

Queensland's Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy 2010-2020

Draft review report

Prepared by: Reform and Innovation Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

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1 Introduction

Queensland's Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy 2010–2020 (2010 strategy) was endorsed by the former Queensland Government in December 2010. The 2010 strategy was produced in consultation with government, industry and community stakeholders to provide long-term policy direction and leadership for waste management in Queensland.

Under the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011* the Queensland Government is required to review the current 2010 strategy by 28 October 2013.

This review report has been produced to meet the requirements of the Act but can also to help inform the development of a new, industry-led waste strategy for Queensland. The report outlines the key elements of the current strategy and evaluates their effectiveness, including achievements and issues raised. It also provides draft recommendations for consideration.

The content of this report has been informed by more general stakeholder consultation on the waste strategy to date. This includes feedback from a series of waste forums held in 2012 by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, Andrew Powell, as well as from engagement with industry to commence development of a new waste strategy for Queensland.

Your feedback is sought on the draft review report. Please provide your comments to waste.paper@ehp.qld.gov.au. The submission period will close on 5pm Friday 30 May 2014.

2 Scope

The following key elements of the current strategy were identified for review:

1. Vision and principles.
2. Goals, targets and priority areas.
3. Price signal—waste disposal levy.
4. Stronger legislation.
5. Programs, actions and partnerships.

3 Key elements

3.1 Vision and principles

Background

The 2010 strategy sets out a vision for 'a low-waste Queensland where resources are used more efficiently and where disposal is seen as a last—not a first—option'.

The vision and objectives underpin the strategy and set out the main policy direction. The principles were designed to align with and complement the waste and resource management principles contained in the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011*.

The strategy sets out five key principles to help inform decision-makers when considering waste reduction and resource recovery options. These are:

Waste hierarchy:	reduce, reuse, recycle, other recovery, treat, dispose
Resource efficiency:	encouraging waste avoidance and recovery
Sustainability:	maximising environmental, social and economic benefits
Engagement:	partnering community, business, industry and government
Capacity building:	facilitating business and industry development.

Discussion

Initial feedback from key stakeholders to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) indicated that:

- Principles should be framed in a way that directly links to actions.
- The waste hierarchy does not sufficiently take into account local and regional circumstances, which may pose financial and social challenges for implementing the standard hierarchy.
- The vision and principles should present a stronger focus on upstream activities including waste avoidance and achieving more efficient ways of reusing waste materials.

Recommendations

- Ensure strategy principles link directly to actions.
- In addition to the waste hierarchy principle, ensure social and economic factors are taken into account.
- Incorporate a stronger focus on waste avoidance.

3.2 Goals, targets and priority actions

Background

The 2010 strategy has three goals, to:

- reduce waste
- optimise recovery and recycling
- develop sustainable waste industries and jobs.

The following targets were established in the 2010 strategy to meet these goals:

By 2020:

- Reduce waste disposal to landfill (compared to business-as-usual projections) by 50%.
- Increase recycling of:
 - construction and demolition waste to 75%
 - commercial and industrial waste to 60%
 - regulated (or hazardous) waste to 45%
 - municipal (or domestic) solid waste to 65%
- Reduce waste generation by 15%, or 2 tonnes per person per year.

The strategy also identifies certain end-of-life products for priority action. Some of the waste that are targeted for action are household organic waste and end-of-life products such as packaging waste, tyres, computers and televisions. The types of actions that the Queensland Government may consider to improve the management of these priority waste include education programs, improving design to ensure recyclability at end-of-life, disposal bans or product 'take back' schemes, where appropriate.

The 2010 strategy signalled the Queensland Government's intention to legislate to require preparation of a priority product statement to notify various sectors of its interest in these waste and the proposed action to improve their management at end-of-life. Supplementary paper three in the 2010 Strategy set out the process by which the highest priorities will be identified for action.

Discussion

Initial feedback from key stakeholders to EHP indicated that it is important that goals, targets and priority areas are under-pinned by robust data, are evidence-based and achievable.

The existing target categories may not be the most appropriate way of measuring the performance of a strategy. For example, some very small businesses may have a waste profile that is more similar to municipal or household waste than it is to commercial waste.

The existing targets are unable to measure avoidance. Furthermore, the existing targets are not mandatory and apply to Queensland as a whole. To take into account different circumstances and challenges facing regional areas of the State, regional stakeholders have suggested differentiated targets between metropolitan areas and the regions should be explored. Stakeholders have also suggested that targets need to be assigned to particular parties to ensure accountability for targets being achieved.

It was suggested by stakeholders that targets be supported by short, medium and long-term performance measures so that ongoing performance can be assessed.

Other types of target could also be explored, for example.

- annual waste diversion targets
- resource recovery targets for specific waste streams and materials
- the amount of resource recovery investment growth in regional Queensland
- the percentage growth in the reuse of waste by industry
- the percentage of new or expanded recycling infrastructure in Queensland.

Any target will need to be backed up with reliable data collection. Reliable data collection mechanisms are critical in order to gauge performance against targets. Subsequent to the release of the 2010 strategy, the collection of key waste disposal and recycling data was mandated through provisions in the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011* (refer section 2.4 Stronger legislation).

Following the release of the 2010 strategy, the Queensland Government introduced legislation through the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011* to enable the release of a 'priority product statement' for public consultation on the best way to improve management of priority or 'problem' waste. At the time of review, a priority product statement is yet to be released.

Recommendations

- Include waste avoidance as a goal or target.
- Continue investment in development, maintenance and improvement of an electronic waste data collection system.
- Ensure data collection takes into account anomalies in waste stream groupings that may skew performance trends.
- Include targets that are specific to certain parties/sectors/streams to ensure the targets are accountable.
- Recognise that regional and metropolitan targets may be more appropriate to take into account different circumstances.

3.3 Price signal—waste disposal levy

Background

The 2010 strategy includes a waste disposal levy as a price signal to change disposal behaviour. The policy intent behind the levy was to apply an additional charge at the point of disposal as a price signal to encourage waste generators to change behaviour with waste. The levy also provided additional incentive for industry investment in resource recovery infrastructure and generated funding for programs.

Levy rates were set as follows:

Waste type	Cost (per tonne)
Commercial and industrial waste, and construction and demolition waste	\$35
Regulated waste	\$50–\$150
Municipal solid waste (MSW)	\$0

Levy funds were to be distributed in the following ways:

- \$159 million towards targeted programs to help business and industry reduce the amount of waste they generate, and to encourage industry investment in recycling technologies, particularly in regional areas
- \$120 million for local governments to spend on environmental projects, focussing on better waste management facilities and practices.

Discussion

The waste disposal levy was repealed in mid-2012 in accordance with a change in Queensland Government policy to reduce costs to business. The levy effectively ended on 1 July 2012 through an amendment to the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Regulation 2011* to set all levy prices to nil. The repeal of the levy was completed when Parliament passed legislation on 5 March 2013 to remove references to the levy from the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011*.

3.4 Legislation

Background

The 2010 strategy identified the need for waste management legislation to drive a strong resource recovery agenda. The existing legislative framework for managing waste in Queensland sits under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* and the *Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Regulation 2000*, which addresses licencing, waste tracking and pollution, but did not reflect the objectives of modern waste and resource management practices.

A suite of legislative reforms was subsequently introduced—the *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011* (WRR Act)—in October 2011 to address current waste management practices.

The WRR Act provides a number of important waste reforms, for example:

- strengthened litter laws and public reporting for littering from vehicles
- improved reporting of waste and disposal
- strengthened planning and reporting by state government
- a legislative framework for product stewardship (voluntary and mandatory)
- strategic planning for waste reduction and recycling
- beneficial use approval framework for general approvals to facilitate resource recovery
- ability for the Minister to issue priority product statements through a transparent consultative process
- review the waste strategy within three-year cycles.

The WRR Act also introduced a waste disposal levy, as outlined in section 2.3 of this paper, which has subsequently been repealed.

Discussion

The legislative reforms have now been in place for two years.

The Act contains provisions for a framework for the approval of waste for beneficial reuse. In early discussions on the development of the industry-led waste strategy, industry stakeholders raised concerns about the application of this framework, describing it as onerous, costly and complex. This section is currently under separate review.

The new public reporting system for littering from vehicles received almost 2496 eyewitness reports in 2012/13, resulting in 1746 penalty infringement notices issued.

The priority product statement and problem waste management measures are new regulatory tools that enable the government to improve end of life management of 'problem' product waste streams. Government action may include establishing product stewardship programs under which producers take back end-of-life products, in addition to phased-in disposal bans for certain priority products. The legislation establishes a framework for public consultation to ensure public feedback informs the identification of the highest priority waste, and the best option to manage each type of waste.

The collection of robust and transparent waste data is essential to help make evidence based policy decisions and legislative changes.

Recommendations

- Review the overarching legislative and regulatory framework for waste management to ensure it is achieving environmental objectives while allowing industry to operate effectively and innovate.
- Provide for the collection of more robust and transparent waste data to help make sound future policy decisions.
- Explore options to ensure appropriate management of problem waste or regulated waste through priority product statements.

3.5 Programs, actions and partnerships

Background

Programs and actions were to be funded by an estimated \$279 million raised from the levy over four years. A dedicated Waste and Environment Fund was established under the WRR Act for this purpose. Additionally, a *Waste Avoidance and Resource Efficiency Business Plan 2010–2020* (the business plan) was developed and published under the WRR Act to detail the implementation of identified programs and actions to deliver on the goals presented in the 2010 strategy.

In preparation of the business plan, the department undertook detailed analysis of Queensland's waste profile to identify priority waste that must be addressed in order to achieve strategy targets. The department then identified impediments to achieving increased recycling and resource recovery across priority waste streams. From this analysis five key themes and associated programs were presented in the business plan. The key themes presented were: waste infrastructure and market development; applied research and development; capacity building; enhanced regulation and compliance; and strategic and national initiatives.

Of the 26 programs that were identified in the business plan, four programs were implemented that spanned the business plan's key themes. These are the:

1. reThink Business Waste Program
2. Infrastructure Grants program
3. Litter and Illegal Dumping program
4. Sustainable Futures Fund agreement between state and local government.

The Waste Environment Fund was established to fund the strategy's programs, actions and partnerships. The fund ceased to exist following the repeal of the waste disposal levy through the *Waste Reduction and Recycling and Other Legislation Amendment Act* in March 2013. Consequently the business plan and associated programs are no longer in place.

To support the development and implementation of the 2010 strategy, various partnerships were fostered including an expert technical working group and overarching steering committee.

The 2010 strategy introduced mandatory reporting requirements for waste recovery and disposal activities. To achieve this the department invested in the Queensland Waste Data System (QWDS) to provide quality baseline data to enable the department to meet reporting and evaluation requirements under the WRR Act, produce reports, examine performance against strategic targets and provide data to stakeholders whilst maintaining appropriate data privacy and confidentiality.

Discussion

Partnerships between industry and government will be critical to deliver future waste actions and will require all stakeholders to participate.

Developing an implementation model that clearly sets out agreed actions and responsibilities will be key to ensuring that strategy objectives and actions are achieved. Stakeholder feedback indicates incentives such as funding are important to implementing strategy programs.

Recommendations

- That the Queensland Government continues to facilitate partnership approaches.
- Develop an implementation approach that sets out clear actions and responsibilities.

4 Summary of recommendations

Vision and principles

- Ensure strategy principles link directly to actions.
- In addition to the waste hierarchy principle ensure social and economic factors are taken into account.
- Incorporate a stronger focus on waste avoidance.

Goals, targets and priority areas

- Include waste avoidance as a goal or target.
- Continue investment in development, maintenance and improvement of an electronic waste data collection system.
- Ensure data collection takes into account anomalies in waste stream groupings that may skew performance trends.
- Include targets that are specific to certain parties/sectors/streams to ensure the targets are accountable.
- Recognise that regional and metropolitan targets may be more appropriate to take into account different circumstances.

Legislation

- Review the overarching legislative and regulatory framework for waste management to ensure it is achieving environmental objectives while allowing industry to operate effectively and innovate.
- Provide for the collection of more robust and transparent waste data to help make sound future policy decisions.
- Explore options to ensure appropriate management of problem waste or regulated waste through priority product statements.

Programs, actions and partnerships

- That the Queensland Government continues to facilitate partnership approaches.
- Develop an implementation approach that sets out clear actions and responsibilities.

5 Have your say

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