

CORRECTED VERSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Subcommittee

Inquiry into Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011

Melbourne — 17 November 2011

Members

Ms S. Pennicuik
Mrs I. Peulich

Mr J. Scheffer
Mr L. Tarlamis

Chair: Mrs I. Peulich

Staff

Secretary: Mr K. Delaney

Witnesses

Ms K. Richards, chair, board of management,

Mr B. West, secretary and public officer, Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria.

The CHAIR — Welcome, Mr West and Ms Richards, to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning Legislation Committee. Today's hearing is obviously in relation to the inquiry into the Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011. I welcome you on behalf of your organisation and remind you that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the Legislative Council standing orders. You are protected against any action for what you say here today, but obviously when you step out of the room that part of parliamentary privilege does not offer you protection.

All evidence is being recorded by Hansard staff, and you will be provided with a copy of the proof version in three days or thereabouts. You will have a couple of days to correct any typographical errors and return for ultimate release on our website. We have allowed about 5 to 10 minutes — or as many minutes as you need — for you to make a presentation. The rest of the time is available for committee members to ask questions. We ask that you first of all begin by introducing yourselves, providing the business address of your organisation and stating whether you are here in a private capacity or on behalf of your organisation.

Ms RICHARDS — I am Kirsty Richards, the chair of Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria.

Mr WEST — I am the secretary and public officer. Our registered address is care of Urban Workshop, level 28, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, which is also the registered address of Sustainability Victoria.

The CHAIR — Ms Richards, is that also your address? Would you state that for the purpose of protocol and the transcript?

Ms RICHARDS — It is level 28, 50 Lonsdale Street — the office of Sustainability Victoria in Melbourne.

The CHAIR — Would you like to begin your presentation?

Ms RICHARDS — KABV has a long and strong history with litter. We started when Dame Phyllis Frost was driving a little white Datsun, got covered in litter by a local truck, stormed home, went and stood in front of Henry Bolte and said, 'We need a litter program'. That is where it started. That was 44 years ago two days ago. From that, it has moved from just litter into sustainability — water, energy conservation, community pride and heritage. Through all that, you have got a building of community and individual resilience and core strength sustainability. It is that core sustainability that means you can do more than the programs work with.

We have been working with the Victorian government and with industry on their approaches to reducing litter of all types — that is, education, infrastructure and enforcement. On education, there is the Do the Right Thing message and that kind of thing. With infrastructure it is bins — lots of them in the right place in the right design. Enforcement is the EPA's lively litter ads. That is on the side to what we mainly do.

I will give you some examples of our programs. A small program is like reducing litter at a footy ground. It has got support from the packaging industry to put in bins with the Do the Right Thing message. We put bins everywhere. There is signage in the bar and signage on the bins. A man walks past with his son and sees a sign that says 'Do the Right Thing'. 'Oh! Do the right thing', his son says — 'Oh! Do the right thing' — and puts his litter in the bin. It works. You have got the communication — the message. Make it easy, have the bin there, make it targeted and it will happen — they will do it. The success of this approach, if you have read the submission, is shown in those numbers. There is less litter in amount and volume in Victoria than there is in South Australia, where they have a container deposit scheme.

I will give you some other examples of how well this works in building sustainability so that people can do more. There is an old people's home. They adopted their beach to make it cleaner, with less litter. They got support for signage and bins through the packaging industry, and by doing that they became more socially, mentally and physically healthier. You could not buy that.

One of the awards came through from the Bendigo high school. They had a year of adopting sustainability litter and recycling practices. That affected the whole school — it reduced the litter, increased recycling twofold and reduced waste by a third, and they reduced absenteeism by half. With this program, which attacks all types of litter with a culture, you can do far more than you think you can. That is why I am saying that this approach that tackles all types of packaging and builds a culture is more effective than a container deposit scheme. We need to use the RIS and get a cost-benefit analysis of the right program to see what will get the best result for Victoria.

In my submission I used the report from the EPHC to say that an advanced disposal fee would be the best way to go, under the table they had developed, which showed the best benefit for the least cost — an advanced disposal fee and work in the hospitality and retail area. An advanced disposal fee is basically what the packaging industry has already put in place in a sense, because they get contributions from their members to fund the bins, the programs, the project and the signage. It is, if you like, one way of using that idea of an advanced disposal fee — using that support from the packaging industry along with programs in the retail and hospitality sectors to improve recycling.

The CHAIR — Mr West, would you like to add anything?

Mr WEST — I have read the protocol, and you have asked for one. No, I concur with that; I see it, but we need to get it right. Dame Phyllis came into this very building and, as Kirsty said, said ‘I want to start an anti-litter campaign’. Henry Bolte thought an anti-litter campaign was not good politics, but what we have 44 years on are programs that show that people can get it right — and we have got it right. We have a good mix across this state where we have less litter and more recycling than a state that actually has a CDL. Those figures are readily available through the Keep Australia Beautiful national litter index, and those figures stand up.

Mr SCHEFFER — Let us accept what you say about how well we are doing in disposal and recycling materials, but that does not mean it could not be improved. We may have it right, but we could get it more right.

Ms RICHARDS — I agree entirely.

Mr SCHEFFER — How would a container deposit scheme harm the successes that we are making? How would it drag it back, if that is what you are saying?

Ms RICHARDS — It would duplicate some of the infrastructure and be an extra cost. It would duplicate costs and infrastructure out there. I think it would harm it because people are now doing it because they have adopted the culture and the approach. The minute you bring money into it, you can change the whole concentration. I think the problem in South Australia at the moment is — you might have seen from the litter figures — that they will pick up what gives them money and they will leave the rest. Instinctively a CDS sounds the best way to go, but when you look at the results, it retards it. People concentrate on what gets money.

Mr SCHEFFER — That can be demonstrated, can it, that people leave the rest?

Ms RICHARDS — From the litter figures, yes, they do. There are less beverage containers in South Australia than almost anywhere else, but there is more of everything else. They have really concentrated on what gets them money. Imagine if you taught someone to take out the rubbish, to cook, to love you — whatever — or you paid them. If you took away the money, what would last the longest?

Mr SCHEFFER — Just one last thing: in public policy generally we know that it is never just a one-strategy gig. You can have an education program and a behaviour change program, but you can also have tax incentives, you can have monetary incentives, you can have legislative restrictions and you can have a range of tools that governments and communities can use to change people’s behaviour.

Ms RICHARDS — Yes, you would be doubling up on some of the infrastructure. You would take some of the recycling out of the recycling scheme currently, so you would reduce the money going into councils.

The CHAIR — You referred earlier to the Keep Australia Beautiful litter index. Could you just explain how that is compiled?

Ms RICHARDS — How long has it been running?

Mr WEST — It has probably been going at least 15 years, but it has certainly come to the fore more recently, and people are starting to use it as a tool.

The CHAIR — And we have in debate. It is obviously very useful information. If you are not able to give us an answer — —

Mr WEST — I would say it is approximately 15 years. I have been involved in Keep Australia Beautiful for 21, and certainly for the last 15 — councils are now using it as well, particularly in the Melbourne metropolitan

area. At the moment Monash is the benchmark, and other councils are saying, 'If Monash can do it, then we have to see if we can do it better'.

The CHAIR — Are you able to maybe just explain why Monash might be the benchmark? What is it they are doing that — —

Mr WEST — I have one answer to that: I live there. I think they have a very good environmental program. They have certainly been a bit controversial in that they want to take cigarette butts out of playgrounds, and to that end they have put the bins there to make sure that playgrounds are butt free. Their shopping strip — and I use Glen Waverley, which is sort of like the old Chadstone. Chadstone used to be Glen Waverley. It has sort of grown in the last 50-odd years. They have the right approach. Not only that, their ratepayers seem to be getting behind them. You have their central reserves — whenever you have something that is centrally reserved there are plenty of bins there, and there are people walking around to make sure that people are getting the message. I travel around through this organisation as a judge, and the message is getting through. If you present it cleanly or you have a tidy town — and we are all familiar with that — people are less likely to litter and more likely to put it in the bin and recycle than drop it.

I can give a classic example of that through another hat that I wear. At Puffing Billy, which we all know is an icon of the state, we run a fire patrol each year for the summer season. It is not what the train does; it is what the general public does. I said to this guy, 'I would like to come out one night and just pick up all this rubbish, because one day we are going to miss the fire'. We started out and we ran what we call the rubbish patrol. We have an infamous train called the Garbagelander — no offence to the Gulflander. We did that for five years, and the business plan was presented cleanly. The public is less likely to drop.

We also make an announcement every time those trains depart a station that if you have any litter or recyclables, please use the bins provided on the platforms or simply leave it in the train. Since 1995 Puffing Billy has not run a rubbish patrol, and yet in our figures for the last financial year — and the report was tabled before the house of this Parliament in August — we carried 276 000 passengers last year, but we did not run a rubbish patrol because people are getting the message.

The CHAIR — And communicating those messages and the reminders — timely reminders — are really important. Could I say that, coming from an education background, I have observed that teachers who use those timely reminders at the end of a school day or at the end of a period, just reminding children to pick up rubbish and throw it in the bin, have typically inculcated that attitude that you have to actually not litter your environment. Those who do not care will typically end up with a lot more rubbish on the carpet and in the room.

Do we actually do enough of those reminders? You say, 'Do the right thing'. We actually have a large number of new arrivals where that is not part and parcel of their everyday life. 'Do the right thing' is a good message to those who are already aware of the campaign and what it means to do the right thing. Are we doing enough in terms of communicating the basic message not to litter?

Ms RICHARDS — There is a great example — a program that won an award at the Keep Australia Beautiful awards recently. It was working with a high-rise up in Moonee Ponds. They did one section. He put in bins, he got signs in different languages — 'Do the right thing', which does not really always translate as 'Do the right thing' — he organised communication through the local newsletter and through the meetings, and it worked exceedingly well. They even got awards for people they saw putting litter in the bin. That worked so well in that one particular area that they are spreading it out to 800 other apartments. So you can do it, but you need the right message, prompts and champions if necessary. Keep on reminding them and rewarding them.

The CHAIR — Who does that responsibility ultimately fall upon? Obviously we want to share that so that it becomes everyone's responsibility, but in terms of coordinating those campaigns and in terms of getting the translations into other languages, who drives that or who should drive that?

Ms RICHARDS — I think you need champions in government like Sustainability Victoria or Keep Australia Beautiful. You need to find a champion within local government or that area. You can demonstrate it works and spell out the benefits in financial terms or whatever is going to move other people — financial, social, less disruption, more involvement and more engagement with youth. Spell out the benefits and other people will take it up, but you need to find the right champions in each area.

Ms PENNICUIK — If I could return to Mrs Peulich's earlier question, which was about how your index is compiled, the only answer I heard you give was that it has been going about 15 years.

Ms RICHARDS — Sorry, yes. It was set up with a research company. They picked particular areas in each state that reflect types of activity. There will be a beach, a park and a main road — that kind of thing. In each state they do regular pick-ups of litter in the same places. They do not disclose where the places are. You can compare what has happened over time in those areas. Because they do not publicise it, you do not get people trying to distort the figures.

Mr WEST — They are real figures.

Ms RICHARDS — Interestingly, there is usually more litter in May.

The CHAIR — Why is that?

Ms RICHARDS — I do not know. It is the start of winter.

Mr WEST — That is why it is a good indication, because it is the same spot year after year. For the first couple of years you really do not get a good idea because you do not know whether you have fluked it one year.

The CHAIR — You do not have the trends.

Mr WEST — No. Over the years, if you go back through the figures, you can see the trends going forward. The trend is: less litter, more recycling.

Ms RICHARDS — We have also twice done a branded litter index, identifying the types of litter and particular brands that go within that scheme.

The CHAIR — Is there anything interesting out of those results?

Ms RICHARDS — They have not really released that publicly.

Ms PENNICUIK — Who is 'they'?

Ms RICHARDS — 'They' is Keep Australia Beautiful national.

Mr WEST — If I may explain that, we have a national body, and each state has its own independent organisation. Thus we have Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. The Northern Territory, even though it is not a state, has its own. We are independent, but we do have a national body.

The CHAIR — Do you have representation on that body?

Mr WEST — Yes, Kirsty is the Victorian representative on that.

Ms RICHARDS — The branded litter index is more expensive to do. It was an extra expense. We are trying to get the expense from industry or the government to fund it. Neither of them really wanted to do that. There are obvious reasons if you think about why. Industry might not want to identify themselves. But as they move more towards taking up responsibility for doing something about litter and packaging, they want to know who is not involved and who is not contributing. They are looking at funding that more and more so they can identify who is involved in the whole litter stream and get them involved in doing something about it.

Ms PENNICUIK — I am looking at your figures on pages 3 and 4 of your submission where you talk about, underline and put in italics the words 'number' in 'number of littered items' and 'volume' in 'volume of littered items'. One of the issues I raised with the Australian Food and Grocery Council — with which I think you would acknowledge you have some links and which also does not support container deposit schemes — is the issue that 'number of littered items' is all littered items when we are actually talking about containers in this hearing. I am wondering why you do not separate out the figures for containers to do a comparison between Victoria and South Australia. If you look at Ms Hartland's report, there is a vast difference between container litter in Victoria and South Australia, which is what we are actually talking about with a container deposit

scheme. I understand that there may be differences among states with litter, but this scheme is not meant to deal with all litter.

Ms RICHARDS — I agree entirely on the table there. I thought I had mentioned that South Australia does have fewer beverage containers on the ground — yes, definitely; I agree entirely — but they have more of everything else. That is the problem with the scheme: that people are focusing just on beverage containers.

Ms PENNICUIK — I do not see that as a problem. You see that as a problem. The other issue is that when you are making a submission to a hearing about container deposits you do not actually talk about container litter.

Ms RICHARDS — The actual beverage container items?

Ms PENNICUIK — That is right.

The CHAIR — I think that point has been made, Ms Pennicuik. Would you like to continue?

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, I would like to continue. I would like to follow up on the issue of your links to the Australian Food and Grocery Council and also your sponsorship by Coca-Cola, which is obviously a generator of beverage containers. I am wondering whether you think if Coca-Cola was not a sponsor of your organisation, it would make a difference to your stance. Clean Up Australia is not sponsored by the packaging industry, and I notice in your submission you say that Colleen Hartland said that Clean Up Australia is ‘independent of industry funding’ when in fact she said ‘packaging industry funding’. You left that particular word out of your submission.

Ms RICHARDS — Okay. My apologies.

Ms PENNICUIK — It is a key word that was left out. I am wondering whether in your opinion lack of sponsorship by a beverage company would make a difference.

Ms RICHARDS — No.

Ms PENNICUIK — You are saying the fact that you are sponsored by Coca-Cola had no influence on your disappointing stance?

Ms RICHARDS — None. I disagree with a lot of what Coca-Cola does, but we are looking at all litter and getting people’s minds around being involved and being responsible for all types of litter.

The CHAIR — In the interests of the record, could you list the various sponsors that you do have so we can see all of that in context?

Ms RICHARDS — Thiess, Veolia, Visy, Sita and a lot of the waste industry.

Mr WEST — VicTrack and Metro as well.

Ms RICHARDS — Bunnings.

Mr WEST — Bunnings has been a success inasmuch as when you buy a bag from them, part of the revenue is going to Keep Australia Beautiful national. That has been such a success that the revenue stream for that one has dried up because people are taking their own bags.

Ms RICHARDS — They have cut their use of bags by 90 per cent. Another sponsor is Hungry Jack’s.

Mr SCHEFFER — Any tobacco companies?

Ms RICHARDS — No.

Mr WEST — No.

Ms PENNICUIK — You also say that Ms Hartland’s report has a large hole in it because it does not set out the cost benefits of hubs and reverse-vending machines, which it does on page 31 of the report, and certainly

that has been supported by, for example, a submission we had from the Boomerang Alliance, who made the point that the scheme proposed in Ms Hartland's bill is slightly different from what exists in South Australia; it is more advanced. The report by Ms Hartland also sets out how it would benefit the councils, and there are certainly many councils who are submitting in favour of container deposits. So I am wondering why you have not been able to perhaps come to the view — or reconcile those two positions. You are saying there is no benefit, whereas other reports are suggesting that there are benefits.

Ms RICHARDS — I guess it depends always on how you add up the benefits. It is about statistics and how you identify and judge the benefits that are coming from a system, and that is difficult to judge.

Ms PENNICUIK — I suppose you are saying there is a hole, and I am saying that the figures are there. Have you actually looked at those figures? Are you suggesting the figures are incorrect? What is your position on the figures that are put forward by Ms Hartland and organisations such as the Total Environment Centre or the Boomerang Alliance? Are you saying their figures are incorrect?

Ms RICHARDS — Maybe they are not incorrect, but it depends how you view, judge, assess and add up the figures to make what you want come out. I disagree with the way those final figures have been arrived at.

Ms PENNICUIK — In what way?

Ms RICHARDS — I would have to go back; I do not remember how I came to that — —

The CHAIR — Would you like to perhaps provide a brief explanation to our executive officer in terms of some detail on that position that you have incorporated in your submission and submit it to us in the next few days?

Ms RICHARDS — Yes, okay.

Ms PENNICUIK — I just have one more question for Ms Richards, which is: hypothetically, if a system, based on Ms Hartland's bill, was set up in Victoria and it was shown to reduce container litter substantially to the degree that it is in South Australia and was found to be beneficial to local councils, would Keep Australia Beautiful then change its mind?

The CHAIR — That is really a hypothetical question, Ms Pennicuik; it is really not pertinent to either the submission or the bill.

Mr WEST — Thank you.

The CHAIR — You can certainly answer it, but I guess people form their views on evidence, and I think the point that has been made by Ms Richards is people view evidence based on how it is compiled, just like you have quizzed the witnesses about how they compile theirs in various ways. You have to attain confidence that that evidence is compiled in a transparent process that has integrity and that those assessments are born in that regard. That is why we have asked you, rather than rest just on your comment that you reject their cost-benefit analysis, to actually submit further detail on that. Do you want to answer the hypothetical?

Ms RICHARDS — I cannot see it not harming the whole approach if you say we will put money on something and not on others.

Mr WEST — It is sort of taking the pedal off in regard to the education and the recycling.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time moving away from us.

Mr SCHEFFER — Regarding the matters that Ms Pennicuik is raising about your sponsors, I am concerned. Business groups come in — and that is absolutely fine — and they put their position forward. We all understand that, and there is no problem with them doing that; that is what we want. But in your case you are an organisation that, I think, is positioning itself in the community's interest and in a more neutral and non-partisan space. The list of sponsors that you have mentioned raises in me the question of whether you are arguing the case in an interest that has not been made transparent. So my question is: are you also aligned and in association with environmental groups — for example, the Australian Conservation Foundation or Environment Victoria? Do you work across the board, or do you just tend to work with business?

Ms RICHARDS — We tend to work with communities. If we can source support from industry to help community action, then we will do it. Other, if you like, not-for-profit groups do not have the kind of support that we would need to help those groups. We steer groups towards other avenues where they can learn about templates or ways things have been done before, and that might be through the Australian Conservation Foundation or whatever. But these guys — —

Mr SCHEFFER — Which guys?

Ms RICHARDS — Community groups need some basic support to get things going, more than ideas.

The CHAIR — Are you talking about money?

Ms RICHARDS — Yes.

The CHAIR — So you are working with industries because they are the providers of funds for community action.

Ms RICHARDS — They have got funds and a background of helping with recycling or litter reduction, and they can help the community groups with that, like supplying — —

Mr SCHEFFER — But you agree that there is an issue of credibility and transparency here, where you have a business and organisations that have particular views around their business, around container deposit schemes, packaging and the whole waste stream, and they are funding you and making it possible for you to operate. Yet that is not the way that you are operating in the market. You are operating as a support for community organisations that want to clean up their environments, so it seems to me that there is a bit of a disjuncture there.

Ms RICHARDS — They do not make it possible for us to operate; we are operating anyway, but they give us extra support. We also get a lot of support through Sustainability Victoria. We have got people, programs and awards — that kind of thing. It depends whether you call Bunnings ‘within the industry’. It has been easier to get support from people who believe they need to do it, I agree, and it is harder to get support from people who just want to look good.

The CHAIR — You are saying that it is in the vested interests of these businesses to actually be seen as good corporate citizens and to be making contributions to the clean-up of the environment to which their industry may be a contributor in the negative; is that their attempt to offset, in your view?

Ms RICHARDS — Yes, but the good thing about that is that they also learn. They also change their behaviour by being involved with us.

Mr SCHEFFER — I think it is fantastic that Visy and all these organisations put their case on the table; no problem. My only issue, on which I am quizzing you and wanting to unpack, is the issue of your transparency as an organisation — that is, whether you are perceived as operating in a neutral space that is pro-environment and pro a proper waste system, but actually you need to be careful. I am proposing this. I am not accusing you of anything.

Ms RICHARDS — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — You need to be careful because you could lose a valuable funding source — for example, if you came out and argued a case that was contrary to the Australian Food and Grocery Council, which is an organisation that is entitled to its view.

Ms RICHARDS — I agree. The Australian Food and Grocery Council were not in favour of an ADF, which is what I put forward — advance disposal fee. They definitely did not want that. But, yes, I agree that it can look that way. We remain apolitical and community focused. If industry comes to the party, fantastic. Some of them have been blown away, like at Thiess, — he was just blown away by the kind of feedback he got from the community groups, and he just came to the party.

The CHAIR — You have adopted policy positions that have not necessarily been shared by those who may financially support the organisation?

Ms RICHARDS — Yes, definitely.

The CHAIR — We have gone over the appointed time. Thank you very much for your time and for making a submission. If you could provide our executive officer with that little bit of additional detail — —

Ms RICHARDS — Yes.

The CHAIR — You will receive the transcript in about three days, and could you correct any typographical errors and return it for inclusion in our official transcripts, which will be part of our report. Thank you so much for being here.

Ms RICHARDS — Thank you.

Mr WEST — Thank you for allowing us to be part of the process.

Witnesses withdrew.

