

Investigation into the Transport of Waste into Queensland

Submission no. 0004

Name Boomerang Alliance



Secretariat

Investigation into the Transport of Waste into Queensland

Brisbane

QLD 4000

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Submission on Cross-Border Waste Transportation into Queensland

Dear Peter Lyons QC,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the independent investigation into cross-border transport of wastes into Queensland landfills.

Boomerang Alliance is a membership-based community organisation dedicated to addressing Australia's waste issues, particularly plastic wastes. Our 47 allied groups include major national, state and regional organisations concerned with litter, waste and plastic pollution.

We welcome your independent investigation of cross-border waste transport and present our views (below) on the incentives that encourage this cross-border transportation and our perspective on what we believe will inhibit such transportation in the future.

The financial, regulatory and other incentives for the movement of waste from other States to Queensland landfills

The Queensland Waste Avoidance and Resource Productivity (WARP) Strategy (2014-24) was released in 2014 by the Newman Government. It was a collaborative strategy between Government and industry and was portrayed as an industry-led strategy.

One key difference between this strategy and the one it replaced (Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy 2010-20) was the removal of a waste levy of \$35 per tonne imposed on wastes from the C&I and C&D sectors.

The decision to remove the Queensland Waste levy effectively perpetuated the circumstance of Queensland being the 'waste capital' of Australia, where, unlike every other jurisdiction in the country, there was no price on waste going to landfill.



The removal of the waste levy meant that there are few economic drivers to reduce waste and little funding to encourage resource recovery in Queensland.

Recent national waste data (Australian National Waste Report 2016) shows that Queensland languishes at or near the bottom on national waste reduction/resource recovery performance' league tables'. We are the highest generator of waste per capita and have the second lowest resource recovery rate per capita.

A review of the WARP strategy in 2017 revealed that (in the period to 2016):

- per capita generation of waste increased by 4.4%
- state-wide domestic waste recycling rate decreased
- business waste recycling improved
- construction waste recycling decreased by 18.5%
- waste to landfill increased by 9.6%

Based on these figures, the review concluded that QLD waste reduction targets for the municipal, C&I and C&D sectors for 2024 would not be met.

The lack of a levy has also meant that Queensland has simply encouraged cross-border waste transportation by providing an economic incentive to do so. Currently Queensland has no price on waste going to landfill, whilst our nearest neighbour, NSW, has a (metro) levy of \$135.70 and (regional) levy of \$70.38 per tonne.

The result has been a significant increase of cross-border waste transport since the waste levy was revoked in 2012. In 2014 estimates suggest that 400,000 tonnes were being transported, whilst more recent claims suggest 30,000-40,000 tonnes per week or 1.5-2 million tonnes are being transported.

Regulatory and other reforms that could limit or stop the cross-border movement of waste to Queensland landfills

Boomerang Alliance supports the Introduction of a levy on mixed wastes going to landfill in Queensland. The levy should be on all mixed waste going to landfill from the C&I, C&D and Municipal sectors. This single measure, if introduced at a levy cost that will remove the economic incentive for cross-border transportation, will effectively remove this problem.



The levy should be subject to annual increases to bring it in line with NSW by 2024. The previous levy was set at \$35 per tonne. The current NSW levy (metro) is \$135.70 and (regional) \$70.38 per tonne.

In addition, if the proceeds of the levy were hypothecated to secondary resource market development (particularly on priority waste streams), improving collection and processing services and public/sector education, it would provide both an economic driver for change inside Queensland and the investment to support and encourage that transition.

Proposals have been suggested that seeking the support of the NSW Government to properly enforce its Waste Transport Proximity Principle would alleviate cross-border transportation. The NSW Proximity Principle, which prohibits the transportation of wastes more than 150 kms from where it was generated, has largely been abandoned by NSW authorities. However, it is our understanding that, were it re-activated, it is not possible for the Proximity Principle to be applied to cross-border transportation, as this would be considered an unconstitutional impost on State trade. It is therefore unable to prevent cross-border transportation.

Queensland needs to urgently address its waste issues. It has a strategy in place (WARP Strategy) that represents a reasonable way forward. However, as the recent EHP review has found, it is failing, principally because there are few and inadequate economic drivers to reduce mixed waste generation and little funding to invest in resource recovery.

The WARP strategy could also be improved by reviewing current Waste and Recycling targets for the municipal, C&I and C&D sectors. These should be upgraded and scheduled to be able to achieve comparable targets to NSW by 2024 (NSW 2021 targets are municipal (70%), C&I (70%) and C&D (80%). Current targets for QLD in 2024 are, Municipal (45%), C&I (55%) and C&D (80%).

The introduction of a waste levy by the next Queensland Government, hypothecated to resource recovery and set at a level to support resource recovery, will kill two birds with one stone.

It will resolve the unacceptably high volumes of cross-border transportation of wastes into Queensland landfills and it will kick start a change in waste reduction and resource recovery inside Queensland.



Whilst waste policies have historically been considered to be environmental problems-as they continue to be-the fact is that waste avoidance and reduction and resource recovery are economic matters too. The continued lack of investment in resource recovery inhibits and discourages business development and innovation and reduces the potential for job creation. This is particularly the case in regional Queensland.

Recovering resources rather than wasting them in landfill provides an economic, social and environmental benefit. Wasting discarded materials in landfill is simply a cost to society and a waste of otherwise useful resources. In the case of cross-border waste, it means that Queensland is essentially paying the costs associated with landfilling NSW mixed wastes.

The Boomerang Alliance strongly urges you to recommend the introduction of a waste levy as the principle policy that will address cross-border waste transport, and drive a much needed new era in resource recovery in Queensland. Our organisation is happy to provide any further information on these matters and others that may assist your investigation.

Toby Hutcheon
Queensland Manager
Boomerang Alliance