

Mayoral Minute

SUBJECT: MAYORAL MINUTE - LEADING A REFORM AGENDA ON WASTE
FROM: The Mayor
EDMS #: 23/334503

Across the Sydney metropolitan area, 55 per cent of household and commercial waste goes to landfill each year, resulting in a loss of valuable resources and costing businesses and households more than \$750 million in government waste levies.

Sydney councils must meet ambitious resource recovery and waste reduction targets, while also meeting the community's expectations for uninterrupted waste services.

Through the adoption of our Sustainability Strategy, Council has committed to taking action to create sustainable and liveable communities. Furthermore, Council's waste team work closely with our neighbouring Macarthur councils to deliver a regional response to waste minimisation and education programs which support the diversion of waste from landfill.

However, providing viable waste services for the community is not just an operational issue for Council to manage. Industry-wide challenges include a limited number of suppliers, a lack of processing infrastructure and a shortage of readily accessible waste collection and transfer sites. These challenges present councils with rising costs, increased truck movements and low resource recovery rates.

The last 20 years have, however, seen significant positive change. Recycling has been introduced for glass, hard plastics, paper and cardboard. There are separate collections for food waste and garden organics, mattresses, electronic waste, tyres, clothing, mobile phones, batteries and chemicals.

In Camden, we have a growing population and with that our waste generation rates continue to increase. Many Sydney councils pay to transport recyclable materials and waste outside their local area, new transfer capacity and land is difficult to secure, and waste processing and disposal systems have not kept pace with our changing requirements.

Data shows that we will not be able to meet NSW and Commonwealth targets with our current systems and progress in domestic waste recovery will be impossible without major changes. These transitions will also be expensive.

The waste levy on landfill is an incentive to recycle, but in a failing market adds to the costs that Council must charge the community. Only around 7 per cent of \$800 million in annual waste levy revenue comes back to councils through contestable grants to fund improvements.

In 2021/2022, Council received \$125,000 from the Better Waste and Recycling Fund, whilst we contributed approximately \$1.68 million toward the waste levy.

On my behalf, the General Manager and senior staff recently attended the 'Metropolitan Sydney Mayoral Summit on Waste' to discuss what councils can do to contribute solutions to these concerns. The NSW Environment Protection Authority, Government representatives and Sydney Mayors spoke about initiatives and areas of influence where councils can work together.

At the Summit, councils were requested to consider the following opportunities to collaborate and advocate for:

- Calling on the Commonwealth Government to expedite bans on materials that cannot be recycled or recovered, and to increase extended producer responsibilities;
- Calling on the NSW Government to set the waste levy at an appropriate level with realistic allocation, to streamline planning approvals for infrastructure, and to increase clarity and efficiency of licensing procedures;
- Working with other metropolitan Sydney councils to coordinate our advocacy, communications and collective buying power to bring the benefits of scale, efficiency and industry confidence;
- Working with the other tiers of government to ensure the delivery of infrastructure solutions locally to reduce waste hauled long distances or to landfill.

I hope that collaboration between councils will support action and outcomes on these important areas and secure solutions for Sydney's emerging waste crisis.

RECOMMENDED

That Council:

- i. **work with other Sydney councils on:**
 - (a) **Reducing waste;**
 - (b) **Improving environmental outcomes where waste has to be processed; and**
 - (c) **Finding solutions for the residue that is left.**

- ii. **write to Ms Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Heritage, seeking changes from the NSW Government to invest all of the revenue from its waste levy for council and industry initiatives that:**
 - (a) **Accelerate the transition to a circular economy;**
 - (b) **Build the waste infrastructure needed to meet the growing pressures of population growth, loss of landfill capacity and a lack of competition in the sector; and**
 - (c) **Educate and support communities to reduce waste.**