



December 2010

Summary Report: Packaging Impacts Stakeholder Workshop

Executive summary:

In accord with the communiqué of the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) from 4th November 2010, a comprehensive stakeholder workshop was held in Sydney on 2 December 2010 to inform the consultation regulatory impact statement (RIS) on additional measures to increase the recycling of used packaging and decrease packaging-related litter.

The workshop broadly agreed that the impacts of used packaging create a number of problems with regard to resource recovery and litter, and that different solutions are applicable to different problems but that applicability of solutions also varies according to the type of packaging material and its location.

This core agreement and learning is critical to informing the RIS.

The workshop was well received. All participants had an opportunity understand the RIS process, the EPHC communiqué, current used packaging data and the issues and perspectives of the different representatives present. Participants also had opportunity to express their views of what it is that needs to be fixed (what the problem is), what the policy is fundamentally trying to achieve (the outcome) and what can be done to fix the problems and achieve the outcomes (the solutions).

Participants were informed that the workshop is one step in the strategic dialogue that will be part of the whole RIS process and there will be further opportunities to provide input and feedback.



Presentations:

The workshop included presentations on the EPHC and its November communiqué, the Office of Best Practice Regulation RIS process, data on recycling and litter for all materials and packaging specifically.

Presentations were also made on specific perspectives of used packaging from a community group (Keep Australia Beautiful), an environment group (Boomerang Alliance / Total Environment Centre), industry (National Packaging Covenant Industry Association) and local government (Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW). Recyclers, represented by the Australian Council of Recycling, were unable to make their presentation but provided notes to the facilitator, who read out the notes to the workshop.

The briefing on the EPHC communiqué and the broad nature of the RIS scope was well received and there was no questioning. However, environment groups (Boomerang Alliance/Total Environment Centre) later stated they believe the question is incorrectly framed and “illogical” (further detail below).

The OBPR briefing was well received and attendees expressed the view they had formed a better appreciation of the RIS process.

There was questioning on the ability of RIS to assess environmental policy and OBPR identified that it is looking at developing better mechanisms for environmental assessment in 2011.

The presentation of available data was well received. While it was generally accepted that the current data enables assessment of broad impacts and trends, it was equally accepted that its accuracy is at times questionable (in terms of completeness and timeliness) and it may not enable a full and detailed assessment of solutions.

Attendees identified that there is further data available to assess broader impacts issues associated with resource recovery (embodied energy and life cycle assessments) and litter (social causes/consequences).

Attendees:

Representatives at the workshop included the Australian Government (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and OBPR), all state and territory governments, local government, community groups, environment groups, industry associations, manufacturers (including beverage and packaging companies), retailers, recyclers, and waste management companies.

Key issues and outcomes:

The following is a summary of the key issues and outcomes from the workshop.

- Attendees agreed on the issue that the impacts of used packaging create a number of problems with regard to resource recovery and litter, and also more broadly. These included:

Litter – impacts on amenity, lack of community awareness and engagement, social consequences (contributing to illegal dumping, graffiti and vandalism), inequitable cost burden.

Resource recovery – loss of valuable resources, cost of infrastructure, inequitable cost burden, lack of economies of scale, lack of integration of infrastructure, contamination of material streams, unrecoverable materials.

Other – contribution to a ‘throw away’ culture and mentality, impacts and opportunities different across waste streams/material type, geographical differences.

- There was broad agreement that different solutions are applicable to different problems but that applicability of solutions also varies according to the type of packaging material and its location.
- It was expressed a number of times that the problems / solutions are non-linear and rather a matrix.
- Due to the complexity of the issues, the workshop attendees did not reach agreement on a single statement of the problem for the RIS nor identify specific preference for any particular solution (or solutions).
- Environment groups’ concerns regarding the framing of the RIS (as noted above) centre on the argument that framing the problem as packaging in the broad distorts the accurate and appropriate assessment of the impacts of beverage packaging. For example, the high recovery rate for commercial cardboard packaging bumps up the overall packaging recycling figures and conceals lower recovery rates for beverage packaging.

The problem and solutions:

The workshop had two sessions totalling almost three hours devoted to discussing:

- (1) What are we trying to fix (what is the problem)?
- (2) What are we trying to achieve (what is the desired outcome)?
- (3) How do we achieve it (what is the solution / solutions)?

These sessions were conducted as a mix of open forum discussions and small group work with presentation and discussion of small group findings with the whole workshop.

As noted earlier, there was broad agreement that different solutions are applicable to different problems but that applicability of solutions also varies according to the type of packaging material and its location. While there was detailed identification of points (1) and (2), there was no such detailed identification of (3), namely what solution(s) would address what problem(s).

There was general discussion, but no broad agreement, that, as set out on the EPHC communiqué, container deposits and / or advanced disposal fees should be considered as possible means to reduce litter and increase recycling and that the complex nature of the problems and what is trying to be achieved means that either or both approach will potentially address some of the elements of the problems identified. It was generally agreed that there is no “silver bullet” and that neither container deposit nor advanced disposal fees is likely to be able to solve all of the problems identified.

The “other” solutions discussed ranged widely and included:

- Business as usual (existing regulations and policies, particularly the Australian Packaging Covenant)
- Extend local government recycling services to commercial and industrial and away from home services
- Separate collection for glass containers
- Mandated office recycling systems
- Producer take back / product stewardship
- Landfill avoidance incentives / resource recovery certificates

The following table was presented, discussed and generally agreed by the workshop as capturing the key issues in points (1) What are we trying to fix (what is the problem)? and (2) What are we trying to achieve (what is the desired outcome)?

(1) What are we trying to fix (what is the problem)?	(2) What are we trying to achieve (what is the desired outcome)?
<p><u>Litter</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amenity • Community awareness and engagement • Social consequences • Inequitable cost burden • Behaviour 	<p><u>Litter</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean streets • Engaged community • Understanding litter impacts • More value on littered items
<p><u>Resource recovery / recycling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lost resources • Cost of infrastructure • Inequitable cost burden • Unrecoverable materials • Economies of scale • Integration of infrastructure • Wider range of materials • Contamination 	<p><u>Resource recovery / recycling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable growth • Realise economic benefits • Embodied energy, water, carbon • Landfill avoidance • Culture change (closed loop) • Reduced upstream impacts
<p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throw away culture • MSW, C&I and C&D impacts and opportunities • Geographical differences • Inadequacy in resources 	<p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greatest benefit to the community • Culture change

Appendix:

Agenda

Packaging Impacts Stakeholder Workshop

9:30am - 4:30pm, Thursday, 2 December 2010

SMC Conference and Function Centre, 66 Goulburn Street, Sydney 2000

AGENDA

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|---------|---|
| 9:30am | Coffee/Registrations |
| 10:00am | Welcome and introduction (Nick Harford, Facilitator) |
| 10:10am | Brief history of EPHC consideration
Tony Roberts, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management |
| 10:30am | Outline of RIS process (30 minutes)
Jason McNamara, Executive Director, Office of Best Practice Regulation |
| | Questions (15 minutes) |
| 11:15am | MORNING TEA |
| 11:30am | What does the data tell us? (Nick Harford, Facilitator)
Presentation of available data (15-20 minutes)
Discussion on data gaps and alternative sources (10-15 minutes) |
| 12:00pm | What are we trying to fix and what are we trying to achieve?
Short presentations from key stakeholders (30 minutes)
Open discussion on the scope of packaging problems and the relative significance of resource recovery and litter (30 minutes) |
| 1:00pm | LUNCH |
| 2:00pm | How can we achieve it?
Recap on issues identified in previous session and introduction to the aims of this session (15 minutes)
Group discussion – develop various approaches to solving issues and problems identified in previous session (1 hour) |
| 3:15pm | AFTERNOON TEA |
| 3:30pm | Open discussion on approaches to achieving desired packaging outcomes (45 minutes) |
| 4:15pm | Wrap up and next steps (Nick Harford, Facilitator) |
| 4:30pm | Workshop finishes |