

Environmental Protection (Powers and Penalties) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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The Waste and Recycling Industry of Queensland (WRIQ) is the unified voice of waste management and resource recovery in the State. Representing more than 90 Queensland-based organisations ranging from multi-nationals through to small family owned and operated businesses, WRIQ engages in a broad range of state-specific issues of strategic importance to the sustainability and development of the waste management and resource recovery sector. WRIQ represents all aspects of the sector including major landfills, transfer stations, resource recovery facilities, firming power facilities and collection services. WRIQ's mission is to elevate the waste management and recycling industries through services, education and advocacy for members to achieve successful economic, social and environmental outcomes. WRIQ welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Powers and Penalties) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Our members are generally very supportive of stronger environmental regulations. The Environmental Protection (Powers and Penalties) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 is a good step towards a more robust environmental regulator in Queensland, but unfortunately it places sole responsibility on waste receivers for issues which are often outside of their control. In our previous submissions we wrote about the concept of 'polluter pays' and how this might apply in the waste recycling industry. The Act needs to broaden the description of who the polluter is to reflect the challenges faced by waste facilities who are the receivers of this contamination. It is not always feasible or possible for the waste industry to identify every potential contaminant their facility is receiving, as the majority of the time waste is received as a mixed load and can be from unknown sources. While the waste facility can make enquiries of the person disposing of an item, it's not practical to wait for lab results to determine the chemical properties of an item or identify contamination such as PFAS that may not be visible to the naked eye. Despite warnings on products or given by local government and waste facilities, members of the public continue to dispose of hazardous waste, including lithium-ion batteries, in wheelie bins, mixed with household waste. Practically, a landfill, waste transfer, or recycling operator has limited options other than to accept the waste, manage or dispose of it. Certainly, it is not an option for every waste facility to simply refuse to take items that are untested (unlike contaminated soil) because they may contain an emerging contaminant/s or hazardous wastes. Test results take time and storing waste before disposal is often not feasible or may result in other hazards to human health and safety. It is important that those importing, designing, producing, selling, using and disposing of products share in the responsibility to reduce adverse environmental and ecological impacts. We would be happy to organise a site visit for the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee to a facility to provide a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by waste and recycling operators.