



16 December 2013

Attention: WARR Strategy Review

By email: warr.strategyreview@epa.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Draft NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery (WARR) Strategy 2013-21

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the draft WARR Strategy 2013-21. The sixteen Councils of the southern Sydney region represent 1.6 million people: 35 per cent of the population of Greater Metropolitan Sydney, and 22 per cent of the entire state. Our region extends from Bankstown to Randwick and from the City to Sutherland. Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) is a body established by the sixteen Councils as a mechanism to facilitate their collaboration on a wide range of initiatives, including advocacy, major projects, and procurement.

1. Essential Service

SSROC has previously highlighted to the Minister for the Environment the need for waste management to be recognised as an essential service, which cannot be allowed to fail. We are very pleased to see this acknowledged in the draft strategy. The strategy goes on to address some of the major threats to the service in NSW, and to allocate funding to the mitigation of some risks under the Waste Less, Recycle More initiative.

2. Role of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure

We are also gratified to see that the draft strategy identifies a role for the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DoPI) in planning for waste and resource recovery as essential services. SSROC has previously pointed out the major role that this agency should play in planning for the development of the necessary infrastructure. We urge the EPA to strengthen its relationship with DoPI, to agree how the two agencies can work together and with other relevant stakeholders, and to include DoPI's role explicitly in future implementation plans.

Member councils continue to be concerned at the lack of suitable waste management infrastructure, particularly the lack of alternatives to landfill, the impending shortage of landfill space, and the scarcity of transfer stations that can receive putrescible waste. It would greatly strengthen the WARR strategy to go further than acknowledging the role of the DoPI as a stakeholder in section 9, and to highlight a very active role for it in Section 4 of the document. That role would be to plan strategically for waste and resource recovery as essential services, identify strategically located areas where resource recovery facilities could be located and establish a coordinated planning assessment process. The EPA cannot deliver the WARR Strategy without this critical role being fulfilled by the DoPI.

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3. Integration of Waste Less, Recycle More

SSROC has some concern about the integration of the elements of the overall approach to waste and resource recovery. The strategy is to be delivered through Waste Less, Recycle More, which is delivered through a series of programs, which are in turn delivered through different contestable and non-contestable grants, extending only to 2016/17. SSROC and Council waste management staff have concerns about the amount of additional work required to prepare funding submissions for projects of strictly limited scope at short notice and within very tight time frames. This approach hampers their ability to respond in a way that is strategically coherent, and tends to encourage a fragmented approach with individual projects and short-term funding. This characteristic of the WaSIP Program has been heavily criticised. The EPA needs to be very sensitive to the risk of recreating of this failing of the WaSIP Program, and manage the programs flexibly enough to avoid the inefficiencies of fragmentation.

The strategy clearly needs a section on implementation, which draws together the “How will we ...” section of each KRA description, and identifies the specific actions that will be taken to deliver the strategy, whose responsibility they are, and when they are to be done. This would help to focus efforts on what the strategy aims to achieve, rather than on the fragmentary allocation of funding to discrete projects of limited scope.

Roles of stakeholders, partnerships and regional collaboration are down-played in the strategy, merely implied in the final section. This is contrary to the Regional Waste Strategy Guidance document, which emphasises regional waste strategies, suggesting a lack of alignment between the WARR Strategy and the guidance document. The role Councils play appears to be an afterthought, not mentioned until section 9 (p27-28) although they are clearly central to much of the strategy. The role of Councils and the need for collaboration should be much more prominent in the strategy, and should be included as a key element of the approach outlined in section 4.

4. Strategic Intent for Industry

It is not clear to what extent the EPA expects the WARR strategy to influence the development of the industry in NSW. The description of KRA 2 (p13) indicates that modelling done as part of setting the targets made a range of assumptions as to the evolution of resource recovery to 2021-22. But there is no indication of whether these assumptions reflect what is likely to happen independently of state initiatives, or whether they reflect the assumed success of state initiatives. For example, assumptions have been made about additional AWT facilities: are these assumed to result from the WARR strategy implementation, and if so, are there associated targets?

The strategy appears to encourage deployment of AWT, with information about the economic benefits of resource recovery, but there is no consideration of the outputs from processes. The compost output from AWT facilities is generally low grade, for which there is a limited market, which may already be saturated. This raises the issue of whether further facilities will be financially viable, and highlights a focus on quantity rather than on the quality of the outputs. These issues will have to be addressed, and the strategy should at least acknowledge these problems and undertake to resolve them.

5. Targets

- The strategy is to 2021 but the targets to 2021-22. This would appear to be out of kilter; either the targets should be for 2021 or the strategy should be for 2013-22.
- Targets are based on weight rather than quality of outputs. The EPA could consider refining the targets to align with recycling definition, such as the percentage of material collected for recycling that is returned to the productive economy.

- In relation to Avoid and Reduce Waste Generation (KRA 1, p24):
 - it has is no specific target, only a general objective of reducing the rate of waste generation per capita. This KRA should provide direction of where are we now, and indicate where we need to be in 2021 or 2022.
 - “Waste generation is the sum of the tonnage of all materials sent to landfill plus the tonnage of all materials diverted from landfill through a resource recovery processor”:
 - It is not clear that these tonnages include the dumped rubbish tonnages for the municipal stream; if not, with which stream would they consolidated?
 - It appears from KRA 3 (p25) that an energy-from-waste facility would be considered to be resource recovery processor under this definition. It would be helpful to state whether or not this is the case in KRA 1, since the role of energy from waste in the WARR Strategy is new.
 - “Materials that do not go to landfill or through a resource recovery processor are considered to be avoided because they have not entered the waste management system. Thus when materials are reused without being processed (such as at a second-hand clothing store), they are not counted in the waste generation measurement.” It would be helpful to expand on the concept of waste avoidance as distinct from waste diversion. For example:
 - if a Council were to operate a re-use centre, then the waste received for re-use elsewhere would be excluded from the diversion rate calculation;
 - a separate organics collection or kerbside bulky household waste collection would both be included in the calculation since they would go into some form of processing (composting and e.g. metals recycling).
- Increase Recycling (KRA 2)
 - In relation to the increase the municipal solid waste target from 52% to 70%, the description would could usefully address the following:
 - The 70% should explicitly include material or energy recovered by means of AWT and EFW facilities
 - Is this a State-wide target?
 - Is there a council- or area-specific target?
 - What materials are counted in this stream?
 - Councils currently prevent considerable quantities of waste food and garden organics from going to landfill by means of services that are not covered by this KRA as currently described. Home composting, drop-off and mulch, and clean up and mulch services are all currently excluded; we suggest that the EPA should consider including alternatives to mobile organic waste bins in this area.
- Divert More Waste from Landfill (KRA 3 p25). S
 - SSROC would suggest that some further explanation is required. The target is understood to cover the overall diversion from landfill across the three major waste streams, and we welcome the explicit comment including the recovery of energy from waste in the diversion rate. The forward projection incorporates energy from waste diversion from around 2018-19 (p16), and the graph (p17) suggests an overall impact on waste diversion of about 4% by 2021-22 from energy from waste initiatives. However, if the three recycling targets of 70% for MSW, 70% for C&I and 80% for C&D are reached, then an overall waste diversion rate of

about 74% is achieved from recycling alone. There appears to be a difference between the projection and the target, so further clarity in relation to the role of energy from waste in the achievement of the targets would be helpful.

- Since the target includes non-MSW streams, which are largely outside of the jurisdiction of Councils, it should not apply to them.
- Manage Problem Wastes Better (KRA 4 p25).
 - The target of one community drop-off facility per 50,000 households in metropolitan populated clusters is extremely ambitious. There are almost 585,000 households in the SSROC region, which suggests that 12 facilities should be located here. Whilst we agree that there is a need for community drop-off facilities, there are very few suitable sites available and Councils generally lack the capital to invest in and develop sites. This issue highlights the need for DoPI to actively plan for the establishment of waste infrastructure.
 - Councils are also constrained in their ability to fund new services, and would need to staff such facilities. Even with grant funding under the Waste Less, Recycle More package, there is likely to be reluctance to establish facilities without continuous funding, with most councils currently working to achieve financial sustainability with their existing commitments.
 - SSROC Councils are considering innovative alternatives, such as the provision of a mobile service, but the on-going financing of the service is of concern. If we are successful in securing funding for a trial, then our member Councils will be able to develop a business case for the serviced, and establish whether or not a cost-neutral model is feasible, perhaps through a shared service.
 - “Managing problem wastes better” reflects the nature of this KRA more accurately and comprehensively than “reducing toxic substances in products and materials”. However, the original intent of the old KRA needs to be retained within the definition of this KRA. The description of KRA 6 (p18-19) does not currently cover the need to reduce the toxicity of materials on disposal, and (p25) there is no measure for toxicity or aim to monitor this aspect of problem wastes.
- Reduce Litter (KRA 5 p25):
 - A new national litter methodology is a good idea, since the measurement and monitoring in relation to this particular KRA is not straightforward. Measures that link to the amount of litter removed by street-cleaning crews are helpful for Councils in assessing their volumes from year to year, but are not a true reflection of the effectiveness of litter prevention interventions. In addition, different Councils have different priorities and levels of service that are acceptable to their communities and within their budgets, and so are not necessarily directly comparable. SSROC would ask the EPA to take these issues into consideration when developing the new methodology.
 - The strategy notes (p8) that “All approaches [to packaging waste] are being looked at, including ... container deposit options”. We urge the state government to actively lobby for the introduction of Container Deposit Legislation (CDL), since it will give value to recyclable containers, without which any littering program will only have a short-term impact at best. SSROC recommends that the introduction of CDL should be a key element in the approach to KRA 5, and should have associated targets and measures.
 - As leader of the national working group on the packaging stewardship scheme, the state government should include in the strategy the key performance measures that will be used to monitor its effectiveness and a commitment to reporting on progress. This is an

important aspect of waste reduction, and the EPA should continue to engage with producers to develop new packaging that is more durable, reusable, and which can practicably be reused.

Organics Recovery

- The WARR strategy identifies organics recovery as a key opportunity and the new targets reflect a substantial increase in organics recovery as the desired outcome. This is consistent with the outcomes sought under the previous WARR strategy, and with the use of AWT processes that will primarily recover organics (the approach adopted by many SSROC member Councils). However, the first round of funding under Waste Less, Recycle More focuses almost entirely on opportunities for source-separating organics. The messages in relation to the two approaches to organics recovery are inconsistent.
- A clear statement would be helpful for Councils, of either:
 - The EPA's preference for one or other approach, or
 - The preferred approach is the one that will yield the best organics recovery outcome for circumstances of the particular LGA.

Definitions and terminology

- The definition of MSW provided in the draft Strategy includes "solid waste collected by councils from municipal parks and gardens, street sweepings, council engineering works and public council bins". These waste streams were not separately identified in the data provided by the EPA and it is not yet clear to what extent these waste streams have been incorporated in the WARR data in the past or included in current returns. Councils would welcome clarity on whether or not these waste streams will need to be reported in future, and more broadly, what changes, if any, in reporting will be required.
- It appears that the definition of MSW includes Council's own operations. Some explanation of why waste from "council engineering works" should be classified as MSW rather than C&D material would be helpful, since identical materials would also be in the C&D stream.
- The definitions of Recycling Rate and Diversion Rate need further clarification to explain the difference between them. For example currently, energy from waste and the outputs from AWT would fit into both as they are materials that are "reprocessed ... and put back into the economy". So there appears to be no difference between the two measures according to these definitions.
- The terms "reuse" and "recycle" should also be defined, since they have a position in the waste hierarchy and should be part of the performance measurement of waste and resource recycling systems.
- The terms "illegal dump" and "litter item" require definition, since they are measurements of success under KRA 4 (p25) and KRA 6 (p26) respectively, and it is important that they can be distinguished from each other.
- The term "AWT" should be defined, in particular to state whether energy from waste (EfW) is included in AWT, or is a separate category as could be inferred from the description of KRA 3 (p16).
- The document is inconsistent in its use of the terms "waste" and "resources". The Minister's foreword speaks of treating waste "as an asset, allowing us to make the most of our state's valuable resources ...", and the introduction mentions "using our resources more efficiently ...". These words clearly convey an intent to move towards resource stewardship and to the elimination of waste. The strategy could be more specific about the distinction between

resources that are not currently being used, and waste – the residue after all useable resources have been diverted. The terminology should be about resource recovery, management and stewardship.

- The phrase “avoiding disposable goods” (p5) should more accurately be “avoiding single use materials”.

General Presentation

The Recyclator graphic (p3) shows an over flowing bin with lid open, which reinforces an incorrect message. It would be better to show a wheelie bin correctly presented (lid closed and not overflowing) in order to avoid reinforcing poor waste presentation in a state strategy.

The details about “reuse the materials”, “recover the energy”, “treatment” and “disposal” (p5) could be improved. The information could also be tabular and presented adjacent to corresponding area on waste hierarchy, which might convey it more effectively. The waste hierarchy as represented in figure 2 (p5) is more explicitly divided into six levels than it has been in the past. The levels reuse, recycle, recover and treat were previously considered to be part of resource recovery in the 2007 and 2003 model. It would be worth a short explanation of why these levels, which were previously grouped, have now been allocated distinct positions in the hierarchy.

Figure 3 (p7) is too wavy and complicated: the overall effect detracts from the information within it.

The data used in figure 4 (p9) is from 2010-11, but 2012/13 should be available by now, so perhaps the figures could be more up to date.

The document overall is perhaps more wordy and repetitive than is necessary. It could be more concise, and could convey more information and have greater impact through better use of graphics. A shorter document without repetition and with effective graphics would be more easily comprehensible, memorable and useful as a reference for regional and local strategic planning.

Conclusion

SSROC broadly supports the principles and direction of the WARR Strategy. However, we have some concerns as to the effectiveness of the mechanisms for its implementation, and think that there is scope to improve the definitions of the KRAs and some of the terms use in the document. I hope that our comments on the strategy will be useful. Thank you again for the opportunity to make this contribution.

If you would like to discuss or to expand on any aspect of this submission, please contact me or Helen Sloan, Program Manager, on 9330 6455 or ssroc@ssroc.nsw.gov.au.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Northey', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alan Northey
General Manager
Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils