



**PROTECT  
CONSERVE  
SUSTAIN**

Agricultural, Resources and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane 4100

20 December 2012

## **Re: Waste Reduction and Recycling and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012**

Queensland Conservation (QCC) is the peak environment organisation in Queensland. Our agenda is based upon the protection of the natural environment and the promotion of ecological sustainability.

This submission is directed at amendments to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011.

QCC does not support the removal of a waste levy. A waste levy provides an economic driver that supports a change of behaviour and contributes to the funding of resource recovery (and other initiatives beneficial to the community).

Our view is that the levy should have been maintained but applied to all sectors, including the municipal sector.

With the Queensland Waste Strategy now under review, it is challenging, to say the least, how this strategy will be financed and resource recovery targets achieved without levy funding. It would appear that further regulation and taxpayer investment will be required.

It was estimated that the levy as proposed in the previous legislation would have generated around \$400M over four years. This funding was scheduled to be used for waste reduction/resource recovery (\$270M), National Park acquisition and wildlife rescue. The loss of revenue from the waste levy also meant the loss of a community-based waste grant that would have benefited a great number of community groups active in litter reduction, recycling and no waste promotion.

### **An Economic Opportunity going to waste?**

Queensland is a wasteful society with one of the highest waste levels and one of the lowest recycling rates in Australia. Much of that waste ends up in landfill or as contamination and litter in the environment. A 2007 QCC/TEC Report *State of Waste in Queensland* estimated that over \$350 million worth of resources was wasted in landfill every year. This figure should be considered as a conservative, under-estimation of the true resource value.

Wasting resources in this way means that high use of virgin materials is maintained for new products, that wasteful and polluting practices are recognised-but not acted upon-and that economic opportunities from the use of discarded materials are not realised.

*By example, it is estimated that approximately 270,000 tonnes of timber is landfilled every year. That very roughly represents 30% of annual use in Queensland. Changed behaviour and better management of this resource would ensure its greater reuse and recycling and provide significant economic opportunity.*

*By example, the significant quantities of residual and contaminated salts from CSG operations should be subject to a hazardous waste levy. This would drive an active reuse program for these materials or generate considerable revenue for the state to invest in resource recovery.*

### **Queensland takes the Waste from Others?**

With other jurisdictions, such as NSW, imposing a levy on waste, the likelihood of cross-border transport of wastes is inevitable. Recent media reports suggest that this is in-effect now happening. A simple assessment exercise conducted at landfills in SEQ will quickly identify the extent of this traffic. We presume that such an exercise has already been conducted and can be included in the Committees deliberations.

### **The True Cost to the Taxpayer?**

The removal of the waste levy was cited as the removal of a cost burden to business. This argument avoided the point that if a business recycled and not wasted resources, it would not be subject to a levy. It avoided the point that the waste industry would rapidly change its services to meet these needs. It avoided the point that waste was not a large component of most business costs and that an effectively directed waste levy would promote significant new economic opportunity for the community.

The management of waste infrastructure and services, illegal dumping and litter clean up is a huge community concern and significant cost. The imposition of a levy both offset some of that cost and supported reduced wasteful behaviour. It would be useful for the committee to know what the community cost is for these services and for the costs of clean up. We would be of the view that these costs were not factored in when a decision was made to remove the levy.

## Conclusion

The removal of a waste levy has had a detrimental affect on the waste to resource recovery agenda in Queensland. Its removal provides a range of challenges for the State Government in developing a new Waste Strategy that must achieve best practice resource targets and build new economic opportunity.

The removal of the waste levy poses a number of additional questions for the government that deserve an answer. These include a response to cross border waste transportation and clarification of the true cost to the community.

Was the removal of the waste levy really the removal of a cost to the community or the removal of an opportunity for a cleaner and more resourceful state?

Regards,



Toby Hutcheon  
Executive Director