

The Boomerang Alliance: bringing waste back to zero

As signatories to Boomerang Alliance Statement of Position, we commit to work for zero waste in Australia based on a mechanism of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for ensuring the elimination over time of all products and packaging from the waste stream. The 'goal of zero' demands that Australia change course on waste as a matter of urgency, or risk falling further and further behind world's best practice.

The Boomerang Alliance believes a more equitable cost sharing of waste disposal and recycling is essential in moving to a zero waste society. EPR redirects the cost burden of managing the waste stream from local government and ratepayers to those industries and consumers that are responsible for the production of waste and litter in the first place, penalising poor performers and rewarding those companies that embrace cleaner production and waste avoidance.

The National Packaging Covenant has failed

We believe that current nationally coordinated efforts to reduce waste, in particular the flawed National Packaging Covenant (NPC) model, are inadequate in terms of their ability to deliver the goal of zero waste.

The first NPC, starting in 1999, was a voluntary and unenforceable scheme, allowing producers to avoid taking responsibility for packaging waste. Action plans for NPC signatories show that industry has generally chosen 'opportunistic' targets and there is little evidence of meaningful gains.

The proposed new NPC, currently being negotiated, will only make marginal improvements to a fundamentally inadequate model. Failure to include a stronger EPR focus in the vital area of packaging waste undermines the positive developments toward producer responsibility being embraced in other industry sectors such as tyres, computer hardware and mobile phones.

Targets on the road to zero waste

Robust targets are required as well as a strong EPR mechanism in order to pursue zero waste. Major improvements are required in recovery, reuse and recycling of items currently subject to kerbside collection, especially various beverage and non-beverage containers, paper and cardboard.

On the recovery side, we support continuous improvement with:

- A mandated minimum 80% recovery for recycling of all common recyclable materials (i.e. glass, aluminum, plastic, paper, steel) within 5 years (by April 2010)
- 90% or greater within 10 years (by 2015)
- 95% or greater within 15 years (by 2020)

STATEMENT OF POSITION

Options to get there

We strongly support businesses and industry sectors choosing their own approaches to introduce efficient and cost-effective ways to deliver on EPR; but reject approaches like the current direction of the NPC that maintain both responsibility and much of the cost burden to the public purse, notably local government – and therefore ratepayers – through its heavy exposure to maintaining kerbside collections for recycling.

We propose that there is strong evidence around the world that systems based on environmental deposits and take-back schemes consistently achieve higher recovery rates than kerbside collections and provide a cleaner flow of materials for recycling. This underpins the economics of an effective waste recovery and recycling industry.

Economic and market based approaches also need to be developed to provide incentives for companies that embrace waste avoidance or closed loop approaches to packaging waste, to ensure externalities are fully accounted for in the costs of resource consumption.

Next steps to move forward

In regard to the politically sensitive issue of kerbside collection materials, we suggest two ways forward, assuming that the current NPC approach is sidelined or changes dramatically. Both should be evaluated, along with any other significant alternatives that may be identified. They are:

- Implement strict provisions requiring packaging supply chain to bear the full cost of meeting the Alliance’s recommended recovery targets for 2009, 2014 and 2019 (including, but not limited to, kerbside collections and litter clean-ups); or
- Develop a comprehensive national packaging waste elimination system that incorporates environmental deposits, to ensure high recovery rates and channel funds into building secure markets for recycling materials.

We also support exploration of incentives for a new breed of waste innovators and entrepreneurs to offer new systems and technologies to:

- Redesign packaging and products to minimise waste; and
- Increase recovery, reuse and recycling to close the loop on waste.

Conclusion

The Alliance calls on the Commonwealth, states and territories of Australia to suspend the current process to renew the NPC – before it locks EPR out of this sector for the next five years – and actively promote an informed national discussion of alternatives that can achieve zero waste.

The Boomerang Alliance Members

