

Item 3.2

Collective Action on Waste

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

On 18 May 2023, I hosted around 140 Mayors, Councillors, General Managers/Chief Executive Officers and management staff from Greater Sydney and Metropolitan Councils for the Metropolitan Sydney Mayoral Summit on Waste.

We also welcomed representatives from Local Government NSW, the NSW Environmental Protection Authority, the Greater Cities Commission, and the Western and Northern Regional Organisations of Councils, the Macarthur Strategic Waste Alliance, and The Parks.

The summit was convened by the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) on behalf of Resilient Sydney, which the City supports.

The summit highlighted the critical need for all councils to work together to bring real change to manage our waste into the future, while we transition to a more circular economy.

The challenge

Reducing waste and its impact on the environment is one of the key actions councils can take to lower our emissions.

Across the Sydney metropolitan area, 55 per cent of household and commercial waste goes to landfill each year. This results in loss of valuable resources, costing businesses and households more than \$750 million in waste levies each year.

Alarming, by 2034, data shows there will be no capacity at existing landfill sites in NSW. The development pipeline for new facilities like the proposed Woodlawn Advanced Energy Recovery Centre near Goulburn can take up to ten years to be fully operational.

The time has long passed when councils collected rubbish and transported it to a landfill where it would slowly rot away. Achieving the overhaul of the industry that is needed requires strategic input from Mayors, Councillors, General Managers/Chief Executive Officers and Council officers.

Industry-wide challenges include a limited number of suppliers, a lack of processing infrastructure and a shortage of readily accessible waste collection and transfer sites.

These challenges mean all Sydney councils face rising costs, increasing truck movements and resource recovery rates that are static at best. Few available options exist for increased efficiency or resource recovery improvements, or to reduce landfill.

The original drivers of public health and hygiene have been supplemented by the need to reduce pollution, lower carbon emissions, and recover and re-use resources. Collecting waste is just part of the picture; councils must make strategic decisions about where this waste will go.

The last 20 years have seen significant positive change. Recycling has been introduced for glass, hard plastics, paper and cardboard. There are separate collections for mattresses, electronic waste, tyres, clothing, mobile phones, batteries, and chemicals. Landfills capture methane to generate energy. There will soon be collections for food waste and/or food and garden organics.

Unfortunately, waste processing and disposal have not kept pace with the growing population, and waste generation rates continue to increase. Most Sydney councils must pay to haul recyclable materials and waste far outside their local area, and new transfer capacity is difficult to secure due to cost and availability of appropriately zoned land.

Data shows that we will not be able to meet NSW and Commonwealth targets with our current systems. Even with the highest efficiencies, progress in domestic waste collection and recovery will be impossible without major changes. These transitions will be expensive.

The waste levy on landfill is an incentive to recycle, but in a failing market just adds to the costs that Council must charge the community.

In NSW, only around seven per cent of around \$800 million collected in annual waste levy revenue comes back to councils and the waste industry through contestable grants to fund improvements. Councils do not receive a fair share of funding despite being asked to meet government targets and transition to a circular economy.

The City of Sydney

The City of Sydney local government area alone produces 5,500 tonnes of waste every day comprising household, commercial, construction and demolition waste, which contributes to about eight per cent of the City's total greenhouse gas emissions.

While recycling our waste is important, the market for recycled products has not kept up with demand. We collaborated on the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Council's Paving the Way program and together created a market for one-third of our domestic glass collections.

Since initiating our food scraps recycling trial in 2019, we have collected more than 1,500 tonnes of food scraps from about 20,000 houses and apartments which saved 738 cubic metres of landfill space and 1,284 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, we produced 64,500 kilowatt hours of energy, 7.9 tonnes of fertiliser and 239 tonnes of compost.

We are now researching new ways to process food scraps using more cost-effective technology. We will soon begin a trial involving insects that not only recycles food and organics, but produces a protein, which can be substituted for animal feed or other protein uses.

Councils need to collaborate, to influence, and to leverage our collective purchasing power. Building a strong, green and circular economy brings opportunities for job creation and economic growth.

It is encouraging to hear at a meeting of Australia's Environment Ministers on 9 June 2023, they agreed to shift towards a safer, circular economy. They also agreed to support stronger and clearer protections under environment and heritage legislation. I look forward to seeing swift action based on these commitments.

I am recommending that Council resolve to take strategic action on waste by:

- calling on the Commonwealth Government to expedite bans on materials that cannot be recycled or recovered, and to increase extended producer responsibilities;
- calling on the NSW Government to set the waste levy at an appropriate level and reinvest it into waste initiatives and improving approval processes and licencing procedures;
- working with other Greater Sydney and Metropolitan councils to coordinate our advocacy, communications and collective buying power to bring the benefits of scale, efficiency and industry confidence; and
- working with the other tiers of government to ensure the delivery of infrastructure solutions locally to reduce waste hauled long distances or to landfill.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) councils have a key role to play in reducing waste and its impact on the environment; and
- (ii) across the Sydney metropolitan area, 55 per cent of household and commercial waste goes to landfill each year, resulting in loss of valuable resources, costing businesses and households more than \$750 million in waste levies each year;

(B) Council work with other Greater Sydney and Metropolitan councils on:

- (i) reducing waste;
- (ii) improving environmental outcomes where waste has to be processed; and
- (iii) finding solutions for the residue that is left;

(C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy and the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water with a copy of the subject Lord Mayoral Minute requesting their commitment to taking strategic action on waste alongside other levels of government; and

- (D) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the NSW Premier, the NSW Treasurer, and the NSW Minister for Climate Change, Energy and the Environment, requesting that the NSW Government reinvest 100 per cent of the revenue from its waste levy for council and industry initiatives that:
- (i) accelerate the transition to a circular economy;
 - (ii) build the waste infrastructure needed to meet the growing pressures of population growth, loss of landfill capacity and a lack of competition in the sector;
and
 - (iii) educate and support communities to reduce waste.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor