



17 October 2022

NSW Environment Protection Authority

Sent via email [illegaldumping.strategy@epa.nsw.gov.au](mailto:illegaldumping.strategy@epa.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir or Madam

**Re: SSROC Submission to the Draft Illegal Dumping Prevention Strategy 2022-2027**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Illegal Dumping Prevention Strategy 2022-2027, and the Litter Prevention Strategy 2022-2030.

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Inc (SSROC) is an association of twelve local councils in the area south of Sydney Harbour, covering central, inner west, eastern and southern Sydney. SSROC provides a forum for the exchange of ideas between our member councils, and an interface between governments, other councils and key bodies on issues of common interest. Together, our member councils cover a population of about 1.8 million, one third of the population of Sydney, approximately 20% of NSW waste, and includes Australia's most densely populated suburbs. SSROC seeks to advocate for the needs of our member councils and bring a regional perspective to the issues raised.

SSROC population and housing data<sup>1</sup>, in the period from 2011 to 2016, reveals a very diverse socio-economic area marked by rapidly rising numbers of dwellings and underlying growth in the number of households in the area. The estimated resident population increased by over 150,000 during this five-year census period.

The region deals with the type of illegal dumping that corresponds to transient and culturally diverse populations, dense urban housing and rampant housing re-development, a behavioral norm around misuse of council's kerbside clean-up and charity collection services, and trends of unlawful commercial and anti-social activities that happen in a typical metropolitan setting.

SSROC commends the EPA on its emphasis on circular economy, data quality and collection initiatives, and education campaigns.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, SSROC has not been able to give this submission the detailed analysis that merits, we therefore present our key comments and feedback on the EPA's Illegal Dumping Prevention and Litter Prevention strategies.

**Illegal dumping prevention strategy 2022-2027**

*Illegally dumped asbestos*

- SSROC applauds the recent change to the levy waiver for household quantities of bonded, separated and wrapped asbestos as part of the Waste Levy Review. This ensures there is a more comprehensive assessment of how to put in place efficient and cost-effective solutions to the safe disposal and management of household asbestos.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of population and Housing 2011 and 2016, compiled by id <https://profile.id.com.au/ssroc/>

- However, we urge the NSW Government to continue to allow exemptions for the waste levy for other non-recoverable materials such as asbestos and expand it to include other non-recoverable materials. The purpose of the waste levy is to encourage resource recovery, and indirectly to get people, businesses, and organisations to follow good recycling practice. However, asbestos is illegal to recover, and councils must pay the levy on dumped asbestos.
- Furthermore, the cost of responding to, identifying and removing illegally dumped asbestos is not relegated to just disposal. Costs are also incurred for rapid response and transportation to the site, repeated visits to the site for testing, testing mechanisms, signage and site controls, and disposal of suspected asbestos or mixed materials that attract the asbestos disposal rate even if they do not test positive. Often, councils outsource this service, and have to pay a premium.
- SSROC recommends that a pool of funds be provided by NSW Government for all (not just large) illegally dumped asbestos incidents. Eligibility of reimbursements could be restricted and verified by receipts, but would assist councils who are charged with activating a response to any asbestos incident in the name of public health.

#### *Impacts and measurement of illegal dumping*

- A couple of unmentioned impacts of illegal dumping on page 7 include increased truck movements and associated emissions and amenity, and specific fleet required to manage dumping and cleansing operations.
- The comments on Figure 2 (p9) in the draft strategy refer to “small-scale illegal dumping” without defining the term. It is appreciated that more innocuous or harmless dumping is recognised as a critical area of focus, but all programs and education materials should clearly be informed by a specific definition of “small-scale”.
- As seen in Table 2 (p11), ‘likelihood of getting caught’ should be emphasized in the Household and charity dumping column, as well as in the Bushland and unoccupied lands column.
- Approach 6 includes three actions that reinforce the RIDonline data collection and monitoring system. Many SSROC councils are reluctant to fully integrate RIDonline because they have their own customer and cleansing management systems which requires resourcing to manage. Double reporting of incidents creates redundancy of effort and invites scrutiny of the data mechanisms.
- Councils are investigating and advancing artificial intelligence systems that optimize real-time, frequent data that doubles as a case management log. Every street in the database will receive its own report, not only on incidents but on trends. This can be reported to the NSW EPA, but there is a concern that it would distort RIDonline data and the resident derived RIDonline platform reporting.

#### *Marketing, education, and behaviour change*

- SSROC commends the EPA for its commitment in Approach 4 to support behaviour change and partnership programs.
- Councils support the EPA’s interest in exploring other messaging and programming for what is effective, or even adopting or sharing council campaigns and programs, such as Canterbury-Bankstown’s Operation Jacob.
- Councils have also established their own messaging and collateral, and therefore support EPA’s flexibility in allowing councils to continue using their own tested collateral and to be innovative with communication platforms.

#### *Regulation, enforcement*

- SSROC strongly supports continued funding for the Sydney RID Squad in Approach 5. For a number of years, the RID Squads have managed to make a sizeable impact on organized commercial dumping, online fraudulent schemes, evidence gathering and surveillance actions, and cracking down on ‘opportunity’ household dumpers. Councils have found value in the program, as evidenced by their continued engagement and cooperation. SSROC member councils have found ways to integrate RID into their ranger, cleansing, waste education and operations teams, and SSROC encourages more opportunities for NSW EPA to forge relationships between those units and RID investigators.
- Nonetheless, the expressed support for RID Squads in the Strategy is confusing to Sydney RID councils, as it is sometimes communicated that the RID Squad will be disbanded. The mixed messages and delayed funding throughout the year have created instability for the human resources employed by the RID Squad.
- Sydney RID faces a real threat to its hosting arrangement in 2023, as the current host council may not continue the arrangement and no other council is able or ready to host the RID Squad. SSROC recommends that the EPA consider other hosting arrangements, or provide further incentives to the hosting council that would make the endeavour more attractive.

#### *Services, infrastructure and clean-up*

- There is a tension in metropolitan areas between the integration of clean-up services and street amenity. In most SSROC councils, there is a political and community demand to always keep streets clean, which often conflicts with the need to investigate, search for evidence, engage communities and conduct interventions. This is often a challenge for operational teams to respond to customers, retain community cohesion and maintain clean streets.
- The EPA could assist to raise awareness of this tension to elected local government officials and leadership, so that compliance teams can feel empowered to build processes and campaigns that embed change. This could be reflected in page 15 and in Approach 3, by acknowledging that cleaning up incidents immediately could send the wrong message to household dumpers.

#### *Circular economy*

- *Approach 1 Moving toward a circular economy* is a good start for a world-class regulator in an illegal dumping strategy. One of the contributing factors to household and charity dumping is the lack of producer responsibility and source control. The Strategy puts the onus on the community, resident, or business to dispose responsibly. However, if “unrepairable household items with shorter lifetimes” continue to be produced, the total amount of illegally dumped waste increases proportionally, creating a greater likelihood that items cannot easily re-enter the use economy.

### **Litter prevention strategy 2022-2030**

#### *Waste levy on litter*

- The litter prevention achieved by the state government transfers the litter into council bins. Whilst this is a great achievement, it does not reduce the financial burden on local government and the community of litter disposal, as the levy is paid by councils whether the litter is in the environment or in bins.
- SSROC recommends a waste levy exemption for council litter disposal, whether it is collected by litter pickers (employees or external parties) or deposited in council provided

litter bins. The purpose of the levy is to increase resource recovery and there are no viable ways to currently recycle or separate general waste litter. There is a precedent with the levy exemption for Clean Up Australia Day, which should be extended to all litter collected in the environment and litter bins. The community is already paying for litter through bin infrastructure, clean up, collection and landfill fees. Therefore, the levy increases the financial burden on communities.

- The CDS provides a good incentive to recover some litter but the remaining litter, which is either left in the environment or placed in council-provided litter bins, is too contaminated to have a recovery option under current NSW government policy. If the purpose of the levy is to encourage resource recovery, litter – whether inside bins or in the environment – is a leakage in this policy because there is no viable way to recovery it.
- Ratepayers already pay the cost of landfilling litter, some of which is brought in by non-residents, particularly in areas with high rates of visitation from outside the LGA. This is currently about \$100 per tonne. Adding the levy (approx. \$150 per tonne) unreasonably increases the cost of litter disposal and takes money away from the community, which could be spent on resource recovery initiatives.

#### *Programs and monitoring*

- Approach 6 – SSROC acknowledges that the program ‘Streets to Sea’ is a good idea, however more detail on what the cross-government working group will involve would be helpful, and possible inclusion of commercial waste collections, bin service providers, small-medium enterprises and industry should also be involved.
- Approach 7 – SSROC recommends that commercial waste services should be evaluated for waste leakage, including an evaluation of waste leakage from permanent public infrastructure. For example, the effectiveness of different styles of commercial bins and technologies, litter booms or other rubbish collecting devices.

#### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. To make this submission within the timeframe for receiving comments, it has not been possible for it to be reviewed by councils or to be endorsed by the SSROC. I will contact you further if any issues arise as it is reviewed. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me or David Kuhn, SSROC Regional Strategic Coordinator, Resource Recovery on 8396 3800.

Yours faithfully



Helen Sloan  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils**