

Monday, 31 January 2005

Community groups walk out of national waste negotiations

Community groups today walked out of consultations in Canberra aimed at reducing packaging waste, accusing industry of snubbing the concerns of environment ministers and the public.

The groups – including representatives from Clean Up Australia, Environment Victoria and Total Environment Centre – say effective strategies to address Australia's waste crisis could be derailed if industry continued to ambush the process, delivering tokenistic outcomes.

The National Packaging Covenant Council (NPCC) had failed to follow state and federal environment ministers' directives to develop firm targets to reduce packaging waste, said the groups.

"Community groups applauded environment ministers' decision in December last year to set firm targets for reducing packaging waste," said Jeff Angel, director of Total Environment Centre.

"But today's crucial meeting to move forward on this directive has been completely sabotaged by industry, who are refusing to take on board any of our concerns, failing to consult with us and failing to set targets.

"The Department of Environment and Heritage bureaucrats are blindly accepting industry's demands, so we were left with no choice but to walk out," said Angel.

Environment Victoria's Zero Waste Campaign Director Jenny Henty said the environment will be the ultimate loser unless future meetings are taken seriously by industry.

"It was total stonewalling by the NPCC. By allowing industry to dominate the agenda, they are betraying not just the community's trust but also the wishes of environment ministers," Jenny said.

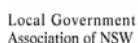
"The debate needs to move past mere lip service to a point where practical mechanisms for reducing packaging waste can be effectively considered.

"With pressures on kerbside recycling services and litter pickup growing, and ratepayers footing a massive \$294 million bill to prop up the system, tangible targets such as a minimum 80% packaging recycling rate and establishing mechanisms to ensure greater industry responsibility for waste are vital to achieve any real environmental progress."

A report commissioned by the Boomerang Alliance in December 2004* found that while Australia produces over 3.3 million tonnes of packaging each year, only 20.1% of this is recycled.

Contact: Jenny Henty, Environment Victoria – 0439 369 209; Jeff Angel, Total Environment Centre – 0404 093 718

The Boomerang Alliance members:



* For the full report, see http://www.boomerangalliance.org/000_files/5_Say_No_to_the_Waste_Club.pdf