

Green groups commend Environment Ministers on waste

Perth 1 July: An Alliance of green groups and local government today commended Environment Ministers for a historic decision on new recycling targets for Australia’s mountains of packaging.

At a meeting in Perth today, Environment Ministers agreed to incorporate an overall packaging recycling target of 65% into the National Packaging Covenant (NPC), to be achieved by 2010.

Ministers have also agreed to set separate recycling targets for paper, steel, aluminium, glass and plastic, with a safety net if industry does not deliver.

“Ministers have come through and delivered an important and historic shift in how Australia deals with the growing scourge of rubbish,” said Jeff Angel, Boomerang Alliance spokesperson and Director of Total Environment Centre.

“A definite 65% target shows Ministers were prepared to resist industry attempts to weaken the agreement by making these targets only ‘aspirational’.

“Ministers have also shown foresight in establishing a process to investigate a range of economic instruments that can be used to increase packaging recycling, with findings to be reported at the Covenant’s mid-term review in 2008.

“Now the acid is on industry, which has so far hidden behind PR and meaningless action statements. The Boomerang Alliance will remain active to audit performance.”

Boomerang Alliance spokesperson Dave West said a range of new instruments are required to ensure councils do not end up bearing the cost burden of improving our recycling performance.

“Traditionally, local government has footed the bill for litter collection and kerbside recycling, paying over \$300 million per year, and it’s crucial that there be no additional financial burden on councils and their communities. It is wise that Ministers have understood the need to provide a guarantee of success if the Covenant’s targets have not yet been reached in 2008,” Mr West said.

“The only concern we have with the agreement is the potential for plastic packaging to get off scot-free. The targets place pressure on raising paper recycling rates – which are already high compared to plastics and glass – and less on plastics.”

Paper recycling in Australia is around 63%, while PET plastic and glass sits at only 35%.

Conservation Council of WA President Sue Graham-Taylor said, “Minister Edwards has an agenda to fix the state’s waste problems. Today’s decision and the introduction of a policy around ‘Extended Producer Responsibility’ for other waste items in WA are clear victories for the Minister and we commend her for them.”

Environment Victoria’s Zero Waste campaigner, Jenny Henty said, “Environment groups were heartened by Minister Thwaites’ response to our call for an investigation into market drivers for recycling such as container deposits and advance recycling fees”.

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