

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into recycling and waste management

Echuca—Tuesday, 3 September 2019

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WITNESSES

Ms Janelle Bunfield, Manager, Works and Waste, and

Mr Ifte Hossain, Team Leader, Waste Services, Greater Shepparton City Council; and

Ms Brooke Pearce, Manager, Resource, Recovery and Education, and

Ms Debbie Wood, Director, Presentation and Assets, Greater Bendigo City Council.

The CHAIR: I would like to welcome our next set of witnesses: Ms Wood and Ms Pearce from Greater Bendigo City Council, and Ms Bunfield and Mr Hossain from Greater Shepparton City Council. Thank you very much for making yourselves available and presenting to the committee today.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you give today is protected by law. However, any comment repeated outside this hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript in the next few days.

The way we would like to run this session is to nominate one person to give us a presentation for about 5 minutes including any issues you want to talk to us about, then we will ask questions and see how we go. Again, welcome.

Ms BUNFIELD: My name is Janelle Bunfield, and I am the Manager of Works and Waste at Greater Shepparton City Council. I am joined today by Ifte Hossain, who is the Team Leader of Waste Services. Before we began I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of other communities that may be here today.

Greater Shepparton City Council is located in central Victoria, approximately 180 kilometres from Melbourne in the Goulburn Valley. Greater Shepparton is home to just over 66 000 people over a 2421 square kilometre radius. Greater Shepparton City Council own and operate three resource recovery centres and also operate a council-owned landfill. The landfill is known as the Cosgrove precinct and is situated approximately 17 kilometres east of Shepparton. The council's kerbside collection services comprise of general waste, recycling and a green organic service. Our FOGO service is by way of partnership with a contractor that delivers best practice and has diverted approximately 25 000 tonnes to date from landfill. This service was implemented in November 2015. Our Cosgrove precinct also has a 0.8 megawatt power plant, which utilises the gas to produce enough electricity to power 400 homes for one year.

Council has recently undertaken and completed a major expansion of our Cosgrove landfill in which we have invested \$20 million. We fully funded this ourselves. This new facility will ensure that the northern region of Victoria has landfill capacity going forward, and it also includes a \$1 million education facility. This newly built waste and education centre will help council and the Goulburn Valley region with their ongoing educational efforts for waste avoidance and reduced contaminations in kerbside waste streams. Greater Shepparton City Council is committed to the ongoing solutions for waste minimisation and diversion. Our landfill site offers a great opportunity for the development of either a regional sorting or processing facility. If this were to occur, council would require access to funding or investment by State and Federal Government or by way of a joint venture.

There needs to be less reliance on overseas markets and processing through appropriate regulation and regional investment. It is important that the funds collected through the landfill levy are fully invested in establishing regional sorting, processing and product manufacturing. This will result in the initiation and support for the research, development and implementation of new technologies going forward. Council want to have more emphasis on the overhaul of the current *Product Stewardship Act* and implementation of the circular economy where waste avoidance is prioritised. We also believe that waste policy should be amended to incentivise

Australian businesses which will make the products out of recyclable materials. Council also suggests that there are opportunities for more collaboration between state and federal organisations. At the local government level it is not feasible to combat this global recycling crisis, which requires new policy, investment and research for new technologies.

With China's National Sword policy Greater Shepparton City Council has incurred a considerable amount of financial impact. As a result of the changes our costs went from \$0 a tonne to \$120 a tonne. This equates to approximately \$900 000 per annum. To date we have not passed any of these costs on to our ratepayers, and we have absorbed these. If the recycling market volatility continues, council is concerned that there will be further increases in this, and therefore we will no longer be able to absorb those costs and we cannot avoid passing them on to our ratepayers. If the Government is to regulate or mandate certain contract arrangements, councils need to be given sufficient notice to allow enough time for the preparation of these new contracts and appropriate access to grant funding.

The CHAIR: A great presentation. If we are able to do the 5 minutes and then ask questions, because there will be a lot of similar issues between both councils, that would be great.

Ms PEARCE: Yes. I might just give a quick overview of Bendigo and where we are at. Obviously we echo very similar issues to Shepparton. We are located in the centre of Victoria, and we cover 3000 square kilometres. We have a growing population of 110 000 and are the state's third largest economy base in Victoria. We are a service and infrastructure centre for north-central Victoria and surrounded by 40 000 hectares of regional, state and national parkland. The City of Greater Bendigo is the largest municipality in the Loddon Campaspe region and takes a leadership role in regional initiatives and advocacy. We currently operate one landfill and three transfer stations, and we deliver a general waste recycling and FOGO collection service. We do have 32 identified decommissioned landfills across the municipality, and our one active landfill, which is Eaglehawk, is due to close in 21–22.

The City of Greater Bendigo spends approximately \$25 million per annum on waste, and this includes approximately \$5 million per annum that we pay in EPA levy. The city is charged, even though we are a rural township, a regional township, at a metro landfill levy rate, similar to metro councils. Eaglehawk landfill receives waste from City of Greater Bendigo residents and commercial operators, but we also receive a large quantity of waste that is out of our municipality and from across the region. It is anticipated, as I said, that there are three to four years life left at Eaglehawk. We have been investigating alternative options. However, with some uncertainty about what is happening within the rest of the state, it is very difficult at this stage to be making decisions, similar to what Gannawarra was saying before, about our feedstock and what the rest of the region is doing.

The CHAIR: Excellent. If I can kick it off with both councils here. You did say you have got the FOGO bins. So you have got green and food waste going into that?

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Where is that going?

Ms PEARCE: Ours goes to Biomix, and we collect approximately 12 000 tonnes per annum.

The CHAIR: So all your ratepayers basically just put it in that bin? None of that is going to landfill?

Ms PEARCE: We still have some green waste. Urban areas only across the 3000 square kilometres receive the organics collection. Rural properties, which were not included in the rollout, do not have that currently. We do have free green waste disposal—so not food but green waste only—at transfer stations and landfills. Recent audits have shown that from rural communities we are still getting about 40 per cent of green or organic waste coming through the general waste stream.

The CHAIR: And what about the metro area of Bendigo?

Ms PEARCE: It is very, very good. Our contamination rate is under 1 per cent for what is going to Biomix, and about 15 per cent of our general waste bin is green or organic.

The CHAIR: So basically what is going to the Eaglehawk landfill would be a minimum of organic or food waste. Is that right?

Ms PEARCE: Yes, very minimal.

The CHAIR: Is there any sort of methane-generating waste?

Ms PEARCE: Yes. Our gas extraction has reduced with the removal of the organics out of the waste stream. But we do get some. Most of the green waste we receive we treat and send off, resell or give out to the community. However, we are still getting some through the general waste system that is not sorted once collected. It is coming through kerbside.

The CHAIR: And when your Eaglehawk landfill reaches capacity in 2021, where would you plan—did you say somewhere in Deer Park or Ravenhall?

Ms PEARCE: No. There was a mention of that before. That might have been prior to our time. We do transport approximately 16 000 tonnes per annum to Patho landfill. That has been happening for—

The CHAIR: At?

Ms PEARCE: Patho, which is near Cohuna and owned by Veolia. That has been happening for at least 10 years that I am aware of. We will continue to do that to extend the life of Eaglehawk until we know what our future solution is going forward.

Mr HAYES: Just a quick question. Just on the FOGO, you say that goes to Biomix.

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

Mr HAYES: What happens there?

Ms PEARCE: That is an in-vessel composting system. Compost is created out of that, which is brought back to Bendigo and sold from local nurseries, but we also use it in our own parks and gardens. We send 12 000 tonnes there per annum, but they receive about 100 000 across the state and are treating 100 000 per annum.

Mr HAYES: So there is still a good market for it.

Ms PEARCE: Absolutely, yes.

Mr HAYES: And you just send whatever the mixture is—so much compost, so much green waste—they just take it and handle it from there.

Ms PEARCE: Correct.

Mr HAYES: And you use the compost within council, and the community takes the rest.

Ms PEARCE: Correct, yes. So we do have a system where we are providing free compost to schools, community groups and community gardens.

Mr HAYES: Fantastic.

Ms PEARCE: But a lot of the nurseries that are in Bendigo, they buy it back from Biomix and we promote it as Bendigo's organics compost. Then the general public are buying it from those local nurseries.

Mr HAYES: That is a great market.

The CHAIR: Can I just jump in. If any question has been asked and a different method is being used in a different council, please feel free to jump in.

Mr HAYES: If you have got any comments to make on that.

Mr HOSSAIN: In Shepparton we divert 7200 tonnes per annum. We introduced FOGO back in November 2015. In the beginning we were having some issues with contamination, but it has dropped to 2 to 3 per cent at the moment. Our collected material clean organics are going to Western Composting. To our knowledge it is one of the best facilities which got approved by the EPA, and there are some grey lines at the moment about what should be the standard for the final product in the compost material that we are talking about, because we are hearing that those products are not classified as fertiliser, but it is a good material for moisture conditioning material, like you can use it at wineries to keep the moisture. But you should not mix it with the soil because the end product still has pathogens in it—they do not get killed. It is not 100 per cent treated material.

So probably from a standard or policy point of view, the EPA might need to look into that, because at the moment there are no specific guidelines. When you hear from the council from Bendigo and from us, you might actually hear different views, but the thing is that there is no specific standard at the moment. So that is something we need to look at. We do not want to have a situation like what we are having with recycling materials. We are going to start diverting our organic material, and then if the product is not useful to mix with the soil—

Ms BATH: It is a waste.

Mr HOSSAIN: It will become waste. So we need to do our homework first before we actually encourage people to divert it from landfill.

The other thing is that we mentioned the cost of landfill. We have got a power plant which gets powered from our methane gas, landfill gas. It is not all bad with landfill, because landfill can also produce clean energy, which we are actually producing. We have been doing it since 2006. So probably more research needs to be done before we can actually say FOGO is good or landfill with a gas power plant is good. So there are some opportunities to research and then find out what exactly would be the best solution. There are a lot of ifs and buts, a lot of unknowns, from a technical point of view.

The CHAIR: That is where waste to energy could be an option with gasification or pyrolysis or digestion technology?

Mr HOSSAIN: Yes. Waste to energy is good, but it is a technology which has been utilised by most of the Scandinavian countries, and their weather pattern conditions, or geographical conditions, are different to Australian conditions. If you actually search on YouTube there are a lot of videos, like by the presenter from *War on Waste*. He went to those countries and an expert from that country actually said that waste-to-energy facilities produce energy or heat that is low-grade energy and it cannot be utilised for things like powering this facility. So it does not produce that level of energy—or efficient energy. Also it has got issues with dioxin material that goes into the air, although they said they put schemes, but how effective are they? There are questions. Scandinavian countries need heat because of their weather conditions, but in Australia, like here when it is summer, we do not really need that. Those actually do not run all around the year. It is only operational during the winter season. So we need to research a little bit more before we make our decision on waste to energy.

Ms BATH: Thank you very much for coming and presenting today. Janelle, you spoke earlier in your first commentary around a regional recycling sorting facility—and Bendigo might like to jump in on this one as well. What are you thinking, what are your needs and what support from government would you like to see to explore that regional sorting facility, because I imagine, unlike some councils and some shires, you do have economy of scale in both Bendigo and Shepparton; there is the volume there.

Ms BUNFIELD: I guess with Shepparton being the bigger municipality around the Goulburn Valley we have got space at Cosgrove, so do we become the hub and have a regional MRF, or are we at the other end of the scale where we become a processing facility, so we pelletise and granulise so that it can then be off to the end user or end market, so to speak? So I guess that is where we want to be able to have that collaboration and have those discussions about what would be best. Do we continue having our recycled products go to MRFs in Melbourne, and I guess leave that step out for us, and we become not so much the sorting but the processing, or do we go the other way and sort our own material and that of neighbouring councils, and then have to try and find somewhere for that product to go?

Ms BATH: So what would you need to do to start to fill in, I guess, the understanding around the direction that you would like to take?

Ms BUNFIELD: I guess some commitment in terms of additional funds. To date, Shepparton has done what it has on its own in terms of our current landfill site. If there was the opportunity for a joint venture so we could see where the costs are going to be shared—because I do not think it is viable for council to sit back and try to do it all on its own.

Ms BATH: And you notice that there was \$900 000 per annum, from zero to that, with respect to your new requirements?

Ms BUNFIELD: Yes, it has been substantive. The fact is that we have absorbed that for the last few years. It is only going to get harder with rate capping and the like, and if waste becomes an essential service, well, then there are going to be further restrictions in terms of us being able to carry the burden going forward.

Ms TAYLOR: I have got this ideal vision in my head that we get to a point that we just do not have landfill. So to get to that point what do you see as the key pillars of changing what we have now? We have the organic waste, or however it is, in a format that is strictly controlled, pursuant to what you are saying there in your recommendations, which make perfect sense. You have recycled elements, but even within that you may have certain plastics which can never break down, and that is a concern to me. I am thinking about whether we streamline and perhaps—I do not want to put words in your mouth; I am just saying—we streamline the plastics. Why have five if only two are recyclable? What is your vision on that?

Ms PEARCE: Within our waste strategy, since 2014 our strategy has indicated that there will be no further landfills in our municipality. So that is our strategy. We also work on the One Planet framework, which also focuses on zero waste. Per annum the City of Greater Bendigo dedicates \$300 000 to education, and that is focused mainly on behavioural change and consumerism. Trying to take a different approach that, yes, there are some things where it is out of our control—you mentioned before about a regional MRF or taking on particular aspects of waste management. This is where, with the executive management team in council, we are trying to strip back and say, ‘What is council’s core business?’. We are not really sure that is our core business to be building a MRF for our area or whether it is just recyclables. Currently we have not-for-profit supported workers who do that within our home town, so we want to continue supporting that business. We do not have experts who are aware of commodities and pricing—and where it should go and who should do this—but we certainly do have a focus on procurement, recycled content within our procurement, ensuring that we are committing to the education campaign and behavioural change, and we also continue to advocate to State and Federal Government in regard to packaging and recycled content within their own policies to ensure that that whole circular economy is starting and finishing, rather than just starting and not continuing to go around. Does that answer your question?

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. Because I think it was trying to unpack it all, but really, to my mind, the packaging thing—

Ms PEARCE: Absolutely.

Ms TAYLOR: And it needs to be accessible and easy for people.

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

Ms TAYLOR: Now, it is a very simple statement to make in a very complex world, but ultimately consumers need a bit of help along the way, I think.

Ms PEARCE: Yes, and big businesses are starting to make calls. You may have seen, last week, Mattel have made a decision that they will no longer have plastic package in their toys, which is massive. That is huge.

Ms TAYLOR: That is very good.

Ms PEARCE: So there will still be plastic within their toys but not in their packaging, and that is a huge step that manufacturers need to make themselves, but we need to encourage them to be doing that.

Ms TERPSTRA: Just on the FOGO side of it, maybe you could give me an idea, in terms of your experience—I mean, I myself was always someone who thought, ‘My vegie scraps go in the compost bin in the kitchen, and they go in the compost for the garden’—have you seen a change in behaviour around that over years? And why you think that has changed?

Ms PEARCE: As I mentioned before, we have a really significant education program. We had a trial before the FOGO was fully implemented. So we played with frequency of collection et cetera, and we did a lot of community consultation and gained a lot of feedback before fully rolling out the implementation. Huge behavioural change and awareness—we visited 84 schools last year; we have a focused education campaign with kids, and they absolutely love it. And they are the ones that take it home to the parents or the guardians and say, ‘No, this should actually go here’.

So there has certainly been a behavioural change. The consistency in our tonnage that we retrieve—there has been no decrease; it has only been increasing since implementation in 2015. And people are seeing that it is actually coming back to the community and that there are benefits for that. So continuing to talk about it and bringing it into schools—share the compost, community groups. We are seeing a real change.

Ms TERPSTRA: But do you think that maybe—because with recycling, many, many years ago there were huge education campaigns about what could go in the recycling bin and what could not. I cannot quite recall whether composting formed part of that discussion, but I am actually quite surprised to hear that people are not composting their stuff at home. So that is why I am asking you to comment on what has changed, do you think, over the years, because it was certainly a central focus to always put your vegie scraps and whatever in your compost bin. So what do you think has changed? Is it a lack of education there, or focus? What do you think it is?

Ms WOOD: So, as part of it, also had an exemption process. So people who had compost or chickens or things like that, where they were going to use it at home, do not have a green bin, and we check that. So we are still encouraging that to happen in the municipality. But I think it is ease. People will just go, ‘Well, it’s easy. We’ve got the green bin. We’ll put it into there’. But having said that we have got the green bin, we are still not encouraging people to use the old methods of composting at home. We have done some composting education with Costa who came down to Elmore, so we are trying to educate as well. It is not all about putting things in the green bin, but it is also about using it at home as well.

Ms PEARCE: We are also providing subsidised worm farms or compost bins through Compost Revolution for those rural communities, and Costa spoke a lot about that on the education day. We are still trying to—that would be our ideal. But unfortunately I think, as Debbie said, for convenience people like it at their doorstep—and take it away.

Dr RATNAM: Thank you so much for both of your submissions—written submissions and all submissions here today. They are very, very helpful. A quick question: I think you mentioned, for Shepparton, that you are with Visy—is that right—with recycling? Is that not your—

Ms BUNFIELD: No. So our kerbside collection contractor has recently been novated to Veolia. But part of that contract was that there was an agreement that Visy would take the recycled products, so that is still the case even though the contract has been novated.

Dr RATNAM: Right, okay. And is that the same for you as well?

Ms PEARCE: We are with J. J. Richards in Bendigo, but then they are with Visy. Yes.

Dr RATNAM: In terms of the impact of the China sword policy and renegotiating contracts, I think you have mentioned in your submission that there is an increased cost for kerbside recycling. Can you talk through any other issues you have had with contract negotiations? We have heard previously as well about the transparency of what is going to happen with recycled materials. Can you speak a little bit about whether you have been able to find out where your recyclables are going—whether they are local or overseas markets?

Ms PEARCE: Yes. With JJ Richards we have entered a service agreement that is in line with our kerbside collection contract, so we have created an agreement with them from council to JJs. It used to be that you would

go through the collector and then they would organise a disposal. We have done that because we want the transparency and we want the communication with JJs directly so that we can work on our education together. They have been very transparent. Part of our contract really, I guess, was very open-book terms. We want an understanding of the breakdown of the material that they are receiving—where it is going, the cost associated with where it is going. If there is an increase or a decrease in the commodity et cetera, then that needs to come back to us and we would pay less et cetera. So we do have a capped amount for a maximum disposal tonnage, but if there is a decrease or if the commodity is more sought after et cetera, then we also are able to pay less to dispose of that.

Dr RATNAM: Is that a similar situation for you?

Ms BUNFIELD: Similar. However, as part of the novation process from Wheelie Waste to Veolia we did ask for more around that transparency side of things because we were not getting that. We did not know where our product was going or what the actual cost was associated with that. So we formed that as part of our novating the contract to Veolia that there is more transparency around the final destination of our recycling products.

Dr RATNAM: It is very interesting in terms of a template that potentially other councils will be able to use as well. That is where this Inquiry could play a role in terms of using some best practice models that can be shared with councils who are having trouble; for example, if they are going through their MRF and the information stops there and they are not able to go to the supplier.

In terms of the ongoing impact, is the cost now for the ongoing impact or is it how much you have to pay for recyclables to be recouped?

Ms BUNFIELD: From a financial point of view, yes. But if I think about the lack of trust that our ratepayers now have in the industry itself, whilst with SKM we have not been directly impacted, our ratepayers are ringing all the time: 'Is my recycle bin going to landfill?', 'What's happening to my product?'. There is just no trust in the system.

Dr RATNAM: That is very interesting.

The CHAIR: Is any of your product going to landfill, do you know? You do not know or—

Ms BUNFIELD: Do not know. Well, we are assuming no.

Mr HAYES: Whereas you know that you have not got—

Ms PEARCE: The last update we had was 14 per cent of contamination within our kerbside recycling stream, and that is landfill because it is contaminated.

Dr RATNAM: Greater Shepparton, you talked about product stewardship and asking the parliamentary Inquiry to look at product stewardship. Can you talk to us a little bit about the thinking there and some ideas you might have there and how it would help?

Mr HOSSAIN: We as a society now actually think that local government is the main organisation responsible for sorting out this waste issue, but product stewardship is one thing that can be designed to bring back that ownership to the manufacturers. Every item that gets generated has got an end destination—how it is going to be re-used or recycled. If it is just council, it is not possible for a council to actually do all of that recycling with a limited budget. Obviously, as Bendigo mentioned, we are not a business organisation. Although we can actually have a joint MRF, we are not a business player; we are local government. So there are things to think about. But product stewardship can help. When we say 'electronic waste ban', it is not just one simple item. This is electronic waste, but there are mobiles which are different to other waste, so it does not all go to the same processing facility. It should go to different processing facilities to be reproduced or re-used. For council it is really hard to actually identify how it should be done because we are not the experts. That is that is why product stewardship should come in. Those manufacturers and also the retailers—JB Hi-Fi, Harvey Norman—should take ownership because they are selling the products. They should have a bit of responsibility for when it is going to end its design life—how it is going to be handled—rather than just putting it in a council

bin and thinking they will sort it out. It is not possible for us. Product stewardship can actually distribute the responsibility. Also product stewardship is going to make for less contamination, and it will be better for the environment because the responsibility is going to fall to those who are experts in that field. And it is not just e-waste; it could be plastic waste, because there are so many types of plastic nowadays that it is really hard to know which one is recyclable, because there are eight types of plastics.

Ms TAYLOR: Eight.

Mr HOSSAIN: It could be more. So technology is changing and our lifestyle is changing as well. The packaged food that we buy from supermarkets—because of people’s lifestyle, people just throw it into the bin thinking that it is food waste. The sausages that they are buying, the packaging, they still think someone is going to take it away. But when it goes to the processing facility it is not possible for those guys to actually rip off and take the plastic out. It is not realistic, so it all becomes landfill waste. Even if only 5 per cent of the total volume would be contamination, because of that unrealistic way of sorting it out it all goes to the landfill. That is why we need to think about our packaging policy, which is due to have an update I think in 2022, if I am not mistaken. So that is one thing. And there is no silver bullet for this waste problem. It should be viewed and should be taken into consideration. Each waste stream has got a different solution. When I say each waste stream I am not saying only recyclable items. In recyclable items there are hundreds of subitems, so we need to think about it that way.

Also, we need to think about what should be our end market. If zero contamination will have those collective materials, then what are we going to do? If we try to reproduce out of that collective material, just think about this glass: if it costs \$1 to import from overseas and if it takes \$1.50 to reproduce from collected glass material, it is never going to get sold. So policy-wise, if we do not get this subsidised and give some cash incentive to those manufacturers who are going to use those recyclable materials, it is never going to work. We can do the circular economy, you can do everything, but at the end of the day it is not going to work, and that is why SKM is falling apart—because they are running out of market. We need to think about how much we can manage. Here we have got probably 20, 30 people. If we have 120 people in this room, we cannot manage, so we need to find out the total limit of our waste generation, how much we can handle or reproduce, and then we can think about the technology and stuff. So we need to do a closed loop rather than just from A to B and then leave it for others.

Dr RATNAM: Can I ask on that, what do you think the Government’s role is in terms of that market stimulation? Because that is a real issue that we do not have markets for those products. Do you think there is a role for State Government in that, and what should it be?

Mr HOSSAIN: Yes, it is just not State Government; it is probably Federal Government as well, because it is a global crisis. It does not end on the bottom.

Dr RATNAM: What kind of things do you think would help?

Mr HOSSAIN: There is no short-term solution. We need to be honest with that. The thing is that waste avoidance is the main key at the moment, because if we produce less waste, our problem will be smaller. It is simple math. So waste education is very important. We should put more emphasis on waste education. Our lifestyle has changed. Think about 20 years ago when you used to go to buy your vegies, how much packaging you used to have and now how much packaging we have. If we just say that manufacturers are going to use less plastic for their packaging, they just do what the consumer wants to have. We need to think about individuals rather than just those manufacturers and producers, because they are going to produce what we want.

Mr HAYES: Just on that, you see education as being a big part of it. Are you interested in banning single-use plastics and packaging in particular?

Mr HOSSAIN: Definitely banning single-use plastic is going to help. But as I said, there is no silver bullet, and those plastics are not really the number one problem. Just to give you an idea, those single-use plastics, the thickness of those plastics are very, very thin compared to now that Coles and Woolies have got re-usable plastic. Those are a lot thicker and will take a lot more to decompose compared to those single-use plastics, so there are signs—

Mr HAYES: But those bags are single use too, though, wouldn't you say?

Mr HOSSAIN: Those are re-usable, so you can use it five, 10, 20 times.

Mr HAYES: Oh, you can use it yourself again, but eventually they end up in the waste stream.

Mr HOSSAIN: Yes, and it will take a lot longer, probably 10 to 20 times more time, to decompose.

Mr HAYES: Yes, I would call them single use all the same. Could I just ask another one while I am going? You were talking about facilities—industries and sharing facilities—between councils and stimulating local industries. Is council in any position to do an economic analysis of that at the moment, or would that be seen as being done on a much wider basis? You would have to have regional solutions so the analysis would have to be done on individual regions. How would you see that being done?

Mr HOSSAIN: For regional councils like us, even if we are actually a city council, we are not generating that much volume for a MRF. A MRF requests around 600 000 tonnes or more than that, 1 million tonnes, for a massive facility, and it requests millions of dollars, which is not possible. And that is not the solution. The solution should be how we can reduce those volumes and the ownership of each individual. As residents we have got the responsibility as to whether we can minimise our own waste generation. If we can do that, then our problem will be a lot less than what we are having at the moment.

I am really glad to see that Infrastructure Victoria has taken the lead role to do the feasibility study, because they are probably the right organisation to know what infrastructure should be needed. At the moment the MRFs that we know—Visy or SKM—are just sorting facilities; they are not actually reproducers. So the word 'recycling' is actually misleading. It is not reproducing. They are just sorting facilities on a bigger scale. They are not really recyclers.

Ms BATH: A question for both Shepparton and Bendigo. I will just raise that in Bendigo you spoke about container deposit schemes. We heard earlier that there was some concern that potentially for the smaller councils, where there is need for a redirection of aluminium or if there was on an individual basis a redirection of aluminium material, that would impact on current activities there. What is your opinion? I think you were in favour of a deposit scheme. But what adjustments would you have to make, or is it all guns blazing?

Ms PEARCE: That is a very good question.

Ms BATH: You can take it on notice.

Ms PEARCE: Did you want to answer that from a council perspective?

Ms WOOD: Well, we have got a notice of motion from council that it will support the container deposit scheme, so that is obviously what we are here to say. I am not sure about the other part of your question, about what we would have to alter.

Ms PEARCE: Yes, I guess we would need to be aware of the State Government's plans, and we would really need sufficient time frames.

Ms BATH: Lead time.

Ms PEARCE: Yes. To understand the impact we would need data from other states to work out what exactly is being taken into the container deposit schemes, where it is going, how many people are utilising it and what type of tonnages they are taking there. There could be a significant shift in regard to our contract obligations that we currently hold with not only our processor, who may lose some of that material and rely on that, but also our collections. So there may be some impacts on council, but there also could be some cost efficiencies for ratepayers, which is really important for us. So you are right, lead time and some consultation and discussions as well as data from other states would be very beneficial, yes.

Ms BUNFIELD: I agree with Bendigo. However, I think it is all well and good to take it out of the kerbside bin and put it in a container deposit scheme, but there has still got to be an end market for that product. It is basically a bandaid fix. You have got to have someone to take that product, and then where does it go? What

does it get turned into? That is my only concern. I grew up in Canberra, and I remember as a kid growing up that we had the divider in the recycling bin, and the glass was separated from the plastic and the cardboard. Are we better off looking at that being an option first? I do not know.

Ms BATH: Yes, I appreciate your comment. One other one, if I can indulge, Chair. You both mentioned a very strong emphasis on education in both councils. I am not sure who, and I do not think I made it up, but there was discussion around an app in terms of education. It might have been from Bendigo or Shepparton. But I think we all have one of these now, mobile phones, and—‘What is five again? What is that five number?’. I am just toying with the idea. Is that something that would be of use?

Ms PEARCE: Our waste and resource recovery group, so Loddon Mallee, they have their own app, which they roll out to the municipalities across that region which has an A to Z guide basically. So you can look up the item that you are referring to. They have their collection days on there for you based on your address in your shire because it gives you a reminder. You get reminders on your phone: ‘Put your bins out tonight’. So it is a great app. The problem is they are a small organisation and actually getting that out there and people using it and getting on board can be really challenging for them. But that technology is certainly there and available. I do not know if it is in other regions, but it is in ours and we do promote it and we do get good feedback about it.

Ms BATH: But that could also be a role for State Government and part of the Sustainability Fund.

Ms PEARCE: Absolutely.

Mr HAYES: Absolutely, and I like the idea of aiming the education at kids too because they force the parents to do the right things.

Ms PEARCE: And they make them accountable—and it is really successful.

Mr HAYES: And I think it is a good way of restoring confidence in the recycling system.

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

Dr RATNAM: Can I ask one more question? Just a question on recyclable content in terms of what your councils might be canvassing around that and what would help from an overall framework and policy perspective. Some councils are using recycled content for roads and those sort of materials. Do you have any feedback or observations about how that is working? You might have heard some councils are doing that. Do your councils do that? Do you all have mandatory recycled content targets in your infrastructure rollout? Would you like it? What would you like from the State Government from that?

Ms PEARCE: So we are working on adjusting our procurement policy at the moment. One of the biggest challenges for us has been that gaining access to that recycled content—let us use asphalt as an example—is based in Melbourne. So for us the transporting costs but also transporting through townships to get to us has an environmental impact. We need to weigh that up against why are those plants not available in Bendigo—we are a reasonable sized city—and why are they not there to actually feed into other small townships that are around us? So that is one of the biggest issues. We are certainly passionate about utilising recycled content in our projects. We are just about to do the first project for one of the large companies in Victoria with 50 000 recycled bottles in asphalt and 4000 glass stubbies, and that is really exciting, but that should have happened a long time ago. So we really need some direction and policy, I believe, from State and Federal Government to say, ‘This is our expectation, and if we want this circular economy to continue as Shepparton’s voice to that recycling, then this is a requirement from you as a local government’. It is going to be more expensive, and how do we manage that? Do we put that cost back onto ratepayers or do we make sure that industry is available to provide that at a costly price so that we can continue to use it?

Ms WOOD: I think it is a bit of state leadership, and I know RRV is doing a bit of work in recycled content and we utilise their specifications, which is good—that they are sharing that sort of information. The research and the development is I think something the State Government, the Federal Government, could really help us with because we do not have the expertise to do that or we do not necessarily have the money to do that. So I think that if the State Government is doing research and development on recycled content in whatever—
asphalt—that would help us. I also think that just leadership in the State Government. We have got it now with

council, and Brooke mentioned the policy where we are saying we will have to have a percentage of recycled material in our products. I think that policy will be what leads change, but we also have to have the commodity there to use within that, which we do find a challenge because we do not have that much volume of recycled glass to put into our asphalt, so there is some work around that.

Mr HAYES: That is what I was getting at. It would have to be a region-by-region examination of transport costs and what needs to be in your procurement policies and things like that.

Ms WOOD: And we have companies in Bendigo that can do that, and maybe there is some assistance for those type of companies as well to help with them setting up their business to be able to get more recycled material as well.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Any more questions?

Dr RATNAM: One more question. Thank you—very interesting. Just in terms of your percentages that you are able to divert from landfill, because you both have got food organics now, one of your councils is about 46 per cent, so you have diverted 46 per cent away from landfill. Is that the same for both of you in terms of your recovery?

Mr HOSSAIN: More than 50 per cent.

Dr RATNAM: You are more than 50 per cent. What are the barriers to lifting that? You have got FOGO in there as well. What are the next steps to increasing that percentage that is diverted from landfill?

Mr HOSSAIN: A couple of things: obviously education, and we have got FOGO here, but new tenants—people who come from other councils who do not have FOGO—do not understand what FOGO is so they are still putting their stuff into landfill bins, so that that is one thing. The other one is contamination. To give an example, if we have got 20 tonnes of organics but only get 1 tonne of contamination, that whole load can be diverted to landfill, so that is a huge issue—contamination.

Ms BATH: And that is where the education comes in.

Mr HOSSAIN: Exactly.

Dr RATNAM: And potentially bin streams. Organics is a bit different. It is education since it is going into that bin, but then the separated—more bins to be able to actually separate out some of the materials. Have you all contemplated that? Or what do you all think about that?

Mr HOSSAIN: From a three-bin system to four or more bins? It is a good idea, at the same time when you think about carbon footprint and the resources, you will have to have a separate truck to collect those, so that is going to have more of a carbon footprint, so you need to think about the whole thing.

Ms WOOD: I was just going to add to that. Probably for us education is one—we need to roll it out throughout our municipality, and we have not done that yet, so trying to touch everyone we will get a lot more out—as well as frequency. At the moment we pick up our bin fortnightly, our FOGO bin. I think if we started to pick that up weekly, we might see some change in behaviours, and if we started to pick up our red bin—general waste—fortnightly, I think that would change the behaviour as well. We are not doing that at the moment. And also commercial: we are rolling out a trial project at the moment through our commercial businesses where we have given them a little caddy for their waste. I think that there is real opportunity there for us to get into restaurants and food businesses to try and make sure that their waste goes into FOGO as well, but that is a cost for us to do that as well.

Ms PEARCE: It has been really successful. We have also implemented it into schools, which we had not initially. That has been a process of asking them if they want to be involved, and they do, which is great, because a lot of schools now have chickens and vegie gardens and all these types of things. I just wanted to add quickly: when you are referring to diversion from landfill, not just with FOGO, one of the main issues for us is commercial and industrial in general—so skip bin-type operators, companies, builders, construction. There is no requirement for that type of industry to sort their waste, which has many other uses. It is basically all placed

into a skip and then sent to landfill, and that is thousands of tonnes per year. That is our biggest challenge: trying to (a) find a re-use for that commodity locally and then having the resources to actually separate that and the space to separate that, because we do not.

The CHAIR: That has taken off in Melbourne but it has not taken off in the regions—that is the point you are making?

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

Ms BUNFIELD: Just to add to that, a prime example: one of the leading supermarkets in our area is currently having a revamp. A bin was loaded yesterday; we were told it was general waste. It got to our landfill and it was full of steel, so stuff that could have been—

The CHAIR: Recycled.

Ms BUNFIELD: Yes, and it was not. Is it a point that it has to form part of private industry contracts when they engage?

The CHAIR: Is that where we are looking at a statewide policy about coming up from the top, saying, ‘There’s the general waste’, and prescribing what you need to do—

Ms PEARCE: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: with each particular waste and how you deal with it—

Ms PEARCE: Yes.

The CHAIR: and the matter of enforcing that? It is a bit like what the Chinese have done with the national Chinese policy: the central government has basically implemented a statewide policy, and that is why everyone is complying. So basically there is something to learn from.

Mr HOSSAIN: One thing I wanted to add on this: in order to divert that commercial waste, there are a couple of things we can actually do. One is a levy at the landfill, if we introduce a levy. That will make them do sorting, because if they sort, then that will be commercially—

The CHAIR: That is a good point.

Mr HOSSAIN: So that is one thing that they can do. The other thing: cash incentives or any other policy which can encourage them to divert that waste—

The CHAIR: Divert from landfill.

Mr HOSSAIN: The other thing which the EPA can also do, at the moment there is a tendency for a commercial waste producer to send their stuff to Melbourne, like 2 hours drive one way, which produces a lot more carbon footprint. So if we can, through our policy, restrict the travel of waste—like in New South Wales it used to be that it all went to Queensland.

The CHAIR: Queensland.

Mr HOSSAIN: To Queensland, exactly. That is still happening in Victoria. They are sending their stuff to cheaper landfill, so if we restrict that and waste can travel, say, ‘X-kilometres’ or ‘Y-kilometres’ and also a levy, then that could have a positive impact.

The CHAIR: So you support having a standard levy throughout the state or a national levy to be consistent, wherever you are you pay the same levy?

Mr HOSSAIN: It can be that way, and also if we can put restrictions on travelling, how much it can travel, then that will reduce.

The CHAIR: Excellent. On that note, that brings us to 2.30. Thank you very much to both of you. Your presentations have been great, and it was great to hear from you about the issues you are doing and the issues you are facing. So thank you very much.

Ms PEARCE: Thank you for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.