

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management

Morwell—Wednesday, 21 August 2019

MEMBERS

Mr Cesar Melhem—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Mr Bruce Atkinson

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Sonja Terpstra

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Catherine Cumming

WITNESSES

Mr Tim Rowe, Manager, Natural Environment and Parks, and

Mr Chris Hastie, General Manager, Built and Natural Environment, Wellington Shire Council;

Cr Graeme Middlemiss, Mayor, and

Mr Steven Piasente, CEO, Latrobe City Council.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Cesar Melhem, the Chair of the Committee. Thank you to the people of Gippsland for hosting us today; it is great to be here. I just want to go through some formalities and then we will start taking evidence.

I declare open the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning public hearing. I will just remind everyone to have your mobile phones either switched off or turned to silent. Also, I would like to extend a welcome to the members of the public, and there are a number of people here from the media—you are welcome. The Committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management, and the evidence is being recorded. I welcome a number of our witnesses: Mr Rowe, Cr Middlemiss, Mr Piasente and—

Mr HASTIE: Mr Hastie.

The CHAIR: Mr Hastie. Maybe I will just say this now: as we have a witness who was not on the list, I ask when we get to witnesses who actually want to make a statement or answer a question please start by stating your name to assist Hansard so that we can record correctly your answers or your contributions.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and is further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders; therefore the information that you give today is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected. Any deliberate false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. You will all be provided of course with a proof version of the transcript in the next few days, and so should you have any comments or corrections, please do so and return that back to the Committee.

We have allowed I think about 5 or 10 minutes for the presentation, and then after that we will go into questions from the Committee. I am not sure who wants to kick off. It does not have to be 5 or 10 minutes; we can turn to questions and answers later on.

Mr PIASENTE: I think we are all defaulting to the Mayor.

The CHAIR: Okay. Mr Mayor, you have got the floor.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Thank you, Chair. The Gippsland Local Government Waste Forum coordinated by the regional waste management group prepared the submission to this Inquiry, and our council has adopted support of that. I do not intend to talk in detail to it because the lead body on this submission is giving evidence I think in about half an hour's time—that is the regional waste management group. So I will not bore you by running through the detail that these people will have.

Can I just comment that we were talking there earlier, and we regard the problems in Melbourne in the recycling industry, and I suppose we are talking SKM here, like dropping a pebble in a pond: the ripple effect comes out into the regions. And the reason that occurs is most of the regional councils—and I cannot speak for all of them—sell their recyclables into the Melbourne system. So if the Melbourne system is not functioning, the cost will come back on us. Now, we are in a very lucky situation. We are probably in that group of about 50 per cent of the councils who are not associated with SKM; we were associated with other people. But we can see that with the SKM situation there is an opportunity there for the survivors to put their prices up, that there is a situation where there will not be enough market for recyclables. So that will come back, we think, fairly quickly on us—we may not find that we have a market or a contractor.

Our contract specifies, 'You do the work for X and you sell them the stuff'. The contractor is already saying to us that much of the stuff that they are selling is almost zero return because the price is being exploited. Some of our stuff has been sent interstate, and again it is almost zero return, to the point where our contractor is saying to us, 'We're approaching a point where you need to do something about it'. Now, 'you need to do something about it' is contractor speak for 'you need to bail us out'—in other words, an impost on the ratepayers. So what is happening in Melbourne will eventually feed back, and we think quite soon, on our ratepayers. That is a cost. We were just discussing the socio-economic groups in some of our towns, and those costs are going to be very difficult for them to bear.

We and our partners here, our next-door neighbours Wellington, I am sure would welcome any proposal to do processing of recyclables out here in regional Victoria. The people sitting next to me I think have got 80 hectares of land out at Kilmany which may be an ideal site for a reprocessing plant. We have certainly got industrial land here. We would welcome the opportunity to look at doing the processing regionally, and again that is very much dependent on volumes; we have nowhere near the volumes of course that the city does. But what we are really saying is: please, fix Melbourne quickly because it is going to bite us. So I might leave it there. Steven, our CEO, would you like to add anything?

Mr PIASENTE: Steven Piasente, CEO of Latrobe city. I suppose in terms of the initial response, when China implemented their ban I suppose it was not something that I was fully cognisant of—that it was coming. We had to respond pretty quickly. So our contractors sort of scrambled a fair bit, and they use one of the other contractors for acceptance of their materials. We agreed fairly early on that there would be a price increase for them. Effectively they take the material and it was their responsibility to deal with it. We could see that as a local contractor they would fall over. But they are still trying to deal with the super-volume of recycling particularly and how they manage that, so they are still struggling. So they are still saying to us, 'There's probably further impacts into the future'.

We are going through a process at the moment with the regional group in terms of an expression of interest around the future, around all of our waste services, not just recycling. So that might provide some different opportunities. But our contractors, particularly in the recycling sector, at the moment they have been able to manage with what has happened. We have had to pay more money, and that has been passed on. I think that the quantum in the submission was \$20 to \$35 on households—around \$25 extra per ratepayer in terms of dealing with it. But they are still struggling, so they are talking to us.

We regularly assess what the impacts are and how they deal with it, and similar issues I suppose to SKM in some respects in terms of stockpiling. So we have had the EPA talk to us about how is that being managed in terms of particularly their stockpiling. It is the bigger problem in metropolitan Melbourne in terms of the stockpiles, but we are seeing a little bit of that in that we have had some of our contractors locally—that they are having to stockpile, particularly some of the recycled material.

We have not sent anything to landfill in terms of recyclables to date, which has been a good outcome. Communicating with the community that they should keep doing the right thing is always a challenge. We get media reports and other people suggesting that we are putting it into landfill, and that is not the case for us. But it is challenging for the contractors particularly and for us to manage that situation and the community perception around that.

As the Mayor touched on, I think for us in a regional city we have, you are probably aware, the transition from the thermal power stations that we have—we had the closure of Hazelwood. So we are looking at opportunities around particularly job creation and that one the Mayor touched on. With the buffer zones we have around some of our industrial sites, it is probably more palatable from a social perspective to have some of those industries establish and develop here than it would be, say, in the metro areas of Melbourne, so that might be a sort of business opportunity. We have had a couple of businesses who have approached us particularly around plastic recycling. It has not really advanced too far. I think that one of the major impediments there is obviously the establishment costs, so the ability to use the landfill levies in that way would actually help stimulate the economy locally, particularly as we have been called a special economic growth zone, which is related to the closure of Hazelwood. I think we could use some of that fund to actually help establish some industries here—we have got good rail access, good road access—and somehow turn that into valuable products that could be used, which is always the challenge in that circular economy. Finding markets for all the materials, as you

would all be aware, is sometimes the trickiest part. But we have had a couple of businesses who have approached us, so that is certainly something we are very keen to pursue, and support from Government in that respect to establish industries, particularly in a regional city, I think is something that should be seriously considered. Those are probably the main points from us.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Can I just add a last point? As you are aware, an energy-to-waste plant has been approved for Maryvale, just over there—the paper mill. It is going to take about 650 000 tonnes per annum of Melbourne’s waste, plus all of Gippsland’s waste—they hope. They are in the tender stage at the moment; nothing is locked in yet. A lot of people have put to me, ‘Oh, that’ll get rid of the recyclables—they’ll burn them’. Their licence is quite clear that they are not to burn any recyclables. So it is kerbside waste—in other words, household waste. They look after that. There is a perception out there that they will be burning recyclables, but that is not the case. So that will not solve our recyclables problem in any way whatsoever.

I certainly stand by what Steve said. If we could have some of the landfill levy back, we might be able to address these problems.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Maybe I will just go back to the last point you made in relation to the proposal by Australian Paper to build a waste-to-energy plant here in the Latrobe Valley. Do you see that as part of the solution in relation to municipal waste?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: It may be—

The CHAIR: You did say excluding recycling. Is that what you are referring to?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Recycling will be out of that, so the recycling problem will stay. Landfill from ordinary municipal waste, putrescible waste, that kind of stuff—it may be a solution for us. Again it is going out to tender and each council has to come to an agreement with Australian Paper to get their waste there, but if theoretically all the councils in Gippsland said, ‘We will send our waste to that plant’, that would reduce their landfill dramatically. So it would be some advantage to councils there. People might take a different view around that, but my view is it we would reduce our landfill—it would certainly, in Latrobe city, reduce our landfill—but it would not affect the recyclables at all because they will not be going out there, they will not be burnt. We still need a solution for those.

The CHAIR: So what has been the community attitude toward that proposal in relation to waste to energy in the region?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Remarkably there was very little opposition. The plant sits inside a 5-kilometre buffer, which is a big buffer, around it. It has been there since the 1940s; it just got bigger and bigger. It is a significant part of our economic foundation here in Latrobe city. A lot of people have balanced jobs against the issue. We have not found very much backlash at all; in fact I think there was only one objection.

Mr PIASENTE: They had to get planning approval, so through VCAT, and there was one objection that came from I think East Gippsland—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Not even Latrobe City—

Mr PIASENTE: They did do a lot of significant work in consulting with the community. They set up a one-stop shop where people could go in and see what they were talking about and actually ask questions about it, so initially there was lots of interest in it and they worked through that process to get support.

One of the major impediments that I see for that particular proposal, and the Mayor sort of touched on it, is getting all the councils in Melbourne—and the metro waste people are going through a tender process, an EOI process, which is probably going to take a couple of years. They have got a landfill a lot of them use in Hallam. That will end in about three or four years time, I am told—2023 or thereabouts—so when that ends Australian Paper are proposing to have an alternative facility here that could take that waste, and they are partnered with Suez, who operate that landfill. But with that waste group process in metro Melbourne, they are probably not going to have that completed for another couple of years, and then to build a station means you are 2025, 2026, so there will be a couple of years gap where that landfill, from my understanding, will be closed and waste then

will have to be transported probably to the west of Melbourne, so that is going to have some other impacts in terms of all that waste going over in that direction.

The biggest impediment, though, is at the moment councils are pretty risk-averse, and they would not want to, from what I am hearing, necessarily say they are going to enter into a 25-year contract, because that is what Australian Paper need to secure the financing. So that is the biggest impediment. They need a long-term arrangement for financing and councils will probably say five years is probably the most they would enter into. And they are saying they are competitive financially in terms of cost on the waste processing, but councils will say—and I have heard some of them say—‘Well, there’s other technology that will come into vogue in the next few years that will mean we will not have to put waste into landfill; we can do something else’. I have been, as the Mayor has been, working in local government for some time, and working in the waste sector. I have probably heard that for 25 years and we still do not have any of these facilities up and running. So Australian Paper has a bit of a challenge there. If there were some policy settings from probably the Government perspective to support that—

I think they have also indicated things around the landfill levies, if the levies were higher like they are in New South Wales—I am not necessarily advocating that; this is what they have said to us—if they had the same landfill levies in Melbourne as we do in metropolitan Sydney, it would be so much more viable for them to establish.

The CHAIR: My apology, Mr Rowe. I should have given you the chance to make an opening statement before we went to questions.

Mr ROWE: That is fine.

The CHAIR: So can I ask Mr Rowe from Wellington shire, would you like to make an opening statement and then we can get into questions?

Mr ROWE: I do not need an opening statement as such, apart from saying we have taken a slightly different approach to Latrobe—we have responded in some detail to the questions that were asked of us—and just saying too that Wellington shire has made a written submission to the Inquiry as part of this. I have got a few pages here. I hope I do not bore you with it, but I will read off the page predominantly if I can.

The first question was around the responsibility of the Victorian Government to establish and maintain a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to waste management. Our view is that the Victorian Government currently plays a leading role in establishing and maintaining that indeed, and this remains critical if we are going to effectively manage waste and resource recovery into the future.

Around the core responsibilities, environmental regulation and enforcement, the EPA needs to play a lead role in the development and enforcement of environmental legislation governing our waste management system, including recycling and resource recovery. We see that is absolutely critical, and there is probably room for improvement in that area. Our experience would suggest that there is a need for a more collaborative approach with the EPA and a desperate need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach, which disadvantages rural and regional Victoria and places undue financial burden on them. This is particularly the case in regard to landfill management, where the cost burden is extreme given our rate base.

As far as community education goes, we accept all levels of government play a role in education. We see Sustainability Victoria playing a key leadership role in this activity at the state level. We believe that at the moment there is a somewhat uncoordinated approach which has resulted in fragmented or confused messaging, which has undermined correct disposal habits at the community level. Branding, messaging and bin colouring standards across council regions all differ at the moment, and this has an impact on community understanding of the recycling process.

Having said that, we acknowledge that local councils play an equal role in community waste education. However, regional councils particularly often struggle to maintain adequate levels of resources to undertake ongoing education programs without additional funding assistance. The short-term nature of funding programs as they exist at the moment does not facilitate long-term and ongoing educational programs and consistent

messaging. Further, staff resourcing is often an ineligible activity within most funding programs, which further constrains us.

There appears to be a gap in statewide education campaigns and a lack of statewide response for the emerging issues in waste, recycling and resource management. The State Government must ensure that it uses a broad range of tools and communication methods to engage members of the community that are not presently engaged in the waste management dialogue. Mainstream mass-reaching information channels, including prime television, need to be considered, and obviously social media has a critical role there as well.

With regard to infrastructure planning and investment, the costs of building and modernising waste and resource recovery facilities to agreed standards, particularly in regional areas, are extremely high. In comparison to other jurisdictions, the investment into the Victorian waste and recycling framework is not consistent with the environmental, social and financial risks imposed by underperforming waste and recycling frameworks. We are concerned that waste management initiatives have not been prioritised for allocation of the Sustainability Fund, as is the original intent of the fund under section 70 of the EPA Act. As a regional council who pays about \$1 million per annum in EPA levies—and our friends at Latrobe would pay more—not enough is received in return to assist in direct action to achieve positive outcomes in waste and resource management to the community and the environment.

The State Government should be more transparent with this fund and, we believe, follow the lead of the New South Wales Government, who have committed to reinvesting 100 per cent of the waste levy it currently collects from industry, council and businesses. In nine years the New South Wales Government has allocated \$802 million for its Waste Less, Recycle More initiative. This includes a major investment to support organics collection for local government, which of course is an emerging issue for us as well.

This brings me to market development. Our view is that for too long the state has championed its efforts in developing markets for waste materials, but sadly for Wellington Shire Council and the bulk of Gippsland I believe there is no tangible evidence of this to date. Until such time that real markets become evident for regional and rural communities the cost of resource recovery will remain prohibitive. The state must play a lead role in market development if resource recovery is to be dramatically improved. The state must understand that the logistics of managing these resources for regional councils need to be considered as this also presents a significant barrier at present.

In terms of advocacy to the Federal Government, from our perspective there does not appear to be any real evidence of this, with the Government seemingly intent on shifting the responsibility for waste management squarely to local government. Whilst we congratulate federal ministers on adopting the 2018 *National Waste Policy*, which sets out 14 circular economy strategies to improve waste management, it lacks real actions and targets and a clear investment framework. The State Government should be more vocal on this matter and ensure that the Federal Government is held accountable for their election commitments to support recycling and waste management, and should ensure that any future state funding complements and leverages the anticipated federal funding.

With regard to industry and essential service regulation, recent evidence suggests that there is a need for tighter industry management to ensure that the SKM issue is not repeated. The development of a local market should have a positive impact on this situation in driving improved environmental and community outcomes, and the EPA and SV must play a strong lead in this.

Question 2 was around the China National Sword policy and whether it was anticipated and responded to properly. In our view the Australian Government did not fully appreciate or acknowledge the impact the policy would have on our recycling system. Government inaction within the first two years after the introduction of the policy has contributed to bringing the nation's waste and recycling industry into crisis mode. The Australian Government's lack of leadership and national coordination has limited state governments' ability to take strategic action. Whilst the short-term funding assistance package provided to councils as part of the initial relief for Wellington Shire Council to meet gate charge increases, which we could not avoid, of \$60 per tonne was welcomed, we believe the State Government's lack of a more strategic, long-term response was due to a lack of appreciation of the complexity of the market and the expectation that councils and therefore

communities would bear the brunt of those costs, and happily do so. The community is not so happy to bear that cost.

The resistance of the Minister at the time of the initial crisis to playing a lead role in responding to this challenge, rather suggesting that it was a failure of councils, failed to acknowledge the complexity or seriousness of the issue when strong leadership from the state was and is still required. This continues to be an issue, as reflected in the fact that during the initial response a DELWP task force was established to work with key stakeholders, including councils, to help understand the extent of the impact of the China Sword policy and develop short and longer term solutions. To date little feedback has been provided to us as a council at the very least; I am not sure about other councils. So we do not know the outcome of that task force. Further, the lack of transparency around the recycling life cycle by our industry processes makes it difficult for local councils to respond authentically to concerns raised by the community. Community faith in the recycling system has been compromised, and we expect that the lack of a national and statewide response to this issue will continue to impact the diversion and contamination rates across the shire and drive up the costs for service delivery.

Question 3: identifying short and long-term solutions to the recycling and waste management system crisis, taking into account a number of factors. Wellington Shire Council supports the development of initiatives that promote avoidance, re-use and recycling.

The CHAIR: Mr Rowe, can I interrupt? We have got your submission. Because of the issue with time, can I ask—and I do apologise for this; I should have said it earlier—

Mr ROWE: That is fine.

The CHAIR: I would like you to still go through the key points, and then I would like to have some questions and answers, because we do have your submission. It is on transcript. So please continue, but if you are able to sort of go to dot points that would be great.

Mr ROWE: I can do that. Absolutely, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr ROWE: I will mention that—sorry, I have said that already.

The CHAIR: I did not want to do that. I did that last time—interrupted someone—and I feel bad about it.

Mr ROWE: No. That is absolutely fine. I understand the pressures here.

The CHAIR: I am conscious of the time, that is all.

Mr ROWE: We would support the Municipal Association of Victoria's *Rescue Our Recycling* action plan and all of its contents, if I can just state that briefly. Council also welcomes the state initiative with regard to the circular economy policy and action plan, and we see that as a critical component in closing the loop and driving improvements in recycling and resource recovery.

In terms of question 4, waste generation and managing waste, we support all the things that were listed there: the product stewardship, the container deposit scheme, the banning of single-use plastics and improvement or development of Government procurement policies to drive that circular economy, and we recognise that those things are critical to ensure that recycled content is used.

One thing that I should say that has not already been mentioned in our submission is around the diversion of organics from landfill, and I was going to add to the Latrobe's Mayor's comment about waste to energy. In terms of the hierarchy of waste, we would not support organics going into a waste-to-energy plant. We would want to see that not occurring. The state should provide stronger leadership on the diversion of organics from landfill. There are significant environmental and financial benefits to be had in achieving this diversion, and councils should be supported in moving in this direction. This could be achieved through improved funding streams, greater technical support or indeed legislation similar to perhaps the e-waste legislation.

In closing, we would support a strong response from the State and Federal Governments. We see this as critical if we are going to move forward in this area. Again building on what Graeme said, the region is keen to explore regional opportunities for the development of the industry through the provision of local processing infrastructure, which would lead to improvements in the economy. This would also go a long way to addressing the logistical issues that the region faces with regard to processing materials, whether it be organics or recycling. Thanks for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Rowe. We really appreciate your contribution. Just on the last point, and I think that was touched on by Latrobe shire as well about the regional investments or regional solution, if I can focus on the recycling aspect: has the shire had any discussions with industries or State Government in relation to what opportunities you could have? Because I totally agree with you: I think it is important that we can look at some particular recycling to actually have some opportunities locally. So do you mind expanding a bit more, Mr Rowe, and then Cr Middlemiss?

Mr ROWE: We have not had any specific dialogue on that with the State Government. At the moment the six Gippsland councils are in the process of exploring a joint procurement for waste collection services and waste processing services. We are hopeful there will be some opportunities that might come out of that. Our desire is for the aggregation of those resources and those materials to provide some economic benefit that might also drive, in terms of savings, some investment in the local area for the processing of recycled materials. We are fortunate in that we have a Gippsland water facility that processes organic waste in our region, very close to Wellington, and I understand that another local business is also exploring and going through the EPA approval process for the process of food organics—I am talking about food organics as well as green organics. So that joint procurement process, which is currently in the EOI stage, may hopefully lead to some of these desired outcomes for us, which would be local infrastructure and local processing.

Mr HAYES: Just a couple of questions. In regard to the pulp mill, you said that as you understand it, recyclables will be taken out of the stream that goes to the pulp mill.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: That is my understanding of the licence, yes.

Mr HAYES: I am just wondering what sort of materials would be left. Are you saying that paper would come out and plastics and glass would come out, as far as you know?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: If you are talking 650 000 tonnes out of Melbourne, my understanding is that they would all be taken out at the Melbourne end. In other words, they would not arrive up here by truck and then be sorted here—my understanding is the contractor would do all of that sorting in Melbourne so we would just get the stuff that would go into the furnace.

Mr PIASENTE: Technically it is a residual, so taking out all of the recyclable material as has been the case—taking out the green and organics—it is then what is left. They have done a lot of research around that. They went and they tested material that went to our landfill, and they tested material that was collected in Melbourne that went to other landfills, and analysed that in terms of what would be left as residual, and that would then be taken.

Mr HAYES: It is hard to imagine that there is much left there to produce energy from, though.

Mr ROWE: About 25 to 30 per cent of the kerbside bins. But of course there is other waste—industrial and commercial waste.

Dr RATNAM: Do you mind if I interrupt just on that point? I understand I will have questions later, but just on that point, when we asked Australian Paper when they were before us as well, they said they are not going to do any of the sorting—they are relying on kerbside separation. So it is the individuals separating them in the bins.

Mr ROWE: Yes.

Dr RATNAM: If that is not separated and recycling goes into kerbside waste, then they plan to burn it with incineration. But the other thing is in their feasibility study they actually identified that if organics were taken

out of the kerbside stream, it would be a serious threat to the viability of their plant, so they are counting on organics coming in for volume.

Mr HAYES: Yes. I sort of saw that as being what they wanted, and yet if you are saying all of the recyclables are out, it sounds very attractive—it just depends on what you define as recyclables in that case.

Mr PIASENTE: Yes. Obviously the interpretation was not what I had interpreted when they told us.

Mr HAYES: It is something we want to investigate of course.

Mr PIASENTE: Yes.

Dr RATNAM: Thank you very much for both the written submission and your evidence here today. Just a couple of questions. So just for Wellington shire first of all, at the moment you do not have organics and green waste collection as a municipal-wide scheme. You mentioned some companies coming up—there is potential there as well. What are the barriers to a municipal-wide scheme getting up and running so you can start doing organics and waste, and what help would you need, for example from the state, to do that?

Mr ROWE: I guess one of the barriers is community acceptance of that, so we will have to provide an additional bin. We are, I think, the only council in Gippsland that does not have a green waste service, which is currently just prunings and grass clippings. If we do go to a joint procurement process, the tender specifications will include FOGO, so food organics and green organics. For us that is the provision of a third bin, and that might cost anywhere between \$70 and \$90 per annum based on some feasibility studies that have been done. Obviously that is an added cost to the community, so we would have to make sure that our engagement process with the community is strong enough to be able to articulate the benefits of that, and there are many benefits around reduction of material landfill, greenhouse gas emission reduction, reduction in capital costs for managing landfills and those sorts of things. So there is lots of benefit there—financial benefit as well as environmental benefit. I guess there are no real barriers depending on what comes back in terms of cost from any tender process that we might follow. Our council has certainly indicated support for this initiative. It sees the benefits. It really is a matter of community acceptance and the cost involved.

Dr RATNAM: Okay. Just a follow-up question to Latrobe on the same line. At the moment you have green waste but do not have organics. Just going back to the conversation as well about waste energy, which in this case is incineration—that is what Australian Paper are proposing; it is waste incineration—one of the worries around waste incineration is it undermines the hierarchy and the incentive to get as much out of landfill and residual waste as possible, including food organics, which is about 40 to 50 per cent of most bins. So would you signing up to incineration have any impact on what your plans are for organics? Do you have any plans to introduce organic waste collection?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: We have tried food organics. We ran a trial at one of our satellite towns, Churchill, for about half a year. The trial was successful in the waste collected, how it was handled et cetera, but we found the cost was too high. We did not believe we could sell our entire city to going to food organic collection, so that is the situation. Mr Rowe has mentioned what the extra cost might be. We find our ratepayers are sensitive to these cost increases, so at the moment we are comfortable with going to the waste management plan. Our green waste—we are lucky we have a large potting mix-type manufacturer here so all our green waste goes to them, and it has done for quite a few years now, so it is just an accepted fact that we have a green waste bin et cetera. So the food organics, it was quite a few years ago now—three, four, five years ago—that we trialled that, and the only reason we did not roll it out across the city was the cost at that time.

Dr RATNAM: Are you part of the six councils that are doing this procurement?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Yes.

Dr RATNAM: And the other final question on that in terms of incineration is that there are worries on a number of fronts. One is in the US we are seeing that the waste incineration companies are suing councils. They have locked the amount into the tender and because they have got better recycling and resource recovery, the waste volumes have reduced and incinerators are suing the councils for not meeting their contract arrangements, so that is a worry in terms of people getting locked into contracts. But the other is toxic by-

products. So you have got the bottom ash, but you have got that toxic cake as well. So that is toxic, hazardous waste. Do you plan to store that landfill here? What kind of plans do you have for the toxic waste that is going to be generated out of incineration?

Mr PIASENTE: So Australian Paper have indicated they are doing some work on some of the ash products in terms of how they might be able to be recycled and re-used. They are wanting to do some trials. They have been talking about it with us. The Mayor would know far better than I because he worked in the power sector, and with the power sector there have been some of those by-products already in terms of ash and the like—it might be available to actually test for re-use, so they are doing some inquiries into what that might mean. So from my understanding the approvals they have been given are the highest standards that are applicable. They have looked around the globe at what the best practice was in terms of setting up a facility like that and they are saying that is what they would meet. So that has had community acceptance in terms of in Latrobe city to get the approval that it has.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Their testing has been around is it suitable for a road base material, and of course EPA approval is all part of that. In terms of it being toxic, that has to go through on that basis.

Mr LIMBRICK: Cr Middlemiss, you mentioned before the extra costs to ratepayers, which is—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: The food organics trial, yes.

Mr LIMBRICK: No, earlier you spoke about the \$25 per ratepayer that has been caused by the—

Mr PIASENTE: I think I mentioned that, yes.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes. It is great that you are very sensitive and aware of that. You also mentioned that if the waste-to-energy facility goes ahead, that would alleviate that to some degree. What effect would that have on ratepayers?

Mr PIASENTE: I think from what we have been advised in terms of the modelling that they have done, they are saying they are cost competitive with landfill in terms of the costed take, except for new material. For someone to pay for their material to go to the AP facility would be similar to—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I was talking in terms of the physical amount being landfilled.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: That is removed. But the cost matter is a totally different matter, and as Mr Rowe has said, we are all out for tender at the moment, and this will all come out in that process.

Mr LIMBRICK: Right. So we do not really know about the end costs yet.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: No. AP, I understand, will be tendering for the waste of the six Gippsland councils. That will be weighed up against cost. But I suspect that the cost savings may not be anywhere near the magnitude of just the savings on not landfilling stuff.

Mr LIMBRICK: One other question for Mr Rowe. You said in your submission and evidence just before that you were supportive of a container deposit scheme and that you already have yellow bins for residents in the shire.

Mr ROWE: Yes, I did.

Mr LIMBRICK: So how would a container deposit scheme look from a resident's point of view? What would change from their point of view if you brought in that?

Mr ROWE: I think it is the incentive that sits around the container deposit scheme that is the main attractor. I guess if you go back to really basic sort of thinking on this, it is not dissimilar to in the old days when Scouts used to collect cans and there was a real incentive to collect this stuff. So if we talk about dumped litter—and dumped litter is a major issue for us which we have not touched on today; it is a major issue for both of our

shires—that is one mechanism for reducing that issue. The other incentive is that it would really separate out the streams—it would separate them further. We know there is a problem with commingled, particularly with glass, and there are a couple of trials going on with I think the City of Yarra and maybe Macedon or somewhere out there. So we await with interest what they will look like. But the container deposit scheme would also separate glass and those materials out into separate streams from the start.

Mr LIMBRICK: So the residents would, presumably, drive to some facility to get their deposit back. Do most residents live near one of these facilities so they could easily drive to it?

Mr ROWE: Well, I guess it would depend on how it is rolled out. So if you have these facilities at every supermarket, every gathering place, which is how they would be rolled out I would imagine—that is how they are rolled out in other states—it becomes an opportunity.

Dr RATNAM: Vending machines, yes.

Mr ROWE: Rather than putting it into a bin, you put it into another bin but it is a recycling bin and you actually get some cash for that. We are not suggesting that that is the panacea, but we are certainly saying that that would be a positive step forward to increase diversion of material and also have a positive impact on littering.

The CHAIR: Just a follow-up on that. Who should bear the cost of the container deposit scheme: taxpayers or the beverage industry—therefore consumers? Have you given some thought to that? There are a number of models around, as you know, where the beverage industry might put an extra \$3 or \$4 on a slab of beer, for example, and that is how it is recovered. Or maybe it is partly funded by the state and partly funded by industry. Have you given some thought to that possibility?

Mr ROWE: Look, I will be honest, I have not given a great deal of thought to that. But with the stewardship program—and I did not mention it in here because we had already mentioned it—we really need to minimise waste at the front end. There should not be waste. That is around packaging, which is excessive and only getting more excessive from my experience. We should have something that deals with that at the front end rather than the back end, which is creating all the problems we have got at the moment. So a stewardship program whereby the cost of a carton of beer or whatever goes up—personally I think that is an appropriate way. You know, it is a user-pays system. Rather than a straight line from birth to death, we need this circular economy whereby these things get rebirthed, and there is a cost involved in that so the user—I think it is fair to say—should pay for that.

The CHAIR: Last question from me. The idea of separating glass and putting it in a separate bin, is that something your shire will support? Because from the evidence we have had so far, and from various submissions, glass is the biggest contaminant to other recyclables. And I think we have got a submission that putting an extra bin would cost somewhere between 40 bucks and 100 bucks. I think I was quoted earlier 70 to 90 bucks, but in various submissions and yours it is actually less than that. So let us say the average is 60 bucks. Is that something council should seriously consider—not withstanding the CDS as another option as well, or that could be together. Would you support the Committee looking at a recommendation to Government to basically look at a statewide approach in relation to that, and also going back to the stewardship?

Mr ROWE: Yes. I think that glass is one of the biggest contaminants. It causes a lot of problems. If there was a whole framework around that, around education—a fourth bin is potentially problematic for the community I would expect, but there are clearly a lot of benefits in it. But it does need to be. If such a thing was to come in and solve the problem of contamination—but it does not solve the problem of storage. We know that there are massive stockpiles of glass already around the state, so it comes back to this circular economy.

I was just recently talking to a local processor, and local road contractors are now talking to them about—he currently does not have a market for his glass, or not a very strong one—how we can work together. So that would require VicRoads' specifications to accommodate that. So my point around the framework is it needs to be broad if we are going to do that. How does the market go around in circles? How do we develop a market for that product rather than stockpile it as we currently do at the moment?

The CHAIR: We do have a glass manufacturing plant in Spotswood and I think that can absorb possibly 100 per cent of it, and we just received a submission from them this morning. I know the Members have not read that yet—it is coming your way—but that is the point I am making. So it is just finding that end product where—because glass is 100 per cent recyclable, you can use it 1 million times. Okay, I will pass it on.

Dr RATNAM: Latrobe council, in your submission I understand that you are thinking about plans for a large-scale battery recycling plant. Can you talk a little—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: We have an application from a company to do large-scale battery recycling.

Dr RATNAM: This is household batteries you are talking about?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Sorry, we have a preliminary indication but the application has not arrived yet. But they are already, at the moment, briefing the community about it. There is some community angst because they have interpreted it as a lead smelter, and you can imagine the reaction to that. The company says, 'We are melting lead, not smelting lead'. And apparently there are quite some significant differences. So at the moment we are waiting on the application. They claim that they could probably process somewhere in the region of 50 per cent of the batteries recycled in south-eastern Australia, so it is a significant operation. But the application is not in yet. There is some, already, reaction from the community in that area, but we are just working through. I think the key in this will be the EPA. The EPA will look at the emissions: are they acceptable or not? So we are working through it.

Dr RATNAM: That is interesting. Great, thank you. And just to—

Mr HAYES: Can I just add onto that one about the batteries? What sort of batteries would be processed? Would it include lithium batteries or just the—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Initially we are talking car-type batteries—

Dr RATNAM: Car-type batteries.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: But they have talked about—

Mr HAYES: Big lead batteries.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Yes. Mainly lead batteries.

Mr HAYES: Not so much household—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: No.

Mr PIASENTE: Not at this stage.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Not in the first stage, anyway.

Mr HAYES: Okay, thanks.

Mr PIASENTE: They have talked about two stages, the first stage and then an expansion. So there is a facility in Wagga Wagga, I understand, which is totally different to this one, and that probably has been a bit of a reference point for people in the community that think it is not a modern facility as such. And so they are looking to build a more modern one.

Mr LIMBRICK: Since the e-waste ban in landfill, it is my understanding that lots of councils now have sheds, basically, full of e-waste. What is the basic composition of that e-waste, and what is the plan to deal with it going forward?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I looked at our shed at the moment—

Mr LIMBRICK: You have been in the shed? I want to see one of these.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I have been and had a look, and it is mainly dead flat-screen TVs and that. I do not know what the experience of others has been, but at the moment we are seeking markets for it. I believe our contractor has a market?

Mr PIASENTE: They have had for some time. We had been doing a little bit of this already before the e-waste ban. We had that ability for everyone to drop their screens and the like off, so that is TVs and other things. They were processing them in Melbourne somewhere. I am not quite exactly sure where, but they had a market. But yes, with the ban it might become challenging in terms of finding enough space in the market for every council that is now doing that.

Mr HAYES: Just about trying to encourage this circular economy and developing local recycling industries, how do you see that coming about in the local setting? Do you see Government mandating a certain amount of recyclable material going into Government contracts or council contracts, or can you see it getting into building industry materials and stuff like that? Would it be possible to establish plants that would deal with that in the area?

Mr PIASENTE: I think there was an earlier question about that. With our contracts that the EOI process is being undertaken at the moment, I suppose the people I have seen that have bid for that are really probably the collectors and the processors—or the sorters, sorry. They are not the people at the end who are actually doing the processing and turning it into another product in terms of a market. So I see that as a particular challenge, so we have a—

Mr HAYES: But it is an essential part of the chain, isn't it? Without that nothing else works.

Mr PIASENTE: Yes, it is. Probably from what I have seen we will be in the same position once we go through that process. We will end up still with products that have got to be taken somewhere to be processed, and we do not have those markets established.

So a couple of examples that have approached us. One came through Sustainability Victoria, they were looking for some sites to do some processing. That was a plastic processing facility, turning it into a carpet backing. That was one of the products they were talking about. There was another one of a similar type. They have really been people in private industry who have developed a market. They have a product they can sell, and so that is where the biggest challenge that I see is. We do not necessarily have those markets and people doing that innovation and looking at how those products can be used.

I think that using some of that Sustainability Fund to actually help with that research and development into what other products they could be turned into is where I see a great opportunity for Australia. Australians are typically conservative and when somebody fails they tend to knock them down quite readily, and I think as a country it is something we need to seriously reconsider in terms of actually allowing people to be innovative and have a go and try some new things.

Dr RATNAM: Good point. That is a very good point.

Mr PIASENTE: In terms of that innovation I think, here we are developing a high-tech precinct in Gippsland. It would be a great opportunity to look at how we can actually do some research that would actually use those products that we collect within the region and turn them into something.

Mr HAYES: Because you want to do it locally to save on the cost.

Mr PIASENTE: Exactly, and I think also even from Melbourne some of the processing—you would not see, to be honest, a battery recycling facility being proposed in the south-east of Melbourne, would you? We have land that is appropriate. The land they are actually looking at for that particular facility is appropriately zoned. The approvals process—it is one of the highest zonings you need for that. It is one of the most restrictive zonings you could have anywhere, so it is an ideal site. But they still have to go through all the approvals processes and obviously there is community concern about that one still, so they have got to work through all that and meet all the requirements of the EPA.

I think in Gippsland—and the Dutsun was touched on—in terms of that facility there is already material going there. There are opportunities here to actually take that material from Melbourne and process it into something that actually adds value. The biggest challenge in that, as I said, is establishing what the markets are for those products—because they have not yet been determined—and turning them into something else.

So using some of that fund, I think, in that research space to actually develop new markets for those materials is probably something that should be seriously considered, as well as obviously for us in terms of our economic outcomes, driving that investment in the regional setting and having the right regimes to support that. Not, I suppose, having Government investment to help support that being established. Obviously the private sector are the ones who create most of the jobs so helping support them to deliver those jobs is part of my—

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Can I just add, you talked about, is there a need for Government assistance? A very good example is we had a not for profit set up a computer breaking down operation—in other words, scrapping them and salvaging them—and it worked quite well. It worked smoothly and efficiently but they could not make a dollar out of it. They lost on it, so they closed. It was fabulous while it was operating, for us—anybody wanted to get rid of a computer monitor, a computer, they threw it in there. It was terrific, but they just could not make a dollar out of it. It would indicate to me it has either got to be a mass scale—so all of Gippsland, and this is where the tender process comes into it—or Government subsidies are required if they are to be done on a smaller scale. Another example is—I was interested in your comment, Chair, about the plant that could take all the glass—our contractor has a small hill of glass, I think that is the best way to describe it, and he is in the process of talking to a local asphaltting plant as to whether it could be incorporated, and I believe it is being done in two places in Melbourne—

Mr LIMBRICK: We visited one.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: The small local asphaltter is reluctant to get in and perhaps lose money on an experiment if it does not work well et cetera, so again I think some incentives or we move to a larger scale at a site further off. I think we have all had some experience of small-scale recycling, and it probably has not worked well at small-scale, and that is where I think some Government assistance would be helpful.

The CHAIR: Just to follow up on some of the themes I have picked up, to me the current system of councils doing their own things—I am not saying it has contributed to the problem; I am not blaming councils at all, for a moment, but to me—

And you made comments about essential services, declaring that as an essential service, and I think the Government is in the process of looking at that. So would you agree that it is time to have that sort of statewide policy to find these solutions if these solutions can be implemented so there is some consistency? Is that something—

Mr ROWE: I think that would be useful. I think we lack consistency. We lack consistency on so many levels in terms of educating the community, in terms of bin lid colours, in terms of services provided. If there was a consistent policy framework, then that would be useful, I would think.

The CHAIR: We did a good job with the water education campaign when we had the drought in the 2000s, so I think we have runs on the board.

Dr RATNAM: I have two final questions. I will ask them together, and feel free to answer them if you can. One question is going back to the waste incineration. If you are at liberty to say, Latrobe council, have you signed a contract with Australian Paper, and does it include your organics volume? That is my first question.

And two, a general question for everyone, both councils: what kind of communication have you had with DELWP or any State Government representatives through this crisis? Has the communication been frequent? Has it been infrequent? How supported do you feel in that?

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I will answer the first question. Through the regional waste management group all our contracts, our collective output, are up for tender, and we understand that Australian Paper, through their contractor, Suez, will tender through that process. So we have not broken free from the six Gippsland councils

on that. We are certainly hopeful that the plant goes ahead jobs wise. On the second one, I would be probably guided down at the officer level. My observation is very little contact.

Mr ROWE: Infrequent.

Mr HASTIE: We would support that—very infrequent, if at all really.

Dr RATNAM: So a desire for more frequent contact, updates, feedback, because you talked about feedback from DELWP from the initial task force, but in terms of now, what kind of contact, what kind of information would be useful for you all?

Mr PIASENTE: It picks up on that earlier question about consistency of approach across the state. Sustainability Victoria put out I think years and years ago some standards and some guidelines on how the councils should do things, and across Gippsland we all do it differently, and across Victoria we all do it differently, so there is not that consistency of approach for people. As part of this crisis certainly there has been a definite lack of communication as to what has been happening, and I think from our perspective—

The CHAIR: Just on that, how do you rate the regional waste recycling group or the metro? You have got the metropolitan waste group—I always get their name confused—and there is the regional body—

Mr ROWE: Resource recovery group.

The CHAIR: That is the one—the waste recovery group. I am hearing a different view on how good or bad that system is. As council, as members of that group—because you are the customers and they are the service provider—is that system working to a satisfactory level? You do have parliamentary privilege.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I should not comment because I was the Chair of the predecessor for about four years and the Deputy Chair for another four years; Mr Rowe and I have been on it for decades. But perhaps I should say that my view is—

The CHAIR: You can compliment him if you want.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: I think they are under-resourced. I will be quite honest. I do not think Mr Peake's organisation is resourced enough to do the work that councils would appreciate them doing—in other words, what we would expect of them—and it has been I think forever that they have been under-resourced. They probably do not have the resources to do what we would hope that they could do, and that is not a criticism of the organisation. I think it does what it can with its resources.

The CHAIR: I meant a comment on the system.

Cr MIDDLEMISS: Yes.

Mr ROWE: As a regional approach, which is what they are set up to do—and as Graeme said, I have been a member for a long time—I do not think it has been successful in terms of generating a regional approach to waste management and resource recovery. That is not necessarily the organisation's fault, but I think there has not been a regional approach within Gippsland. The difference is this joint procurement process that we are going through at the moment, which may or may not be successful. I would say from a regional perspective, in achieving regional outcomes, the process we are going through at the moment is probably the pinnacle, and other than that, in terms of regional outcomes, probably not much.

The CHAIR: Thank you. On that note, I just want to thank you gentlemen for your contribution today. We really appreciate that you have taken the time and shared your thoughts with us. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you. Should you find any mistakes or anything needs to be corrected, please send that back to the secretariat.

Dr RATNAM: Thanks very much; that was excellent.

Witnesses withdrew.

WITNESSES

Cr Natalie O'Connell, Mayor,

Mr Anthony Basford, Chief Executive Officer,

Ms Fiona Weigall, General Manager, Assets and Environment, and

Mr Kartik Venkatraman, Manager, Sustainability and Waste Minimisation, East Gippsland Shire Council.

The CHAIR: I would like to extend a welcome to our next witnesses from East Gippsland Shire Council. Thank you very much for your time today. I just want to go through the formal process.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege—you may have heard that earlier—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 deliberate or 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.

We have allocated 5 or 10 minutes for a member of your team to present. My understanding is that we did not have a formal submission, but we have just received one now. Is that correct?

Ms WEIGALL: That is right. We were part of a regional submission, but we have put out a document and our presentation today for you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. A copy of the submission has been just provided to the Committee, and that will form part of the transcript. It will be incorporated as a submission and will be received as a submission. So who would like to go first? If you can take us briefly through an outline of the submission and allow us a bit of time for questions and answers, that would be wonderful. So who wants to lead? Mr Basford?

Mr BASFORD: Chair and Members, thank you for the opportunity. I have asked our General Manager of Assets and Environment, Fiona Weigall, to provide the introduction because I feel that it is important that you hear from people that are dealing with the matter on a daily basis and have that working knowledge. I have asked Fiona to provide the initial introduction, so I will hand over to Fiona.

Ms WEIGALL: Thank you. So I guess if we could just perhaps set a little bit of context about East Gippsland and what that means in terms of waste for us. We are a large municipality; we are about 21 000 kilometres—10 per cent of Victoria; 70 per cent of that is Crown land, so we have got about 46 000 people dispersed across 42 different communities. So when you think about that in terms of waste generation and waste management, it is quite complex.

Back in 2014, recognising that, we actually developed our waste facilities and disposal strategy, and we have been slowly implementing that over the past five years, led predominantly by our Manager of Sustainability and Waste Minimisation, Kartik, who is at the end here. It is one of our largest single budget items. In terms of operating costs, it costs us around \$10 million per annum. Of that, interestingly, \$1.2 million is probably the landfill levy that we pay back to State Government. And then on top of that we have capital costs. Depending on the work that we are doing, this year about \$3 million because we are closing a landfill and rehabilitating it.

Given the complexities of our situation and our geographic area, it means that we have also got a complex approach to how we manage waste. We have a three-bin kerbside collection, which we offer to most of our urban areas. That is under an external 10-year contract until 2025. It has a total value for council of around \$25 million. On top of that we have a street bin collection service. We have two licensed landfills and one unlicensed landfill. Those are all managed in-house by staff, so we have actually brought the service in-house. We have 15 transfer stations where we collect waste and then transfer it back to those landfills. In addition to that we have another 11 transfer trailers, where we do not have the capacity or the need for entire transfer

stations but we still need to be collecting and providing a collection opportunity for our communities. We also have a rural kerbside collection service, and we have trialled a composting facility in Mallacoota.

So for us the growth in our population has led to an increase in waste and recyclables, which coupled with the ban has put enormous pressure on us as a local government to manage this. Unfortunately as part of this process we have seen that those councils bear most of the cost and responsibility for managing household waste. Consultation with the sector has been a little sporadic, and we perhaps feel that we have not had enough of a voice and a seat at the table at this time, so we thank you very much for this opportunity.

Whilst we see that it is good to have researched and explored solutions, we believe that we need really strong strategies and programs to support that. We would encourage that focus on immediate programs and strategies and policies to be put in place whilst working on the longer term issue around how we actually minimise waste. So for us we see there are two issues: there is the critical issue around what is happening at the moment, which needs some policies and some actions, but there is also how do we minimise waste going forward so we are not always in this sort of crisis process? For us, waste avoidance is very important, and we see that as being around waste education, sustainable procurement, the ban of certain packages and materials, and product stewardship. For example, I know in the last hearing you talked a little around container disposal schemes. While we see that as falling into that short-term action, it provides an opportunity for us to divert recyclables from waste and from landfill at the moment. However, in the long term we would like to see policies where we are actually minimising packaging, not just managing the packaging when it is in circulation. We see that as being fraught with risk.

Council has lobbied on this matter. We have worked through our regional group, we have worked through motions through the MAV and through the national Australian Local Government Association, but we see that this should not be a matter where there is a need for advocacy. It is a matter of such importance that all levels of government need to work together on solutions rather than it being a response to advocacy. Therefore we see that there is a strong role for government—state and Australian governments—to provide that leadership for us all on these important matters.

As a local government that abuts the New South Wales border and shares quite a lot of border with New South Wales we are also caught and impacted around a lack of policy around cross-border initiatives. For example, some of our communities are much closer to New South Wales receiving stations and yet we are not able to transport some of our waste materials across the border to take advantage of those situations there. So we see there is a need for not only looking at what we are doing here in Victoria but how we can look at our cross-border relationships and innovation as well.

So one of the areas that I know the Committee was keen to question and discuss with us was around were we aware and were we prepared for what has happened in the last 12 to 18 months? For us in East Gippsland we have been separating at source our recyclables for quite some time, so we have had yellow bins, or recycle bins, as part of our kerbside collection and we have been collecting commingled and dried recyclables as well as organic waste and municipal waste for quite some time. We have been lucky that we have a local MRF that operates and also has our kerbside collection contract, so unlike some of the others we actually have a lot of recyclables collected from the kerbside and locally segregated and categorised into paper, plastics, glass, cans, tins et cetera. And then they are on-sold or exported for further use.

Unfortunately one of the problems and one of the challenges we have when we answer our community's questions is we know very little about where those recyclables go once they leave our local MRF. We are very confident that we are not having recyclables going into our landfill, but there is very little tracking and policy of reporting where our recyclables actually go. We will touch on that little later—we think that that is a policy initiative that could be introduced.

So I think we have seen that the speed with which the changes have happened has made it quite difficult for us. We were aware of what was going to happen but perhaps did not fully understand the risk in terms of that short turnaround and the impact of those tight time frames. We, probably looking back at it, have seen that there were signals there that this was likely to happen for quite some time. If it was not the China National Sword policy, it was perhaps going to be some other policy. So therefore we are questioning, 'Well, if that was a risk, why didn't we have a response to that risk collectively, and a mitigation strategy?'. Perhaps that is where we would

have liked to have seen in retrospect some of the waste levy, the landfill levy that is collected by councils, going into preparing us and making sure that we are not so exposed to that risk. We do ask some questions later on about the use of that levy.

From this point forward, once the China sword policy was introduced, stockpiling was seen as being really inevitable, and I guess we are therefore questioning why there was still a focus from EPA and other agencies on enforcement rather than finding solutions. We did question that, and while our processing stream is not one of the ones that has been closed, looking from afar we are saying, 'Well, why is there not this collective response to try to find solutions to the stockpiling rather than closing down those that are stockpiling?'. So let us go beyond the National Sword policy and what is happening in south-east Asia other than to say that it really puts enormous pressure on the waste industry but also is probably the catalyst for us exploring new opportunities, and we should be using it as such to restart and recheck what we are doing and take a new and fresh approach to how we are managing waste across all sectors.

We know, though, that in the short term there is going to be continued cost with this. The screening processes to get the waste contamination down from 5 per cent to 0.5 per cent will incur further costs, and we believe that councils will continue to have to and be expected or seen to pay some of those costs, and we are asking for assistance with those increased costs in the short term while we are still relying on export. In the last 18 months we have seen the changes result in an additional \$85 per tonne in the cost of our recyclables. For us, because of our distance from Melbourne and the fact that for most of the recycling the final end point is in Melbourne, it turns out a lot of our costs are also associated with transport, and we believe that there are better short-term and long-term solutions that have a more localised approach. MAV, who we work closely with in this sector, have advised that they think in the short term there will be an additional cost which will equate to a rate rise of between 1.1 and 2.5 per cent, so given that we are in a rate-capped environment, how do we manage that sort of escalating cost?

If we move on to talk a little bit about what that means to the waste industry and what that means to some of those critical questions that you asked as part of your letter to us, we see that there is an opportunity to use the waste levy quite differently. Over the last 10 years we have paid approximately \$12 million into that levy. We have received \$3.8 million back, of which less than 30 per cent was actually waste-related initiatives. So we believe that it is time to shift the investment focus and use the levy to really look at waste management, recycling management and new initiatives in that space. If we look at what other councils and what other states are doing, there seems to be a closer correlation between the levy and investment in waste management and waste controls. We see that there are some opportunities to use that levy to improve the sorting and cleaning of recyclables, because that cross-contamination is a really important issue to address so that we can re-use them in a circular economy.

We believe there is a need to look for an end use for plastics just as we have with paper. We have now created a value for paper so that it is recycled, and a lot of it is going into recycling. We need to place the same sort of emphasis on an end use for plastics. We are seeing quite a lot of research coming out of the UK and Europe. They are using it in road bases and other areas. We think that there are similar opportunities there for not just Victoria but the whole country.

We believe there is an opportunity to use the levy to fast-track the use of crushed glass and other materials so that we can start to use those in some of our civil construction and in other areas quickly. We know some of the research has been done, so now let us open the doors and create policy and incentives to support that going on. We heard in the last lot of evidence that there is a lot of stockpiling of glass throughout Victoria. Here is an opportunity for us to really take a commodity and give it an end use, with a little bit of investment.

We also think that whilst we are looking at recyclables we also need to keep focus on looking at our organics and our green waste so that they do not become our next crisis. There are still a lot of organics and green waste that are going into landfill or not being treated and not being turned into an end product, so we would encourage the levy to also be used for some of those sorts of initiatives as well.

In terms of the levy, we also recognise that it funds a lot of the EPA functions, and we think that in some ways the new EPA legislation has taken the EPA from being a partner and mentor to more of an enforcer. We would

like to see some of that old partnering and mentoring approach back for the EPA so that we can work through some of these complex problems together rather than one being seen as an enforcer and one as a perpetrator.

We believe that it is not just about projects; there is a lot of legislation and policy change that could help in this matter. We have just talked about one of the questions, that communities do not know where their recycling is going. In terms of our e-waste contracts, we have just put criteria into our contracts that they must report on the downstream use and the end use of those products. We believe there could be policy around all recyclables so that we can track the downstream processing and tell our communities where they go and restore that community confidence that their recyclables are not going into landfill and can be used appropriately.

We have talked about the fees being reinvested back into waste management, so I will not go into that.

We think that there is a need for some clear guidelines around the re-use of food and green waste, so around FOGO, and some clear policy and some clear incentive around that so there is some consistency in how that is being managed across the state. We have also encouraged the Committee—and I am sure you have already done this—to look at the policies of some of the other states that are considered to be leaders in this field, such as New South Wales.

We see that the energy-from-waste initiative being discussed at the moment provides some solutions to deal with current waste. However, for a local government like ours, where we do not have the volume and we do not necessarily have the ability to transport that waste to a centralised system, we are not sure that that is the only end solution, and we have encouraged the Committee to keep looking at other solutions that reduce waste at source and reduce creation of waste.

That I guess leads us on to this whole area of centralisation and shared services. Whilst we recognise that shared service brings with it the opportunity to create economies of scale, it can also lead to sometimes a metropolitan or a high population base focus for those services and also perhaps push some of the smaller players out of the market that could create opportunities more locally and that create opportunities and initiatives that have a more localised solution. So whilst we understand the shared service focus, we would also say that that needs to be matched by a decentralised approach that allows those in regions and communities like ours, where it is not economical to transport waste long distances, to look at more localised solutions.

We have heard a lot of talk about banning single-use plastics. Whilst we support that, we say that without it also having a big community education process around it and a lot of these other policies we will merely see that transferred into more durable plastics being used and filling our landfills.

We note that recently COAG discussed waste at a whole-of-nation level, and we are encouraged by that and believe that waste needs to be addressed at a whole-of-nation level as much as possible. When we see different states having different approaches, that sometimes leads to even more confusion in the market. Therefore things like consistency around the container disposal scheme will be important so we have the same standards and where we have—and we just touched on this earlier—cross-border opportunities these are not restricted by cross-border movements.

We heard previously from our colleagues from the western areas of Gippsland talk about the need for consistency through the yellow bins and through what goes into our bins. We believe that there needs to be some consistent policy around that so that we do have one consistent standard of bins so our consumers and our customers and our communities recognise and feel confident that they know what they are and that they know what goes into them. If we think back in terms of the investment that went into campaigns around 'Life. Be In It' or wearing seatbelts, we believe this is the time for similar investment in public education around waste.

This leads me, I guess, to one of our last points, which is around the importance of any policy and incentives being matched with community education and behavioural change, both residential and industry based, where there are actions and incentives so that the community understands those and that the industry sees that there is value to their business in being involved in waste minimisation. At the moment unfortunately we are seeing some of those being very metropolitan focused. I would encourage you all to remember that waste is generated throughout the state and we need to make sure that our education campaigns reach our entire state. For example, in the recent changes—the banning of e-waste—council actually invested in their own marketing and

community education campaign because we believed that the campaign that was being run by the state did not have enough reach into our community. So that was an additional cost that we had to bear to make sure that we actually got that community understanding and take-up of that initiative. We think it is really important that we have initiatives around community understanding and the importance of 'sort, clean and crush'. We have heard about the importance of avoiding cross-contamination in our waste and recyclables, and that starts with our community, so it starts with what goes into the bins.

We have seen across Victoria ResourceSmart officers, which suggests 'Why aren't we perhaps putting waste and environment into our primary school and secondary school curriculums so that we have that consistent approach?'. Again we encourage working with industry on initiatives there. There have been really successful initiatives working with industry around energy reduction, and we would see a similar approach could be taken to waste reduction.

We also see—I just touch on this very briefly, because I know we are running out of time—that there are also opportunities to work with waste and see waste as an industry. The way waste is termed it is seen as an end use. We really do support the circular economy concept and see that there are some real opportunities here, not just for the big players but, as we have said, in the small to medium sector. They will need different controls and different incentives to the large ones. If we take, for example, Orbost, a town of ours which used to be a strong timber town, it is 400 kilometres from Melbourne so the cost of transport is excessive, but if we took away some of those cross-border restrictions, we could see that we could have a locally based MRF there that is collecting and crushing glass, is collecting concrete and crushing that and selling that as an end product. We could see a real industry in processing our recyclables and our FOGO in that sort of area. Whilst we understand that, we think that there is opportunity to balance both. There are also commercial opportunities in those sectors in their own right.

The CHAIR: Ms Weigall, I have got to interrupt you, because that is why we ask for submissions, and you did put that in late; next time I think it would be better if your submission was a bit early. But I have got to say I compliment you on the great work in the submission that you put in, and the presentation was excellent. Do you want to conclude, and then we will go into questions?

Ms WEIGALL: Sure. Look, I think we all agree that waste in Victoria is at its cross-road. But we feel that at the local level councils like ours are bearing a lot of the costs at the moment. We are looking at the state and national leadership. We see that there is an opportunity for us to take some quite decisive short-term actions whilst we are still working on those longer term changes and behavioural change. We have a strong role to play in this, and we look forward to working with the state on these sorts of initiatives. And we thank you for the opportunity to present before you today.

The CHAIR: Thank you. One question from me: you mentioned the EPA changing their role—it used to be a partner and mentor—to an enforcer. I am interested in you expanding on that a bit because it is always this debate about what should they be. Should they be the enforcer? And someone else is the partner and mentor? I do not think you can have two hats. I mean, you can do it but it is—do you want to sort of expand that a bit further? Let us say the EPA is just, only, a partner and a mentor. Who is going to be the enforcer, then?

Ms WEIGALL: Look, it is a good point.

The CHAIR: Which has been the biggest criticism in the past: they have not been strong enough to enforce the law—SKM is one of them. So that is what I am sort of curious of: your view on that. Are you then suggesting maybe we should get someone else to fill that role of partner and mentor if the EPA is going to be an enforcer?

Ms WEIGALL: Well, I guess perhaps—and look, I think we will have more comments on this—if we see the shift that has left a vacuum behind them, where we used to work with the EPA and work through the solutions together, we now do not have that. We are just going straight to enforcement—PIN notices, PAN notices, formal warnings—whereas we feel that there should be an opportunity for us to work with them on some of the minor issues and work through them and not just go straight to the enforcement end. We recognise that there is a need for enforcement on serious matters.

Mr HAYES: Just on that point that Mr Melhem raised, for what sort of issues has EPA issued enforcement against your council?

Ms WEIGALL: I will hand over to Kartik on those ones.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: In terms of the enforcements, it is more to do with the landfill compliance, and monitoring and reporting.

Mr HAYES: So actually what is going to the landfill? Or—

Mr VENKATRAMAN: That is correct. And basically what we have seen is a shift since the reform. We used to have a very coherent relationship with the EPA, especially with the Gippsland office, with the regional offices, where we could approach. Now it is just kind of—we have to go through Melbourne. That has been quite a different approach. And the reform has shifted, obviously, from reactive to prevention—and that is the focus of the EPA, we totally understand. But in the scheme of things, for example, there is so much happening in the recycling space, including what has happened with SKM. I totally understand that it had to be shut down, but there needs to be some flexibility, practicality, which is not happening anymore with the EPA.

Mr HAYES: I am just trying to get to the crux of it. What you are saying is that since the close of the China market the EPA have been chasing you after recyclables going into landfill? Or is it stockpiling?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: No, it is not the direct impact.

Mr HAYES: About stockpiling?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: No, it is not. We do not stockpile.

The CHAIR: Do you operate your own landfill?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: That is correct.

Ms WEIGALL: We do.

The CHAIR: Maybe I am just going to be helpful, I think. So basically you have got two hats. One is as a council, sort of responsible for the overall policy, and on the other hand you are an operator of a landfill. And that is where I suppose you are putting that hat on, as the operator of the landfill and your interaction with the EPA.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: The EPA, yes.

The CHAIR: So that is basically—

Mr VENKATRAMAN: So there are two interactions. One is, as rightly said by Mr Melhem, the operation of the landfill and the waste facilities, and the restrictions on the stringent regulations that come with it and looking at the recyclables and the back end, where we are at potential risk with the increase in cost plus the transportation, and also looking at how our contractors are basically processing the material. So that is putting a lot of pressure from the EPA perspective. In terms of the timing, we all know that since 2018 we have been in a recycling crisis. I do not know if it was practical, flexible, to have these enforcements and the reform implemented stringently—that would impact local government. And as we see, the closing of SKM is impacting 31 different councils, and the cost. The end result is the recyclables are going into landfill. I do not see where the environment is being protected. That is where I see that the EPA needs to be more flexible and work with councils and Sustainability Victoria. We see that that is not happening at the moment.

The CHAIR: That is the problem I am having with your approach, because on one hand we want the EPA—we have been criticising them for years of being a toothless tiger and it has led to two major fires in Melbourne, which led to the SKM non-compliance. Now that they have grown some teeth we are not happy about it. I do accept what you are saying—you need a partner and a mentor. I think it is very important because that is very important. On the other hand, you need a strong enforcer. We cannot have it both ways; that is what I am trying to say.

Ms WEIGALL: I think what we are saying is that we recognise there is a need for enforcement, that perhaps there is that gap now. In the submission we suggested this is maybe the time to look at what Sustainability Victoria's role is as well and what DELWP's role is and for them to play a mentoring role and maybe look at resetting that platform so we as a local government know where we go for that mentoring and advice. Perhaps we are still going to the EPA for that mentoring and advice and finding it is no longer there. So who is filling that gap to provide that leadership that we need as a local council to get to that point?

The CHAIR: I would like to explore the issue further because it is something we have not really focused on. Essential service, for example—then the industry should be declared as an essential service and then you have got some central sort of support. I think what I am getting to understand is we are shifting a lot of responsibility between various players and various agencies and who is doing what. So do you see it is sort of part of that to look at where there is more support, whether it is financial support, technical support, policy guidance? We talked about the China National Sword policy. What is your understanding of the China sword policy? A lot of people sort of think, 'Okay, we will just stop importing everybody else's rubbish,' which pretty much is that, but there is a reason behind that. I think the central government policy is to actually change the way they actually deal with waste and how they do it, and it is done centrally.

Ms WEIGALL: Yes.

The CHAIR: So do you sort of see, then, maybe a top-down sort of approach and having some real accountability about having some real directions—is that something you are sort of crying out for?

Ms WEIGALL: I think that is exactly where we are heading in terms of saying that we need some centralised policy and some guidelines—that we know that they are the guidelines and we can follow them, whether that is about what goes into bins or does not go into bins, so that is standardised. I think it is about setting the goalposts very clearly for us so we understand where we fit. Then we can follow those rules. We follow those rules in all the other things that local governments do, and we are trying very hard to follow the rules in terms of how we manage our waste and manage our landfill, and we are trying to be creative—but it seems that there are little pockets of things happening without that centralised approach. We hear someone is doing some trials of glass, but there is not that centralised approach. We hear that VicRoads and the Department of Transport have changed their requirements so we can do that, but there is not that centralised approach of 'Okay, now, everybody, this is the way we have got to go. We have got this change'. So it is about that guidance and that mentoring so that every local government is not wasting their resources trying to research things and find out what is going on—there is that more centralised area which is providing that leadership.

Mr BASFORD: It is interesting that you ask whether it is an essential service, because clearly councils broadly are traditionally known as 'rates, roads and rubbish'. So it is something that is in the psyche of local government. It certainly, as Fiona said, is an area we spend a significant amount of money on, both rates and grants. How many legacy landfills do we have?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: Forty-six.

Mr BASFORD: Forty-six legacy landfills that we have to monitor and manage, plus the existing ones, plus the very remote rubbish collection. So it is a significant part of what East Gippsland does. Each shire in Gippsland will do it slightly differently because of their geographic area and their population, but it is a significant service and cost for our shire.

The CHAIR: But you should not be doing it on your own going forward, I think. That is the message I am getting.

Dr RATNAM: Thanks very much for your submission and your evidence here today. It has been very compelling and really important for us to hear. Just a start-up question, I am just trying to jog my memory: when you mentioned the type of recycling and resource recovery you do, at the moment you have got the two bins—recycled and residual waste; are you doing food organics at the moment?

Ms WEIGALL: We are doing residential green waste. I will get Kartik to explain it in more detail.

Dr RATNAM: Residential green waste? Okay, great.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: At the moment we have a three-bin service across the shire, where the third bin is the organics, which is only garden waste at the moment, except in Mallacoota, where we have trialled and been successful with FOGO. We are looking at a business case in the next 12 months to look at how we can roll out a similar program across East Gippsland.

Dr RATNAM: Great. Can I ask, what do you anticipate or know of the likely barriers to a rollout across the whole municipality for FOGO?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: There are two major barriers. One is the contamination levels.

Dr RATNAM: Of FOGO?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: The FOGO, yes. Mallacoota is a pro-environment, a very environment-conscious community, so to have that consistency across 42 different towns is going to be a big challenge. It has got to be backed up with comprehensive education and awareness. The contamination is going to be a major issue. The second one is the technology. We need to explore. We are working with eastern water at the moment and industry partners such as Patties and Vegco, looking at alternative options for processing organics.

Also, one of the biggest constraints is we have a huge influx of garden waste and food waste. Is it going to complement the supply and demand? So that is something that needs to be looked at in the market. We need to look at the end use as well. So it is kind of a very challenging task, but not impossible.

Ms WEIGALL: For council we have got probably a two-year window of opportunity while we are using our green waste on our own landfill rehabilitation projects, and then we are likely to have a massive cost if we have not got to a point where we can start using and finding a composting use for it locally. So the transport costs and gate fees of taking it somewhere else are really going to be problematic for us.

Dr RATNAM: You need to find somebody who could process that organic waste as well?

Ms WEIGALL: Yes.

Dr RATNAM: Right.

Ms WEIGALL: Which links into how we use the levy and the fund, and how we have some clear guidelines about how we should be managing composting facilities across Victoria.

Dr RATNAM: I also note in your submission that as a council you are supportive of a container refund scheme or a container deposit scheme as well?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: Yes, we are quite supportive of the scheme, but we do not see that as a solution to combat, or for waste minimisation. It is more of a litter prevention scheme. The scheme would work very well because we are a tourist destination, but on the other hand we want to look at how we reduce waste generation and looking at alternative refill stations. So there are two different things that we need to look at: one, with the CDS obviously, to get a cleaner product so that we can process it without additional cost and also prevent litter. As you know, 70 per cent is Crown land and it is very easy for people to go into the bush and litter. And the first thing is to look at comprehensive education. All the three factors need to be complemented.

Dr RATNAM: It is part of, but not the whole, solution.

I was also going to ask in terms of the current crisis with SKM: you are not one of the most directly affected councils, but previous councils that have presented to us before today have said that it has ripple effects. You start to feel it because your local recyclers will then start feeling they do not have another place to send it when central Melbourne starts to have issues with that. Has that been your experience as well? Are you all feeling that ripple effect now?

Ms WEIGALL: We are feeling quite vulnerable—

Dr RATNAM: Yes. Can you explain that?

Ms WEIGALL: because we have now got almost a monopoly, or an oligopoly, occurring in Melbourne, so what does that mean in terms of the fees that we are going to be paying? What does that mean in terms of all of those logistic costs? And what is our community attitude towards recycling?

Dr RATNAM: How have you been able to meet some of the costs that have been borne recently as well? So you have had an increase in how much your recycling is costing to be disposed of?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: We have introduced costs for recyclables—all the recycling through self-haul to the waste facilities, since July last year. We have also increased the rates—

Dr RATNAM: Yes.

Ms WEIGALL: It is one of our fees and charges.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: As part of the fees and charges. We have been lucky in a sense. We pay \$85 a tonne, as opposed to all the other councils, who pay \$110 to \$130. That is primarily because of the MRF we have in house. So most of the contaminations are sorted and segregated, and the overburden is then sent to Visy.

Dr RATNAM: Okay.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: In that way we have been working on—but we have introduced fees and charges for recouping costs.

Dr RATNAM: And you have an in-house MRF, do you?

Ms WEIGALL: The contractor that we use for our kerbside collection owns and operates the MRF.

Dr RATNAM: It is the MRF. It is not council run, but you have a local contractor?

Ms WEIGALL: Yes.

Mr BASFORD: Mr Chair, if I could just add something to that as well, I think one of the issues that our community particularly faces is a capacity-to-pay issue. So we have a number of communities. Like all shires, there are areas of greater wealth than others, but certainly some of our more remote communities, where potentially the cost to actually bring the waste back to a central point, their capacity to pay additional fees—so for instance at the moment we do not charge for green waste. That, I think, costs council somewhere around \$60 000—

Mr VENKATRAMAN: Six-hundred thousand to process.

Mr BASFORD: Six hundred thousand—sorry—to process a year, and we do not charge fees on that, because one of the other reasons, we know, is that given the type of communities and type of geography we have there are a lot of opportunities then to dump that waste in state forests, national parks and those sorts of places, because if the fees are too high, then people can take an easier option. It is not necessarily because they actually want to do that, but it is because, as the fees go up, then their capacity to pay that—

So there are some real competing issues for us around if we were to charge all those fees and if fees continue to rise—and I think this picks up on the point that Fiona made about our vulnerability—if we start to see those prices going up, and that has a flow-on effect on our community, then that is the sort of knock-on effect that we may see as well.

Mr HAYES: I just wanted to ask a few questions. Dr Ratnam covered the ones I wanted to ask about the green waste trial and where that got. I just wanted to ask you about the cross-border cooperation. Are you saying there is no cooperation either way in dealing with waste in small communities along the river?

Ms WEIGALL: There are actually restrictions on moving waste across the border, which I will get Kartik to explain.

Mr VENKATRAMAN: We have been in discussion with neighbouring councils over the years, but nothing has actually materialised till lately. But there has been quite a bit of interest from our neighbouring councils, whether it is Snowy Monaro or Bega. We see a lot of synergies, because towns like Mallacoota, which are closer to the New South Wales border, do not have to bring all their waste back to Bairnsdale, which is 300 kilometres further down. There are already facilities and state-of-the-art infrastructure for processing organics—Cleanaway has a materials recovery facility—so that is something we could look into and work on with the councils. That is our future direction, and the plan—

Mr HAYES: There is no legislative barrier, is there?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: There is some kind of restriction in terms of what we can do and what can be moved interstate. It also varies with the levy. There are two different levies, so another thing that needs to be looked at Australia-wide is to bring more consistency to the levy, because our levy system is much cheaper than our New South Wales counterparts'. Again, it is cost benefit versus the cost of disposal and how it is going to work.

Mr HAYES: It makes sense, doesn't it? The other thing I wanted to ask was you said you have an industry that collects the recycling and presumably sorts it too, and then you say you do not know where it goes. You must have—

Ms WEIGALL: We know where they take it; we then lose track of it from when it goes to the recycler in Melbourne. So that is where we do not know where it goes.

Mr HAYES: So they are onselling it up to Melbourne?

Ms WEIGALL: So they are onselling it, and then that is where we do not know. Our community is saying, 'Well, how can you guarantee that your waste isn't going to landfill? It's not going to your landfill, but do you know that it's not going to landfill more generally?'. We have listened to our community saying it, so as I said, with our e-waste contracts that we are just letting at the moment we have put a criterion in there that they must tell us where it goes and be able to trace it all the way downstream for us.

Mr LIMBRICK: With regard to the differentials between states, especially in the landfill levy but also other things like container deposits schemes, is there any evidence of materials—I know there are restrictions on materials crossing the border, but it would seem that the lower landfill levy in Victoria would incentivise illegal activity to cross the border. Is there any evidence that you are aware of that this is actually happening?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: Yes, absolutely. Prior to our sites in Bendoc, Bonang or Genoa, which is closer to the border, whether it is Snowy Monaro or Bega, they were not staffed sites—like, they were not supervised—and we have seen a lot of cross-border illegal disposal happening. We have found that not just from the New South Wales counterparts but also from the other Victorian borders, where there has been a lot of waste coming from Dinner Plain and Mount Hotham to the sites closer to Omeo and Benambra.

Ms WEIGALL: So, for example, in one of those four sites, with a small population—you know, a population of about 250—we will end up with 50 or 60 mattresses at the transfer station. They are not all coming from the local community.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes, clearly.

Ms WEIGALL: We are seeing commercial quantities of cooking oil being dumped in some of our national parks that are close to the border. So, yes, we are seeing that.

Mr LIMBRICK: And this is incentivised by the high levies?

Ms WEIGALL: Yes.

Mr LIMBRICK: On a converse point, New South Wales has a container deposit scheme. Is there any evidence of containers crossing the border the other way to take advantage of that? You would not be aware of it?

Mr VENKATRAMAN: No.

Ms WEIGALL: No. We hear about it happening at other parts of the Victoria-New South Wales border. We are not seeing it ourselves, but that does not mean that it is not happening on a much smaller scale.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time. We really appreciate it. It has been great to hear from you and your contribution. Thank you for the submission. The submission will be accepted at the next meeting and will be published on the website. A copy of the transcript will be sent across to you so if you have got any corrections, please let us know. Also if there are any other materials or issues you would like to share with us in the next few weeks, we are due to report back at the end of November, so please send that to the secretariat. Again, thank you very much for your contribution.

Mr BASFORD: Thank you for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.