

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management

Dunkeld—Thursday, 19 September 2019

MEMBERS

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Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

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Ms Melina Bath

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Dr Samantha Ratnam

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Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Catherine Cumming

WITNESSES

Cr Neil Trotter, Mayor, and

Mr Lyall Bond, Manager Environment and Emergency, Corangamite Shire Council; and

Cr Kevin Erwin, Mayor, and

Mr Trenton Fithall, Executive Manager Operations, Northern Grampians Shire Council.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Hello, all. I just want to welcome you and say that we are opening the Environment and Planning Standing Committee hearings, and just a reminder to turn your mobiles on to silent or turn them off. We have not got anyone in the gallery at the moment. I just want to extend a warm welcome to you and to the members of the public if they come. The Committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management, and evidence is being recorded.

I want to welcome witnesses from Northern Grampians Shire Council and Corangamite Shire Council, and thank you for making submissions to the Inquiry. 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 you give today is protected by law; however, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a print version of the transcript in the next few days. We have allowed 60 minutes for this session. To ensure there is sufficient time for questions, the Committee asks that any opening comments be kept to 5 to 10 minutes. I might ask you to make your submissions in turn, and then there will be questions from the Committee afterwards, which gives you a chance to flesh out what you have put in there. So I might call on Corangamite to start with their submission, please.

Cr TROTTER: Thank you. I am Mayor Neil Trotter. I have environmental services manager, Lyall Bond. This is of particular interest to us. I will not take up too much time because you have the submission before you, but it is of particular interest to us because we operate a landfill at Naroghid which takes in quite an amount of regional waste. Some of the real issues for us are the costs to our ratepayers, keeping that contained, and it was probably one of the reasons why the landfill was set up in the first place.

That landfill probably has got a 70-year life span. It takes waste from a number of municipalities: Colac, Otway, Warrnambool and some from Moyne—just a little from Moyne.

Mr BOND: A little.

Cr TROTTER: Yes. So we are probably taking in about 37 000 tonnes per year. We have the landfill. We separate out our green waste in FOGOs. We have got a composting facility at the landfill. We have contracts with Visy, and all our recyclables go through Bartons in Warrnambool.

The ongoing cost is a huge concern for us. Because of our size and economies of scale, it is critical for us if we are going to have a long-term future to have good contracts, long contracts. At the moment we are probably getting contracts for about three years. We would like to see that probably extended so that if you are going to make an investment, you can make an investment. Over the long period of time, you are looking at a payback. With short-term contracts it makes it difficult to do that investment.

We have some issues around the pricing structure for waste. With our facility we are worried about long-term sustainability. Pricing structure for waste is critical for us in that we do not want to see our facility bypassed for stuff being transported long distances, perhaps to Melbourne, to Wyndham or places like that. So it is an issue for us—that we would like to see that pricing structure probably more balanced so that it ensures the long-term survival of our waste facility.

We have made a big investment there. Our cells at the landfill last probably two years. We have usually got one cell in construction while the other is being filled. We have had significant costs in doing those cells. In the past

we did not have to line them. When the situation came up at Cranbourne there was a one-size-fits-all approach to lining cells. Our site has probably got 70 metres of clay underneath it, and we see that the cost of doing those cells, which is about \$1.2 million per cell, has been a big impost on us and meant that our costs have escalated because of that. Anything else that you want to add, Lyall?

Mr BOND: I would probably like to, I suppose, go back to our submission to some degree for Corangamite. For us we are a rural community. We are quite dispersed, so it is almost a 2-hour drive from one end of our municipality to the other. So a lot of times we hear about recycling and the yellow bin issue or the commingled, but for our council we have a whole lot of population that are rural residents that have also recycling needs that we need to consider in, I suppose, our holistic service that we provide to them. In Corangamite we have had a three-bin system for quite a while. Probably for 14 years now we have had food organics separated, and we have composted that at our own facility. With that process, because we have a regional landfill and a composting facility, we had a local MRF operating within our shire. When we moved to what was considered best practice, which was to include 1 to 7 plastics rather than a smaller number and include glass—and we used to have bundled paper and then it went to loose—that MRF actually became unviable for the operator. We started transporting materials down to Melbourne because that was considered best practice at the time.

With that change, with the Visy issues that we experienced, our ratepayers saw over a \$50 per tenement charge go up to their kerbside collection charge to try and cover the costs of that change. When we are a rural municipality we do have people that struggle to pay bills, and our garbage charge went from \$293 to nearly \$360. So it is a significant bill to our ratepayers. So we do have quite an interest in what is happening and how it is managed. We really think that the MAV submission highlighted the three tiers of government, and you could nearly add another tier in there around the community—the community have a job to do as well. But certainly all three tiers of government have a responsibility in this space.

We are tending to look at the back end where, what do we do with it once it is already waste or already recyclables? I think there needs to be a lot more emphasis put on, why do we have these products making it into package? Can we legislate to actually include a percentage of recycled product to create demand? Because in the end the products we have at the end that are in our yellow bin, there is no demand for them and there is nothing driving that product.

There is a wide range of solutions. I do not think it is one. I think the submission we provided tried to touch on all of the questions, but it is a multipronged approach and certainly in principle we support container deposit schemes, but it has got to work. I think that is where we need to support our community to make those right decisions and have the right things that are long term. Because in a rural community there is often one shop that provides it. You cannot go to another shop that does not have more packaging; you have got to accept if you want a product that is what it is. So there is definitely a role there in legislating and supporting communities to make those decisions so it does not become recyclables or waste.

Cr TROTTER: Just around that, that packaging covenant is really important at a federal level. Really you have got the packaging companies being their own policemen, and I do not think that works tremendously well. I think that there has to be a change in that area so that product stewardship becomes a really important issue, just reducing the amount of stuff that comes through, and it can be done quite easily. It is a bit like putting Dracula in charge at the blood bank while you have got the packaging industry in charge of those covenants. I think there are going to be problems. There is probably a role there that Government can probably play in changing some of those practices.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I might call on the Northern Grampians Council to make their submission, thanks.

Cr ERWIN: Thank you very much for the opportunity. Our comments are probably similar to Corangamite. Obviously our ratepayers are paying a significant amount to dispose of waste. We run a two-bin system—just putrescible and recycling. We have got low volumes and tyranny of distance, which most rural councils suffer from. We are looking at some options for FOGO and obviously glass, now, is a very topical subject so we might put those on hold until we see the circular economy paper which is due later on this year. We will see if that influences any of our decisions.

Our putrescible waste goes to a privately operated landfill which is just on the edge of Stawell. It still has a few years left of airspace. There was an agreement made around shire amalgamations that it needed to be 20 years airspace. It is getting very close to the end of that. I think it might be actually this year or next year that that contract concludes, so we will have some challenges about where we actually place our putrescible waste.

On recycling, the China National Sword policy has had an impact on our recycling charges. We struck a deal with the contractor, which saw a variation and that has been \$33 per tenement. That is the increase that that decision by China has made. Fortunately we have not seen any interruptions to our service. We deal through Visy. I suppose that has been a bit of a blessing that we have not had to put any of our recycling into landfill that we know of.

It has had its challenges. Being a small rural council with long distances adds to that challenge. Personally we would like to see some local solutions if possible. I know it is a challenge when you are dealing with small volumes but some local solutions—and I do not know, I have not got the silver bullet to think of all those solutions—that would be our preferable option.

Mr FITHALL: It is probably worth noting that some of the media out there regarding the recycling crisis has been generalised, and that has impacted on our reputation. We have been receiving an influx of comments from our community regarding what we are doing with our recycling. As Kev said, we are not sending recycling to landfill, but that is definitely the perception, and we have had to do some pretty strong media, and targeted media, to our community trying to get some of our reputation back in this regard. We like to think we are not bad at doing this, and we like to ensure that our community has confidence in our ability to manage our waste and recycling.

Cr ERWIN: I think it has done a bit of damage generally to recycling overall in the state. There is a bit of a perception there, ‘Why worry? Just chuck it all in one bin’, and that is really sad.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is very damaging.

Cr ERWIN: It is very damaging, and it is going to take a lot of education and putting some faith back in the whole industry to cure that or to improve that.

Mr BOND: That is something that at Corangamite we would support. We have seen a 3 per cent decrease in our commingled recyclables this year, which is the first time in I think about seven years that we have actually had a decrease in that volume. Although we were not sending anything to landfill and we were able to keep our material being sorted, we have suffered the bad publicity. Even though our media and our Facebook team and everyone else have really worked hard, the bad stories have certainly tainted the whole system in its current form.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I might ask a couple of questions. How are you handling your commingled recycling at the moment? It is all being shipped out, is it? Is there any pre-sorting going on or anything like that?

Mr BOND: No. At Corangamite our kerbside collection trucks take it directly to a facility to be bulked up and direct hauled to Melbourne.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: The same with you guys?

Cr ERWIN: The same.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: In regards to FOGO you are considering options and you have already implemented—

Cr TROTTER: We have been doing it for quite some time.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: First of all, what options are you considering in the way of FOGO? You have got a large area to cover. Are you recommending composting at home? Or are you thinking of establishing a composting centre to deal with it?

Mr FITHALL: We are in the middle of developing our waste strategy, and it is probably not great timing around everything else that is going on so it is a little bit on hold but effectively that would identify some of the solutions in doing that. FOGO is approximately 40 per cent of our waste in terms of weight. From my opinion, with pushing composting at home and things like that, we are in a rural setting and our community has an ability to do that with land and whatnot, so I think in the first instance we will try and push a composting sort of methodology or concept and then follow it up with the need for bins and separate collections.

Cr ERWIN: There has been some thought, because we have the likes of Halls Gap, a high tourism area, that we might put a biodigester of some description out there and trial it in that area to try and work out a collection method and do some costings on what it might cost. It is difficult when you have got low volumes: how do you collect it effectively, efficiently and cost-effectively? So yes, we need to apply some real thought to how we do that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: And how are you guys handling it?

Cr TROTTER: We have been doing it for a number of years. We have green collection bins, and last year we rolled out kitchen caddies as well with disposable biodegradable bags for those. That is our fortnightly contract. Over the summer we do it weekly, for December and January, for green waste. So we just do it for those two months of the year. That has gone over really well with the community; they see good value in that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: So have you got three bins right across the municipality?

Cr TROTTER: We have got three bins, yes. Timboon is one town in our area that has probably gone plastic bag free in its supermarkets for the last 20 years. They still have it for green products—vegetables and fruit—but you have to take your own shopping bag in or buy one there, and the community has been used to that for probably 20-odd years.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Well done. That is great.

Mr BOND: It is worth noting just with that that we only provide that to our townships. So of our ratepayers, the rural properties use transfer stations for their services. So it is only our kerbside collection towns that have the three-bin system and then the kitchen caddies.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: So what happens in the rural—

Mr BOND: Most rural areas have either chooks or they have a compost system. Even in town that is a comment we do find a lot. People say ‘Because we are a rural town we have another system’, and that is fine, but it is an ongoing struggle to get more of the kitchen organics into that bin. That is why we have introduced the caddy system to go in the kitchen and a compostable bag, because we are finding the green organics—the garden clippings, the lawnmowings—are quite easy to get in, but with that other food waste there is an icky, yucky factor. People do not want to just tip it into that bin. So that is how we are trying to deal with that. It has improved, but it is a little bit like the recycling—it is an ongoing education and communication program. You cannot allow it to have a bad news story because it does send it in the wrong direction.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: But you have seen a reduction in what is going to landfill since the introduction of it.

Mr BOND: We have been doing it for nearly 14 years now, so it is probably hard for us to say what that reduction is, but we do have quite a high rate of recovery when you compare the three bins. It is 65 per cent that is recovered at Corangamite, so that is a very good rate. But a lot of it is that organics material.

Cr TROTTER: We are using most of that compost to rehabilitate the landfill. We cannot move it offsite, which is one of the problems we have had. We wanted to install a biodigester, but we had trouble getting funding for that. We put in an application a couple of years ago and were not successful. But, you know, a biodigester would help us to have that product ready for sale. It would have to meet engineering standards. Currently they do not, so we use it back to rehabilitate the landfill.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, that is interesting. I suppose you have thought of the possibilities of separating glass out too. Like the other councils that have presented, do you see possible industries being immediately available in recycling glass in your municipalities?

Cr ERWIN: Yes, look, we could use it in our own construction at the council. It is how we collect it, and we are still trying to work out a methodology around that. In principle we support a container deposit scheme. I think at least that gives you maybe a small amount or a reasonable amount of clean product anyway. There are options and different methods around Australia. I do not think it is something where we have to reinvent the wheel. It would have been good to have it nationally, but South Australia has already had it for 40 years. It is probably going to be hard to change them greatly. But there have been tried and true methods around Australia. I think we could probably come up with one that works reasonably.

Mr FITHALL: In terms of road-based construction, I guess we are fairly resource rich. We have got quite a lot of gravels within our region. So having crushed glass be competitive against those natural resources is something that is going to be very difficult. Unless we are resourcing that locally and then feeding it into our current systems it would not really work for us.

Cr ERWIN: I guess we are in a part of the state that does have small volumes generally. Things like a mobile glass crusher might be advantageous to areas a bit more remote so you can crush on site and that cuts down your cost of carting the product around.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I suppose so, yes.

Mr FITHALL: And potentially feed directly into our current system.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to make a comment?

Cr TROTTER: A fourth bin does come at a cost. That is a prime consideration for us as well. If you introduce the fourth bin for glass, there is going to be a cost, and that will go straight onto the ratepayer. So that is a concern for us as well.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: That is right, and would not save you that much in landfill.

Cr TROTTER: No.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: That is interesting. Just one other question briefly talking about product stewardship; we just touched on it a bit last time. How much of a concern is e-waste to both of your councils?

Cr TROTTER: It is a big concern for us. Probably recycling is a bit like cherrypicking. People want to take the best out of their e-waste and the rest of it is probably going to be warehoused. We have built two facilities with government assistance, but they are filling up rapidly, and there is no real market for a lot of that stuff. The market is very, very small at the moment. For us, it is going to be expensive. We are looking probably at a proposal of having warehouses full of e-waste with no viable market.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Same for you?

Cr ERWIN: Look, we are probably a little better than that. Horsham has a facility up there, Axis Worx, which does break down the e-waste. I think they will probably be flooded with e-waste, but we will see how that goes. I mean, it is early days. It was a concern that we would have a similar large stockpile of e-waste around, but fingers crossed it does not go the same as the recycling where there are warehouses full of recycled material.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: All right, thanks, Kevin. I might ask the Committee members if they would like to ask some questions. I will start with Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you for your evidence and submissions today. I would actually like to follow on, Cr Trotter, with the e-waste question. There was quite a large section in your submission about e-waste, and it is a concern that we have heard brought up a number of times. We heard evidence from the MFB. They had serious concerns about fire risk with e-waste stockpiles, in particular with some of the materials like lithium

batteries that are used in solar systems and other consumer products; they did not have sufficient firefighting materials to actually put those fires out, and also the explosive nature of those fires meant that they did not have protective equipment. It is also my understanding from other evidence that we have heard—you mentioned solar panels—that there is no market for these at the moment and they contain toxic materials such as cadmium telluride, lead and this sort of thing. Is the only option at the moment for you to stockpile these solar panels?

Cr TROTTER: Pretty much. And it is going to be something that is going to increase exponentially because they have a limited life span. Some of the earlier ones are probably now becoming obsolete, so you can see probably a large volume is coming onstream within the next few years, I would think.

Mr LIMBRICK: So these panels that contain these toxic materials being stored in the same facility with lithium batteries that are prone to explode—do you see that as a serious risk long-term when you have got large volumes of these with no markets for them?

Cr TROTTER: Yes, it is a problem. I will let Lyall expand on it but, you know, the batteries are a problem going into landfill as well. We had fires on Christmas Day last year—

Mr LIMBRICK: From lithium batteries?

Cr TROTTER: and I think we had nine units, and they had to go in and physically pull apart the landfill to douse them and put them out. So it is a significant problem. If we can divert them out of landfill, it is good too, but there is still that inherent danger with them.

Mr BOND: It is probably one of the times when not having large volumes is a good thing. As a rural area we do not have lots and lots, and when Cr Trotter talks about the facilities we have built—the sheds for taking this material—they are not huge warehouses. They are big sheds, but we have a separation system so they are apart. But one lithium-ion battery that gets damaged and catches fire is quite an intense fire, so it is a concern for us. The range of products that we are seeing coming in that are classed under the new e-waste ban go right down to the small, fluffy toys that have a battery and a voice, because no-one wants them. The ability to actually recycle that is very low.

So the approach of, ‘Well, we’ll create a ban and then that will create a market because it will be there’, does not work in our experience in the waste industry, and I think the recyclables industry is probably suffering from that approach to some degree as well—that we have a product but that does not necessarily mean someone wants it at the other end, and unless there is some way of making sure that people use these products in other new materials or other items then, for that commodity, the use of it will be quite low. We are banking or putting aside those e-waste items that we just have no home for and no processor, and the cost of that is quite high for us, so we are concerned with the model. If there is no use for a product and no demand for a product, just because you are going to create the product does not build that demand, and it needs some attention as soon as possible.

Cr ERWIN: Yes. Look, we probably have similar concerns. I can give you an example of a lithium battery. I am a member of the CFA and have been for quite a while. We had a walking floor truck heading on the Western Highway which had a fire in the load. As we actually got to the thing it was a lithium battery on the floor right in the middle of the load, so they are prone to catching fire—exploding or whatever they do—and it has always been a concern that they should be separated out. Europe, they have certain retailers; they have containers that you just drop your batteries in and they are separated out and dealt with.

Mr LIMBRICK: You mentioned the e-waste storage facilities. Are the lithium batteries being separated from the solar panels?

Cr TROTTER: Yes.

Mr LIMBRICK: Because that was one concern: if the lithium batteries catch fire and then that sets on fire the solar panels, you end up with plumes of cadmium. It is not a good thing.

Cr ERWIN: Dangerous stuff, yes.

Mr BOND: They are all separated and we do have specific areas, but the concern is that at a facility a fire is a fire and it is still quite concerning. It could spread to that area, so the ability to have markets or places to take that e-waste material just does not exist for some of those items.

Ms TAYLOR: I have got a couple of things. I was just looking something up, sorry. I googled this:

Recycling processes today recover 25 per cent up to 96 per cent of the materials of a lithium-ion battery cell, depending on the separation technology.

So the cell itself does not necessarily have to be the end of the world. It just seems to be, if I can rely on Google—let us not rely on Google—on principle if you have proper separation technology. So that might be part of the issue, which is really the fundamental element of my question—product stewardship—because in the first place if we are making products knowing full well there is not an endpoint, that is a problem. So how would you envision we could somehow implement the requirement of product stewardship, and I guess it has to be national because otherwise—

Cr TROTTER: It does not work.

Ms TAYLOR: and perhaps international, doesn't it really?

Mr BOND: If I use an example that is quite prudent to rural areas, so the drum muster program, every time you buy a chemical through certain suppliers a percentage of that per litre goes into the recovery of the drum. It is actually not a legislated requirement, and although it has been really successful and we support it at all of our transfer facilities for our rural community, what we have seen in recent times is people pulling out of that program because of costs, and there are a number—and our attendants actually have a list—of drums they cannot accept from certain chemical companies because they have pulled out of the drum muster program. But probably before that was happening I would have held it up as a program that takes a bit of work but is one where when you buy it, you pay for its disposal, and it works really well. Then when you come to dispose of it and you do not want it, it actually costs you nothing because you have already paid for it. So then for a council it is basically a process of in and out with a contractor to come and get the material and send it off, and I think the success of that program has probably been underplayed when I think of product stewardship.

Mr MEDDICK: It sounds a lot like a container deposit scheme.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: The same is being done with tyres presently and has been done for a while: you pay a little extra, which goes toward the collection and disposal of the tyres.

Cr TROTTER: You pay so much, yes, and I think some of it has been done with mattresses as well. Some of the bedding companies are doing it as well.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Correct.

Ms TAYLOR: The second question: the council supports investigating localised waste-to-energy options. I was wondering what that looks like, because at the least sustainable end what has been fed back in the Inquiry is you produce this toxic ash and then you have to have a very stable landfill to be able to deal with that. So again you are going back to a landfill solution at the end of the day anyway, so what did you envisage in terms of waste-to-energy that is going to help create a more sustainable future?

Cr ERWIN: We investigated it. We have got a hydroponics set-up which is being built, and we investigated it pretty thoroughly to actually power that.

Ms TAYLOR: That's good!

Cr ERWIN: But we found there was not enough feedstock. It was irregular. They do need a considerable amount of feedstock. They are probably more suited to a metro-type situation rather than a rural situation. Ballarat has gone through a similar program, but same thing; it struggled to get dependable feedstock.

Ms TAYLOR: Fair enough.

Mr FITHALL: It would not be the first time either. We have an abattoir in Stawell that was looking at the same process, and again the same outcomes. We just could not quite get the feed to get it working.

Cr TROTTER: You are looking at the tonnages and whether it is viable, and there are a number of schemes. At Skipton Hospital they are burning stubble pellets, so they are harvesting the stubble. They have got a harvester that turns it into pellets straightaway, and then that can be fed into a burner that is heating the hospital and providing all the hot water.

There is a similar scheme at Beaufort I think, where they are using—

Ms TAYLOR: Pardon my ignorance, what is—

Cr ERWIN: Crop residual.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay.

Ms BATH: Expand on that one a bit more—plant-based.

Ms TAYLOR: I am clearly from the city, and I apologise up-front. The tonnages involved in that are astronomical for this region, where people would normally burn that stubble. Now they harvest it, they leave about that much of the stalk to protect the ground and what is harvested is immediately turned into pellets, and then it goes in and fires the burner at the hospital.

Ms BATH: Wheat, isn't it?

Mr BOND: Yes, that is right.

Ms BATH: The bottom bit of the wheat.

Mr BOND: Beaufort hospital has a wood version of that as well. When most people consider waste to energy they picture all in—chuck it all in—and then it will be magically gone and we will sort it out. But I think when we talk more about waste to energy at the local scale, trying to deal with it where it becomes the waste, that is where there is far more waste. There are pellets, there is timber, there are wheat residuals—there are a lot of other wastes other than just all the municipal wastes. I think there are opportunities for varying waste-to-energy technologies, depending on the needs of communities, and that does very quite considerably. The latent use at a hospital is: you need heat.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: We would probably be looking more at plastics and things and that rather than stubble.

Mr BOND: Yes.

Cr TROTTER: But it has to be done on a regional basis. Individual councils—it is beyond our capacity, and you would not have the feedstock and you do not have the contracts. To put a facility like that—it is long-term payback.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It would not pay back quickly.

Cr TROTTER: So you have those contracts, and it has got to be for more than one municipality. It has got to be a regional basis.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. Thanks very much.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you all for coming, and it is good to see you all again. Might I just say off the bat: once again it is great to see a regional town leading the way, setting the example in Timboon and having a plastic bag ban for many, many years. It is wonderful to see it just quietly going about and doing what is needed.

A lot of what you have answered already and what you put forward in your presentation covered a lot of the questions that I originally had, but I have got just one or two. They more now spring from a consumer's end but still affect what happens with all shires, whether they are regional or whether they are city, in terms of landfill and what can be used as plastics as recyclable and not. One of the things that has been prevalent is this whole situation of, first of all, when we all go into a supermarket and we want to buy fresh fruit and vegetables and we are presented with plastic trays with food wrapped in cling wrap. Now, an individual person might not think that this is a big problem because they go into their local supermarket and they only see themselves and what they are putting in their trolley, but if they stop for a moment and look around and see 150 people in the supermarket all doing exactly the same thing, multiply that across their community, multiply that across every single supermarket in Victoria, multiply that across every single supermarket in Australia and we have a massive problem. So this comes back to this product stewardship. Would a state-instigated ban on that type of packaging help, first of all?

Secondly, when I was first married, for instance, we used to separate our cardboard and paper. We had to wrap it up in a piece of string and put it on the nature strip, and that was all done. But we could not, for instance, put pizza boxes in it because they had food waste contaminating it, and this has become a problem. How much of that must be an education? We talk about glass and the contamination of glass in recycling—how much of it gets rejected. Would a simple education program in that respect help? I know when we are at home the first thing we do with all of our glass just automatically is it is in the sink—we have got a glass jar and we wash it out. Where possible we try to get rid of the labels as well before it goes in the recycling bin, because we want to make sure that this is where it ends up, where it is supposed to go. Again I come back to my earlier statement with the other councils: would a releasing of the funds from the Sustainability Fund help cover an education process but also help in all this other investment in these other areas?

Cr TROTTER: Education is really, really important. The biggest problem is, when you get a crisis that comes along like we have, that the education that has been going on for 10 or 15 years goes out the window, like that, and people say, 'Oh, I'm not going to do it. It's all going to recycling'. And now we are not doing that. We have got to go out and re-convince our community that that is not the situation—, that we are recycling and it is not going into landfill. But the damage that this has done has set us back years.

Mr MEDDICK: And that is a cost being borne by the shire as well?

Cr TROTTER: Yes, that is right. So that education is really, really important, but it is very, very fragile as well because of the situation.

Mr BOND: It is also very variable. As a region and a regional waste group, we try and run education across multiple councils, but every council has some variation—a different bin lid or something else, or they might be doing a glass trial—so it is really hard to have one size fits all. A different processor might take a different material or not accept glass so they have an extra bin, so certainly education is key to a whole lot of things. When you talk about releasing funds from the Sustainability Fund, the amounts that we have been getting as regions have been quite good, but they have really reinforced the systems that we have had in place and supported those. For a landscape change in recycling and waste management in Victoria, we need to get serious about the amounts, and it is multimillion-dollar projects to sort some of this stuff out.

Mr MEDDICK: Something like your biomass?

Mr BOND: It is not a \$100 000 project or a \$200 000 project. It is great to spread it to all the municipalities, and I think we have all benefited from that and we have expanded and improved our systems, but if we are actually to do a shift, the half a billion dollars in the Sustainability Fund needs to be invested very large scale. That is the only way we will get a landscape shift in what we are trying to do.

Mr MEDDICK: Kevin and Trenton, would you back that up?

Cr ERWIN: Yes, I would agree with that. Just back on your question, I am not sure whether the State would—it would probably help some, but I think I am quite interested in the trial they are doing in Europe. That is putting a specific identifying mark on all recyclable material. It needs to be fully recyclable. If it is not, they

pay for the privilege of using some other packaging. That is quite interesting because one of our councillors actually mentioned she bought a product that had a triangle on it like that.

Mr MEDDICK: Is that an EU thing or is it an individual country thing?

Cr ERWIN: No, I think it must be an EU thing. Anyway it had a triangle thing on the packaging and she thought it was made to be recyclable, and apparently it is not. So we probably have not got a really good track record on labelling.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: You would have to have a real strong licensing scheme.

Cr ERWIN: It would be, yes, and obviously nationally would be far better than perhaps an individual state doing it, but it is just interesting that unless it is fully recyclable it does not get that whatever that is—that identifying mark.

Mr MEDDICK: And then they pay a premium.

Cr ERWIN: And if it is not, they pay a premium for putting that product on the shelves. Personally I despise polystyrene. It is the most useless product. I think we have far too many plastics on the market. I think Japan went through a trial where they reduced the number of plastics that were able to be used. With those types of things it will take a radical shift, and yes, we should use some of that waste levy money to develop some of those. Personally I have always said that we are very good at collecting waste but we are not very good at doing something after that. That is the bit that is missing.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Reduce is essential, isn't it? It is an essential component of handling waste.

Cr ERWIN: Yes, absolutely.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Just before we go on I would like to acknowledge the presence of Mrs Bev McArthur, MLC, who has come into the hearing. Welcome.

Ms BATH: Thank you very much for your presentation and your passion in your region and for looking after your particular area. Part of our terms of reference looks at stockpiling of waste. The EPA, the Environment Protection Authority, certainly has a big role to play in that. I note in the Northern Grampians submission you talk about the Stawell tyre project, and I would be interested to understand a little bit more around that and, I guess, your experiences and what the council has had to do to jump into that space. Also a similar example: could you go through the Kaniva—have I said that right, Kaniva?

Cr ERWIN: Kaniva.

Ms BATH: Kaniva—I beg your pardon; you can see I am a Gippslander—the toxic waste dump there, and your experiences there, because council has a role but it also has limitations in its role, and the EPA has a role. I am wanting to understand where you see that the EPA could have improved their role and what message you can give us as a council hearing about that that we can send back to Government.

Cr ERWIN: A bit of a history on our famous stockpile of tyres at Stawell: it was a re-treading plant that went through various ownerships over time. The legacy was anywhere up to about 5 million to 8 million tyres was the recommendation, but it did not turn out quite that many, luckily. They have been sitting there for probably 20 years, and that is the problem: there are a lot of legacies around the state. It took a consistent approach for a long, long time to actually get someone to listen.

Ms BATH: From council?

Cr ERWIN: From council predominantly, yes. We had an abattoir that was about 400 metres to the north, which was the largest employer in town. When we did some scenarios around town it would have basically shut the town down. It would have affected the tourism industry, because the plume, if it had gone up in smoke, would have affected out over the Grampians, which is 25 to 30 kilometres away. So it was a real challenge. We had numerous meetings in Melbourne with SV, EPA and EMV, and it was a real challenge. It just took a consistent approach to actually get someone to listen. Eventually it happened: council jumped on the graders

and things to actually get some tracks and things made so that tyres could be taken out. There was some fireproofing methods done—bringing in some tanks so there was a water supply there in case anything happened when they were deconstructing the pile. I have not got any photos of it, but it looked quite spectacular. Trent, I might hand over to you for some of the more technical stuff.

Mr FITHALL: Well, I suppose once we got the call to arms to be able to act it was an all-of-government sort of approach. I do not think the EPA could have done it without us and I do not think we could have done it without them. While the EPA led that process, council pretty much shut down its work department for about a month and a half to get it moving, to get machinery in there, to get things in there and to get the tanks installed just to have this thing move in the right direction and quickly. And once it was moving it did—it moved very quickly.

Cr ERWIN: It did. Look, some of the tyres got recycled and some were that far gone that they went to landfill. But yes, a lot of it got crumbed and sent around.

Ms BATH: You just mentioned then that there seemed to be an impediment for people listening in Melbourne. What do we need to understand that would have made that process easier for you? And maybe you could put that in the context of the Kaniva issue as well.

Cr ERWIN: There is probably a stronger role there for the EPA in some of those circumstances. I do not say all but in some of those circumstances. Kaniva was probably the same. Although it seemed to be that there was not an awareness that all of this stuff was sitting on a block of land outside Kaniva, there was a certain element, I think—and I will not make allegations—behind some of these things. The storage of the material was unknown—what it actually was—because I do not think there was any labelling. Some of it was buried in containers and some was just buried in the land, and there were cars stacked over the top to cover it up, basically, so that it could not be detected from the air. For instance, if the local fire brigade got called out to something there, they had no idea what they were coming up against—none whatsoever. There was no labelling, no signage or anything; it was just dumped there.

It was a similar situation in Melbourne with warehouses. You do not know what you are rocking up to. There is just a warehouse full of some sort of chemical. I think the EPA do have a stronger role in some of this and probably the fire services too, perhaps, and the EMV, maybe. I think it is combination.

Ms BATH: So with the identification of the inherent risks and dangers and then a localised understanding with the EPA office, have you got a local EPA office that you communicated with?

Cr ERWIN: No.

Ms BATH: So you have to do all your shouting back into Melbourne?

Cr ERWIN: From afar.

Mr FITHALL: I think our risk was well understood. We have been doing a lot of work on this for a long time. There was consistent messaging coming both through council and through our emergency management processes and forums. We were pushing this for a long time, and it was only when we were willing to act that is when it moved, I suppose.

Cr ERWIN: And I must say, some of the landfill levy was used to actually pay for the removal of these things. And I know there are a lot of legacies. If we used the landfill levy to remove them all, it would probably disappear and probably some better work could be done in the future. They need to get really serious about some of these things because, look, it has affected communities in Melbourne as well with the drift, and surely someone knows about it. With the amount of materials carted to Kaniva, you cannot do that without someone noticing it.

Cr TROTTER: And when you have got illegal operations or warehousing like we have in the metropolitan areas as well as in country areas it means that your landfill is competing with someone that is not doing the right thing. The costs go out; you cannot compete. With the landfill levy, we are paying, I think, \$900 000 per

year from our landfill, and you get very little back. Even if they were loaning the money to private industry to come up with alternatives, there would be something being done. But as it is now, the money seems sacrosanct.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: We are hearing that consistently. Thanks, Cr Trotter. I just wanted to ask: talking about illegality, I was just wondering if you had any suggestions on how to tackle illegal dumping and littering in general. Many regional councils have raised this issue.

Cr TROTTER: I think the EPA is changing. They are changing their focus. We had meetings with them last week. That is probably looking more promising than it was because they were always just a policeman. They never gave advice and they were not involved in product stewardship or being proactive. I think that is changing, but it is only recent—it is only in the last 12 months—so there is a lot of catch up to be played there. But they do have a role in carrying out that enforcement and making sure that compliance is there. Perhaps the penalties for warehousing should be far higher, and a better reporting procedure would probably go well.

Mr BOND: In Corangamite we do not have a large illegal dumping issue. I am concerned, however, when we are talking about a circular economy that quite often our way of dealing with it is to increase the landfill levy or to make the last system more expensive. When we have had illegal dumping that we have been able to investigate and come to a conclusion, in our shire it has typically been associated with someone who has not felt they are able to pay for the dumping. It is not large truckloads. It is usually a house load of waste or material, and they are financially struggling to meet the cost of that disposal. There is, I think, a concern—or I have a concern—but I think there is a balancing act between the circular economy and where you actually put the cost of things. In our current process people buy things but then quite often do not have the ability to dispose of them effectively.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: That probably goes to product stewardship too.

Mr BOND: It does, yes.

Cr ERWIN: It does. Stawell is surrounded by quite a bit of bushland, and you get things like lounges dumped out in the bush. It comes at a cost to clean them up. We get phone calls, and the guys have to run out and clean it up. It all comes at a cost. And if you take a train ride from Ballarat to Melbourne, have a look at the side of the railway lines. There is household rubbish dumped all the way along there. So we have got a lot of legacy stuff to clean up.

Mr FITHALL: I think the EPA are increasing their presence out in the regional areas too. I know the OPLE program has been quite successful in other shires—not necessarily us, because we were not successful. But we are hearing good things from the likes of Buloke and Loddon shire around their OPLE and being able to act on some of these things.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Terrific.

Mr LIMBRICK: Chair, can I clarify one thing. Mr Bond, so you would think that the landfill levy is incentivising illegal dumping? It seems to imply that.

Mr BOND: I think there is a barrier for some low-income households to use—especially in rural areas where they might not get a service through their property; they have to go to a transfer station. They are struggling to meet some of those waste costs already. And it is not just a waste cost; it is a power bill, it is every other bill, and what do they sacrifice to try and afford to live in their community?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you very much. I would just like to say thanks to all of you for coming here today and for your submissions. We are grateful to hear your solutions and how you are tackling the problem at the moment. Thanks very much.

Witnesses withdrew.