

Democrats for social credit

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Waste Minimisation In New Zealand – Discussion Document 2009

Democrats for social credit (DSC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this discussion document. We see the management of waste and the environment generally as of equal importance, and indeed closely tied, to managing the economy. It is largely economic activity generated under the present inefficient monetary system that treats the earth and its resources as infinite, which they most certainly are not.

DSC applauds the intent of this discussion document, yet we feel it does not go far enough. The focus of this discussion seems to be addressing the problem of waste as solely one of disposal. We would go much further, and address the production and poor management of waste of all forms that has been allowed to continue for too long.

We are facing a number of impending global crises, including food, water, energy and peak oil, all of which are linked to climate change. DSC hopes that this narrow discussion on what to do with waste will be quickly followed by a wider discussion on how to address these multiple crises as they will assuredly impact on our people, our land and our economy. Even more do we hope that action will come from such discussion, before it is too late.

Part 1: Revising targets for the New Zealand Waste Strategy

- The targets for reduction of quantity and monitoring of composition of waste seem reasonable, although the extremely modest volume target reduction of 20% by 2015 should be a minimum guideline, with the intention of aiming for a higher percentage.
- The date for target 3, a system for collecting data on the management and recycling of organic waste (2012) is too far in the future. If this information is important (and it is) then the system for gathering it should be in place sooner. Similarly systems for collecting data on other types of waste should also be in place before 2012 (Targets 5, 9, 13, 14). DSC has identified a more comprehensive way of collecting this information, discussed later in this document.
- Targets 7 and 8 are far too modest in ambition. We would like to see five product stewardship schemes established by 2012, and another dozen by 2014. We do not consider that there is time for delay in this matter, and industries who have shown profits on the back of severe environmental degradation must begin paying their debt to the planet by taking responsibility for the products they have profited from.
- Target 12 should read "...should establish a national environmental standard addressing environmental management of all waste disposal facilities." rather than merely "assessing the need" and addressing only solid waste. The need is already apparent for all forms of waste, and is indeed urgent in our view.
- We propose that a target be included, that funding be made available immediately for the development of systems for recovering, reusing and recycling waste, and also redesigning at all levels of the waste stream so that the first three are more easily and efficiently implemented.

Part 2: Identifying products that are priorities for product stewardship

- The products already identified (agricultural chemicals, used oil, refrigerant gases, electronic products, packaging, mercury lamps, batteries, paint, plasterboard, tyres) have a very high priority in our view. In addition, waste that goes through several hands before ending in landfills should also have priority. Packaging has been mentioned, and the sort of packaging that goes into households needs attention. Most of what households throw out is plastic from packaging, which has a multi-level dependence on foreign oil – manufacturing initially, then transport from factory to warehouse to retailer to household to tip, all requiring fossil fuel. It fails to break down in landfills, sometimes for centuries. There is also increasing evidence of carcinogens leached from packaging into our food. Supermarkets and other retailers have made some well publicised but minimally effective moves to reduce plastic bag use. However they continue to pass on a high volume of waste, either through accepting highly packaged products from suppliers, or employing systems of packaging themselves, e.g. selling meat on polystyrene trays. We do not think the Packaging Accord has done enough to reduce waste in this area.
- Another area of concern is the widespread use of disposable nappies. These create an environmental problem again through the use of petrochemicals in manufacturing, and an additional health hazard in disposal. The sheer volume of disposable nappies in landfills has been a problem for decades. We would like nappy manufacturers to be set a mandatory time limit on the manufacture of these products, while they redesign or change over to providing a more environmentally benign product. We realise that washing cloth nappies creates another problem through waste water, but we feel it is long past time to find a solution.

Part 3: Identifying funding criteria for the Waste Minimisation Fund

- It is often claimed that science and technology will pull us out of the various crises that we face. If that is so, DSC considers that funding for environmental and technological research, except for commercial applications, is woefully inadequate, and therefore should be increased. Existing activity in communities is similarly poorly supported and informed, relying heavily on the increasingly overloaded voluntary sector. In the case of waste minimisation, we need alternative ways to package goods, the development of technologies that will efficiently re-use waste products, micro generators or similar to allow converted waste to contribute to household and community energy needs, and investment in industries that can manufacture these kinds of technologies. We envisage multiple benefits: reduced carbon emissions through less need to collect and transport waste, reduced land use for stock-piling waste, reduced foreign imports and reduced household energy costs.
- For several generations, we have lived in a society of consumption and planned obsolescence. We feel that the general population should be given incentives to change these wasteful behaviours. For example, we suggest the revival of the bottle deposit/refund system, encompassing all unbroken glass and also plastic drink bottles. This would support the fund-raising efforts of service organisations, instil conservation behaviours in young children, reduce the amount of broken glass and discarded plastic on roads and footpaths and go some way toward waste minimisation.
- It has not been found effective to rely on market forces to achieve the level of recycling and reuse of waste that must occur if we are to stop poisoning our environment at the rate that has occurred up to now. It will require enforceable, robust regulation of waste-producing industries to make them face up to their responsibilities. Direct targeting of funding towards ways to make use of waste products, even if they are deemed to be unprofitable, should be considered as “paying back” the finite resources that we have taken from the planet. Once systems are in place, and behaviours and expectations have adjusted, these initiatives may become profitable. Indeed there is already a growing global demand for ‘green’

technologies. However, we do not consider that profit is the best measure of success in this case, unless environmental costs are given a dollar value. In fact, if this had been done for all levels of production in the first place, many industries would not have been considered so successful. Perhaps the place to start in this difficult evaluation is to count the immediate and long term cost of dealing with the various forms of pollution, and with the wide ranging human health issues caused by environmental damage.

Part 4: Monitoring waste in New Zealand

- A voluntary supply of information is clearly inadequate for the purpose of planning for waste minimisation initiatives, therefore there must be a reporting requirement. However, although waste facility operators seem in the best position to collect data on waste volume and composition, it should not be left to them alone to meet the costs and obligations of supplying this data, which would involve sorting, weighing and record keeping. Generators of waste, whether it be industry, farm, business or residential, should be central to the collection of this information, and sort waste before it is delivered to the waste facility, with a range of fines for noncompliance. Waste arriving at the landfill fully sorted would streamline the reporting process. The information from landfill operators would be an audit on the primary reporting of waste producers.
- We feel that the reporting categories are vague, but if waste arrives at a landfill previously sorted and already reported by waste producers, more specific categories will provide better information not just about where the waste is coming from, but how much effect minimisation strategies are having and in what areas of waste.
- Accurate compositional data of waste is the responsibility of everyone. Landfill operators should not be required to bear the full cost of providing this information, and where weighbridges need to be installed, funding should be granted for the purpose. If this information benefits society as a whole through informing improved systems and technologies to deal with waste and providing a safer and cleaner environment, then everyone involved in waste streams should contribute.

We propose that, rather than placing the full onus on landfill operators to provide the necessary compositional information of waste, waste producers should provide this information in the first instance. Similar to annual financial accounts, businesses should be required to produce annual environmental impact accounts, declaring extent and nature of land and water use for business purposes, content and volumes of waste that go to landfills including hazardous waste, content and volume of any gaseous emissions, including from the use of vehicles, and a corresponding report for any products going into waterways, whether through storm water systems or sewerage.

In this way the Ministry will have accurate and complete information to inform future regulation, and the Government will be more effective at targeting areas of most concern at source. In the interests of economic recovery, taking advantage of opportunities for 'green' industry investment makes sound financial sense. Environmental damage will have to be paid for eventually as finite resources run out, and with information gathered from business reporting on environmental impacts, leading edge technologies can be developed with government initiated support. There is a huge and growing global market for sustainable business innovation to which New Zealand should contribute, and from which we would all benefit.

Part 5: Improving the operation of the waste levy

- It is the stated intention of the Ministry to reduce waste, and if these proposed strategies are successful, waste will reduce and the revenue will drop. There is always the danger of creating an effect opposite to what is intended by charging a levy in this way. The revenue could become an income stream that is difficult to relinquish (witness alcohol, tobacco and fuel oil), and the incentives for reducing waste could be undermined. We feel it is far better to utilise Reserve Bank created credit to grant the funds needed to offer incentives, initiate strategies and invest in industries that reduce, re-use, recycle and redesign.

We propose that, just as the Bank of England has created new money to deal with the credit crisis in the UK, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand should create new money to deal with the environmental crisis, which is intrinsically an economic one.

To invest new money in this way, without creating further debt burden for future generations to shoulder, will stimulate new businesses, support creative innovations and technologies, and place New Zealand in an advantageous position as regards the global sustainability market. Most importantly, new Reserve Bank environmental funding would make a decided move toward the clean and green country we all would like and are rapidly losing.

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Written after discussion with the Deputy Leader John Pemberton, and referral to Party policy on environmental issues. DSC is a political party.