and councils' officers.

Providing viable waste services for the community is no longer solely an operational issue for council staff to manage. Industry-wide changes include a limited number of suppliers, a lack of processing infrastructure and a shortage of readily accessible waste collection and transfer sites. These changes present all Sydney councils with the prospects of rising costs, increasing truck movements and resource recovery rates that are static at best. Few options exist for increased efficiency or resource recovery improvements, or to reduce landfill.

The original drivers of public health and hygiene have been supplemented by the need to reduce pollution, lower carbon emissions, and recover and re-use resources. Collecting waste is just part of the picture; Councils must make strategic decisions about where this waste will go.

The last 20 years have seen significant positive change. Recycling has been introduced for glass, hard plastics, paper, and cardboard. There are separate collections for mattresses, electronic waste, tyres, clothing, mobile phones, batteries, and chemicals. Landfills capture methane to generate energy. There will soon be collections for food waste and/or food and garden organics.

In spite of councils' successes, waste processing and disposal have not kept pace with recent changes, yet the population is growing, and waste generation rates continue to increase. Most Sydney councils must pay to haul recyclable materials and waste far outside their local

area, and new transfer capacity is difficult to secure due to cost and availability of appropriately zoned land.

Data shows that we will not be able to meet NSW and Commonwealth targets with our current systems. Even with the highest efficiencies, progress in domestic waste collection and recovery will be impossible without major changes. These transitions will be expensive. The Waste Levy on landfill is an incentive to recycle, but in a failing market just adds to the costs that Council must charge the community. Only a around 7 per cent<sup>1</sup> of around \$800 million in annual waste levy revenue comes back to councils and the waste industry through contestable grants to fund improvements. Councils will not receive a fair share of funding, despite being asked to meet government targets and transition to a circular economy.

On 18 May 2023 the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) held a Waste Summit hosted by Lord Mayor Clover Moore at Sydney Town Hall. The Sydney Mayoral Summit was convened by SSROC on behalf of Resilient Sydney, which our Council supports.

The Summit was addressed by the waste industry, NSW EPA and Federal Government representatives, and Sydney Mayors about initiatives and areas of influence where councils can work together.

**I therefore recommend:**

**1. THAT** Council note:

- (a) councils have a key role to play in reducing waste and its impact on the environment; and
- (b) across the Sydney metropolitan area, 55 per cent of household and commercial waste goes to landfill each year, resulting in loss of valuable resources, costing businesses and households more than \$750 million in waste levies each year.

**2. THAT** Council resolves to work with other Sydney councils on:

- (i) reducing waste;
- (ii) improving environmental outcomes where waste has to be processed;
- (iii) finding solutions for the residue that is left; and
- (iv) to coordinate our advocacy, communications and collective buying power to bring the benefits of scale, efficiency and industry confidence.

**3. THAT** Council all on the NSW Government to invest the revenue from its waste levy for council and industry initiatives that:

- (i) accelerate the transition to a circular economy;
- (ii) build the waste infrastructure needed to meet the growing pressures of population growth, loss of landfill capacity and a lack of competition in the sector;
- (iii) educate and support communities to reduce waste; and
- (iv) set the waste levy at an appropriate level with realistic hypothecation allocation, to streamline planning approvals for infrastructure, and to increase clarity and efficiency of licensing procedures.

---

<sup>1</sup> 7 per cent represents \$356 million allocated to contestable grant funding over the 6 years 2021 to 2027, as a percentage of \$800million year-on-year. Being contestable, the grant funding will not be equitably apportioned across NSW.

- 4. THAT** Council call on the Commonwealth Government to expedite bans on materials that cannot be recycled or recovered, and to increase extended producer responsibilities.
- 5. THAT** Council work with other tiers of government to ensure the delivery of infrastructure solutions locally to reduce waste hauled long distances or to landfill.
- 6. THAT** Council write to the relevant State and Federal Ministers for the Environment, Local Government and Infrastructure in respect of the above.

**COUNCILLOR ZOË BAKER**  
**MAYOR**