



RETHINKING WASTE MANAGEMENT

Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC) has inherited a challenging situation in respect to waste management as many practices are archaic and not compliant with Australian or international law nor acceptable to many residents and unknown to the tourists who visit.

As with all islands, there are many challenges in relation to waste management in a remote location including:

- Tyranny of distance with prohibitive freight costs and limited freight competition
- Increasing consumption due to affluence leading to increasing waste generation
- Diverse waste streams that all require management
- Poor economies of scale resulting in disproportionate high operating costs
- Emergence of new and problematic waste streams - solar cells, E-waste, plastic rainwater tanks
- Financial constraints due to small population, low rate base, and limited funding options
- Councils' reliance on external grants

In addition, to the above, Norfolk has a set of unique barriers including:

- Inability to provide a landfill on the island,
- Compliance and customs costs as deemed an international port and destination by Australia,
- Compliance with Australian laws which prevent residual waste from being exported to New Zealand,

Despite these challenges over the past two decades Norfolk Island has been on a journey of continuous improvement following previous studies that informed the current system including:

- The closure and rehabilitation of the former "Top Tip" burning pit,
- Closure of large-scale commercial burning pit,
- The development of the Waste Management Centre (WMC),
- Source separation of general waste for recovery, recycling, reuse or disposal including:
 - New sorting station and baler for aluminium, steel cans, plastic containers, cardboard for recycling,
 - new Hotrot compost for garden, food, paper/ cardboard,
 - separation of batteries, used motor oil/cooking oil, gas bottles, fire extinguishers, used tyres, E-waste, smoke detectors, toner cartridges, chemicals and asbestos,
 - reusable items available to the community – furniture, clothing, toys,

- all remaining general waste baled for export.
- High temperature incinerator for medical and quarantine waste
- Export of stockpiles of hazardous waste – chemicals, asbestos, oils, toner cartridges, lead acid batteries in 2020

Despite this progress, we have three significant issues:

- Formal notice to cease Headstone dumping for the protection of the Marine Park by January 30, 2023 requiring an alternative solution to bulky waste,
- The old glass crusher needs urgent replacement,
- Shipping containers of processed recyclables and E-waste awaiting export and no funds to pay.

The 2015 Waste Plan aimed to align Norfolk Island with other Australian offshore islands regarding waste separation, treatment and disposal. The plan sought to: divert to composting 68%, export for recycling 10%, reuse 7%, and bale and export 15%.

This year it is expected that the island will need to export approximately 400 tonnes of baled waste and recycling. Reducing waste requiring export is paramount. An examination of the current residual waste bales reveals they comprise, by weight, food and paper (49%), nappies (12%), and plastics 26% of which single use plastics are 7%. If the community separated all food and paper, and families converted to compostable/reusable nappies we could reduce our current exports by 60%. Current budget constraints do not allow for the removal of recyclables from the island which are stockpiled.

No one foresaw at the time of the 2015 study that the shipping service to Australia would cease and baled waste would require air freighting to the mainland because shipping to New Zealand was not approved. All baled waste is treated as quarantine waste by the Australian government and must comply with strict bio-security regulations. This change in freight arrangements has caused a substantial cost increase with NIRC forecast to spend \$1.8 million in 2021-22 on waste.

The revenue to support waste management activities is derived from:

- Waste Import Levy - \$600,000
- Tickets sales at WMC - \$60,000.
- Community Waste Management Charge -\$460,000
- Community shortfall - \$680,000

The Community Waste Service Fee of \$300 per household and \$75 per bed at accommodation facilities is modest compared to other NSW councils. By comparison Lord Howe Island residents pay \$672 per annum for 105 litres per week. A 50% discount is offered for pensioners. The waste levy applied on all imports to Norfolk Island at \$41/tonne or cubic metre, whichever is the greater, bears no resemblance to the cost to manage different types of waste.

Mainland Australia have moved to introduce extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes where manufacturers contribute to end of life management costs. National schemes exist for a range of products including: TVs and computers, mobile phones, motor oil, tyres, mattresses, paints, farm chemicals, household batteries, and by 2023 a national program will exist for beverage containers where a 10 cent refund is provided. Unfortunately, these schemes are not offered on Norfolk Island.

Where NI is unique is that it currently obtains a waste import fee of \$41/m³ or tonne whichever is the greater.

Going forward every person and business will be required to avoid, reduce, reuse and recycle waste in order to minimise the amount of waste that is being generated on the island and that will need to be processed either on or off island at a greater cost than is currently afforded by the island. There are several key issues to be addressed:

- Reduce the waste management operating and export costs,
- Manage the bulky wastes previously discharged at Headstone,
- Promote more on-island solutions,
- Determine suitable technologies to re-process or re-purpose waste into new products,
- Improve productivity and efficiency at the WMC,
- Decide whether a kerbside waste collection or collection direct from properties is an option to current self-haul,
- Increase revenues including how the waste import levy could be more equitably applied,
- Distribute commercial waste fees equitably recognising varying waste volumes,
- Encourage compliance with any new systems and stop backyard burial and burning,
- Gain access to national waste programs and funding opportunities,
- Access to national waste programs and funding opportunities.

Council has engaged external consultants who have worked with our community for over 20 years to help guide us. A draft report has been prepared which seeks to address these issues and provides some options for consideration including reducing, reusing and recycling / composting more materials, modifying the charging regime, and processing bulky waste on island.

We, as an island community, need to make substantial and significant changes in a very short timeframe. We need the island community to support the actions we decide upon.

Please have your say by responding to the community survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PVSZFDB> or seek a meeting with the consultants from Monday 14th to Saturday 19th February. Appointment times are available by contacting PJ Wilson by email peter.wilson@nirc.gov.nf or phone 55254.