



SECURING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
through appropriate technology

**Centre for
Appropriate
Technology**

31 July 2009

Waste Policy Taskforce
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

Centre for Appropriate Technology Submission: Draft National Waste Policy Framework

The Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) is a non-profit Indigenous organisation with specialist expertise in technology for remote Indigenous communities. CAT was established in Alice Springs in 1980, and in addition to its Central Australian head office and operations it has northern regional offices in Darwin, Derby, and Cairns. CAT's vision is of happy and safe communities of Indigenous people and its purpose is to secure sustainable livelihoods through appropriate technology. It provides information and practical assistance with housing, water supply, energy, waste, telecommunications, transport and other infrastructure issues. CAT supports communities through community development, planning, training processes and project management.

The management of waste in remote Indigenous communities is a relatively new function for many remote communities. Often communities are left reliant on external contractors and government departments to deal with the waste in their communities. Waste is not always managed well by outside interests in remote Indigenous communities, due to various limiting factors such as remoteness and cost of transport.

Further changes to waste management in remote Indigenous communities is likely to occur with the proposed changes in NT Government policy, particularly the 'Working Futures' document. Under this policy, waste management will become more centralised. Government services to outstations/homelands will mostly involve a form of remote delivery, based from the closest or most accessible 'hub town'. In addition some small communities that are not under local government jurisdiction, do not have the infrastructure available to deal with their waste effectively. The structure of local government is a centralised model that is not easily adapted to remote communities.

Thus there is a need for a policy stance on waste that eases the difficulties already faced in remote Indigenous communities in dealing with their waste. The impact of not managing waste in remote communities is significant and includes but is not limited to affecting environmental health for Indigenous people.

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As a result of these difficulties and as an Indigenous technology organisation we believe that the issue of waste management in regional and remote areas is unique and should be stated as a particular theme to be addressed in the National Waste Policy (NWP). Culturally and logistically every remote Indigenous community is unique and the NWP should reflect and allow for this.

The following suggestions relate to each relevant theme stated in the Draft National Waste Policy Framework.

Section 6.5.1 Taking Responsibility

Product stewardship/extended producer responsibility is an important aspect of waste management. The framework states that businesses and the community will be facilitated to 'take responsibility for end of life management of materials, products and packaging through a national product stewardship/extended producer responsibility framework.' The framework also states it 'will cover an initial set of nominated sectors, materials or products.'

In regards to remote Indigenous communities, this particular theme is imperative as they have less resources available to deal with waste that comes into the communities, thus responsibility for waste going into communities needs to be taken by both the communities, suppliers of goods and other organisations and operators living and working in remote communities.

As an example, the amount of packaging waste going into communities is significant and there are opportunities for this to be minimised. 'The logistic similarities between remote Aboriginal and Antarctic communities suggest that certain aspects of their waste management strategies are compatible. It is significant that one aspect of the Antarctic waste management strategy is to dramatically minimise packaging and maximise separation prior to goods being transported to the Antarctic. It is appropriate that such options be seriously considered for remote Aboriginal communities.' (CAT, 1991). This could be achieved through consultation with organisations such as Outback Stores and independent stores.

Another issue to be considered in remote areas is that many communities are heavily impacted by NGO, health sector and private sector operators in regards to waste. There is little support for communities on the ground to deal with other sectors waste that has an impact on community health. Responsibility is required throughout the plethora of groups going into communities and it should not impact on the already stretched resources and capability of community and local government responsibilities.

Section 6.5.2 Improving the market

The policy focus of moving market signals upstream is constructive; however it is difficult to create markets around waste management in remote areas. Sending market signals 'upstream' may have the unintended consequence of increasing costs for remote communities without availing them of any additional capacity to use the market dynamics to reduce or recover costs locally. Recycling in remote locations is poorly connected to markets and potentially there should be incentives for greater creative re-use.

Section 6.5.3 Pursuing Sustainability

It is agreed that looking at better design for products, processes and services to avoid and minimise waste is beneficial. Moving towards utilising organic waste will also create major benefits.

It is also agreed that in order to pursue sustainability, waste minimisation policies wherein producers are responsible for the 'real' cost of disposing of the waste created need to be implemented. An example would be an incentive to encourage solutions for reducing waste in the manufacturing of products and/or

a disincentive for producers to create short lived products that end up in landfill. Take for example the number of refrigerators and other whitegoods that end up in landfill in remote communities. There is a need to look at more efficient and robust technologies as well as behaviour.

However, pursuing sustainability is not just about looking at ‘waste’ or ‘resources’ at the end of their life, but also looking at the consumption of goods in Australia. The consumer is also responsible for choices made that create waste at their end of life. The consumer does not pay the cost of waste disposal. Waste reduction requires changes in people’s behaviour, thus educational programs along with ‘eco-labelling’ of products need to be used combined with changes in policies.

To further pursue sustainability it may be beneficial to develop a ‘working group’ on waste issues across Australia, using the themes and directions stated in the Draft National Waste Policy Framework, with a specific emphasis on issues faced in remote communities. Local government capacity in remote areas could be identified as an early priority focus.

Section 6.5.4 Facilitating Investment

There are opportunities to facilitate investment in remote Indigenous communities through recycling and other waste management schemes. As an example, CAT in planning with the Lajamanu community and the local store developed a recycling project in Lajamanu for refunds on cans and bottles. It was shown from this project that having a container deposit scheme in place allowed for members of the community to engage in informal recycling which also provided them with some additional income.

Capacity is often lacking in remote areas, therefore remote areas need to be considered in facilitating investment, otherwise the benefits of investment in remote areas is often not realised.

Section 6.5.5 Reducing hazards

CAT supports any moves to reduce hazardous wastes. Remote Indigenous communities are not without problems in dealing with hazardous wastes, however due to remoteness and lack of resources in small communities, it is not always feasible to comply with best practice for dealing with hazardous waste. Hazardous waste is often dealt with inappropriately in remote communities, due to lack of options, thus putting the health of people at risk. CAT requests that any move towards ‘a national capability for hazardous waste’ as stated in the draft framework considers remote Indigenous communities.

Interestingly the NWP is excluding radioactive waste and there is no discussion or evidence of consideration given to the benefits and difficulties of excluding it from this policy. There may be valid reasons for the exclusion of radioactive waste from the NWP, however if this policy is dealing comprehensively with hazardous waste, perhaps some discussion of the nature of the risks and benefits of excluding radioactive waste is required.

Section 6.5.7 Tailoring solutions

CAT supports a move to explore potential for changes in regional, remote and Indigenous communities around waste management. Prior to the Keep Australia Beautiful (KAB) campaign in Australia, and the need for improved litter control in Australian cities and streets, much of the community would dispose of their waste in inappropriate manners. The KAB model shows that Australian communities can tackle waste matters in their own backyards.

Indigenous and remote communities can tackle waste in their communities also; however there is a unique quality about remote and indigenous communities that must be recognised, respected and worked within. This is not only the remote nature of these communities, but also the different cultural aspects. We

cannot continue to impose one size fits all policies to Indigenous communities and expect them to work. Waste is no exception.

It is recommended that a study is done on community perception of waste in remote communities to gain an understanding of this perception in order to better plan for waste management in these areas. The model for KAB educational campaigns tailored to remote and Indigenous communities might also be explored.

In addition, historically local governments have chronically underserved remote communities in a range of areas including waste management. The NWP could consider a capacity building strategy for local governments to assist in this regard.

The Centre for Appropriate Technology thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to comment on the Draft National Waste Policy Framework. We trust that the comments made herein provide some valuable feedback to this process.

Yours sincerely,

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References

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