

Australian Association for Environmental Education.
PO Box 560
Bellingen NSW 2454
Australia

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Waste Policy Taskforce
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601
E: wastepolicy@environment.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the consultation paper *A National Waste Strategy: Managing Waste to 2020*. This letter is not intended to be a formal submission, in response to the details and questions outlined within the consultation paper. It is provided to draw on the experience of our members and National Executive team across Australia in reminding policy makers of the critical role of education in delivering the objectives of waste policy and more broadly, education for sustainability (EfS) in Australia. The success of which is interdependent with policy governing the approach to waste avoidance and management in Australia.

We note the principle of 'Education and Awareness' outlined in the *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development 1992* and recognition of the need to increase awareness of the impacts of waste to ensure they are considered in community decision making.

Firstly, on behalf of our members who represent education professionals right across private, government and non government sectors, we would support a national approach to waste policy recognises the role of education in not only the community setting but within formal education, research and the corporate sector.

For example, in providing information about the environmental impact of goods and materials, EfS gives the consumer, the procurer and the manufacturer a basis for being able to make choices about impact on the environment. How is it possible to become a green procurer, a green consumer, a green manufacturer if there is no information available to industry and to the general public?

AAEE supports the work of researchers providing the scientific basis for reliable eco-labelling initiatives and educators who promote the use of such schemes on schools, communities and business. The Australian Government Waste Policy should provide support for such research being undertaken and the results being made available to enable wise purchasing leading to more informed environmentally aware choices.

Secondly, increasingly waste education is encompassed in more holistic programs of EfS. Students, researchers, communities and business are increasingly aware of the interdependency of environment, society and economy as educators increase understanding of the relationships between critical issues such as waste management and climate change. Increasingly products and services are marketed with messages which focus on 'whole of

lifecycle' impacts. However, impediments such as the provision of inadequate and conflicting information present challenges for both consumers and educators alike.

A National Waste Policy has the potential to place effective and consistent product stewardship responsibility for materials that are not readily recycled via curb side recycling programs. AAEE supports the onus for disposal and recycling of these products to be placed back as a producer responsibility in order to ameliorate the financial cost to consumers and the environmental cost to the community.

We must acknowledge and build upon the benefit of environmental labelling and certification as a basis of allowing effective consumer and community choice and ability to overcome the asymmetry of information related to both environmental and waste issues associated with consumption. Government should support programs such as the ISO 14 024 based Good Environmental Choice Mark which seek to help consumers become educated as to the overall environmental impact of products purchased allowing them to give preference to manufacturers have in place effective product stewardship.

Quite simply, we must seek waste management systems and infrastructure that provide for consistency across regions, states and territories to empower consumers to make the right choices at point of purchase as well as disposal.

Thirdly, in the interests of complimenting existing national policy and regulation we would encourage the Waste Policy Taskforce to consider the objectives and principles outlined within the *National Action Plan for Education for Sustainability 2008*, as well as other related climate change and sustainability policy and reports.

Sincerely,

Phil Smith
President
Australian Association for Environmental Education