



Webinar Q&A COVID-19 and the Waste and Resource Recovery Sector

Friday 24 April 2020

This was the fifth in a series of regular webinars for the waste and resource recovery sector. Along with this Q&A sheet, a recording of the webinar is available to members.

The questions have been grouped according to topic rather than order asked.

1. Introduction:

The WasteMINZ team was joined by:

- The Hon Eugenie Sage, Associate Minister for the Environment
- Kevin Lavery (SOLGM)
- Shaun Lewis (MfE)

2. Key announcement/s

Earlier this week the PM announced the transition to level 3. On Monday 27 April at 11.59pm NZ will move out of level 4.

Waste and resource recovery

There has been a lot of discussion about what this will mean to the sector. Safety including social distancing, contactless payments, contact tracing will be key.

Please keep checking the official [COVID-19 website](#). Councils, please keep communicating with residents about your plans to reinstate recycling and so on.

<https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/tables/COVID-19-alert-levels-summary.pdf>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/tables/COVID-19-alert-levels-detailed.pdf>

Inter-regional travel at Alert Level 3

- Regions are defined by Regional Council Boundaries (CDEM)
<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/cdem-groups-and-councils-september-2013.pdf>
- Permitted if you are travelling to do *essential* work.
ID and documentation should be carried. <https://www.transport.govt.nz/about/covid-19/covid-19-faqs/#interregionalFAQ>

Freight

- The movement of all freight is permitted at Alert Level 3, including the ability of business and customers to send, distribute and receive freight. All freight can enter and leave the

country.

<https://www.transport.govt.nz/about/covid-19>

3. Updates from panellists

Update from Kevin Lavery (SOLGM)

Good news on flu vaccinations – essential workers can get into vaccination programmes including staff from councils and operators. Get in quickly as it's open to the public next week.

Transition to level 3 from level 4 is the transition from essential to safe. There will be more construction, more businesses operating and an impact on the sector with more industrial and construction waste. Most places will resume kerbside recycling collection and more transfer station will open but not many MRFS due to manual operation. Need to operate safely, social distancing, contactless payment, and contact tracing alongside common sense/other normal H&S practises.

MFE update from Minister Sage

A big thank you to all of you who have been continuing with collection of waste and operating within the challenges presented by COVID-19 such as shortage of PPE. A big thank you to Janine and WasteMINZ team for work with central government to represent concerns of the sector.

Workplan that began before COVID-19: Landfill levy is a priority as it will create revenue that can go back into waste minimisation. However, cabinet committees are minimal so no opportunity so far to get proposal in front of cabinet, but cabinet and parliament resume next week so will continue to advance that policy within the parameters of the COVID-19 challenges. Desire for public consultation and input but demands on people's time. WasteMINZ has led the way with online engagement so will look into that.

Pre-COVID issues are heightened by COVID and still exist. So, there's adaptation of the policy programme but it needs to continue. I.e. fibre market difficulties and lack of processing capacity for plastics etc still remain. Kerbside collection system still needs to be made more efficient. More infrastructure investment etc so still all very much to the fore.

In a good position to perhaps fast track some of waste infrastructure. Grant Thornton contracted to do consultation on investment plan for the sector with increase in landfill levy and priorities for the sector. Some priorities already identified which will help inform economic recovery package.

Also Provincial Growth Fund looking at investment priorities - may change focus from tourism to a change to assist in recovery and ensuring there are jobs and relooking at some projects where funding wasn't provided and maybe free up funding for some of these. Cabinet to make final decisions but MfE working with other ministries on this.

Does COVID allow us to build back better and take circular economy priorities into account? It has been at the heart and ministries are aware of desire to 'build back better' and use CE principles to make good decisions. Fast track decisions can be made but reminder of bringing forward transformational climate change investments that need to happen anyway. So preparing people, employees for jobs of tomorrow. This is the principle of any recovery. A range of projects have been suggested in the environmental space – not so much about waste projects but that is because work has already shaped up some of the priorities.

4. Q&A

Landfill levy and other MfE work updates

Q: Thanks to COVID-19 we need as many export earnings as possible. The metal industry brought in 425 million in 2019 and retains its ability to access export markets. Has any further consideration been given for metal recyclers to be exempt from a proposed increased landfill levy?

A. There has yet to be a cabinet decision around submissions made on the landfill levy. We have had discussions around key principles, but no final decisions have been made.

Q. Don't you think it is unfair to charge a recycler more for waste they can't recycle when they make the effort to recycle some of it?

A. This has come through in the consultation but we want to avoid creating loopholes so not sure how that will get picked up at this stage.

Q. Is Minister Sage or MfE able to update us on priority products for product stewardship schemes and any announcement that might be made before the election?

A. We hope to as the submissions have been analysed. We are waiting on the final recommendations to go to cabinet but the paper to go before cabinet has not yet been finalised. There is competition for cabinet committee time at the moment. The intention is to identify the products and have decisions made on these. MfE is already working very hard on what schemes might look like and any schemes announced will probably have 18 months set up time.

One of the complicating factors is that much of the MfE work involves consultation, which puts a burden on the sector and also raises issue on how to do consultation in this environment.

Q. Regarding the design of Container Return Scheme – any updates?

A. Yes, it is still continuing. Scheduled to submit a report in August and understanding is that it is still the same timeframe.

The WMF

Q. Will the Waste Minimisation Fund be available this year?

A. The WMF will probably open next week. There are decisions to be made within MfE about strategic priorities that will be changed in light of COVID-19 so the aim is to support the sector in the medium to long term and not to duplicate existing stimulus packages provided by the government. Economic recovery and additional employment will be priorities. There is a lot of economic hardship and food banks are struggling so food recovery and distribution, as well as recycling and increasing efficiency in recycling through product stewardship. There will less available (\$8-9 million) as some is going into addressing more immediate funding issues. The process is slightly different this year as we will invite 2-3 page expression of interest initially and then successful applicants will be asked to do full applications later.

Investment in organic processing

Q. Councils have been told to have shovel-ready projects i.e. already planned projects in terms of waste minimisation and carbon reduction. Can government lead more work in terms of compost and biodigesters?

A. The definition of “Shovel ready” is being debated. There are three waves that government departments should be putting up as projects – immediate, medium and long term. So there is a short term focus at the moment and then projects that need more planning there will be an opportunity for later.

Q. Is there any consideration to requiring councils to have organic waste collection and more industrial composting available throughout NZ?

A. Auckland is piloting organic waste collection through an anaerobic digester, which could potentially occur elsewhere. There are different models for collection of food and green waste and different issues. Butchery waste etc may need an anaerobic system. COVID-19 presents an opportunity for MPI, MSD, MfE to do more around food waste in general. We need to get some change to ensure food is not going to waste and food security is increased for vulnerable people.

Q. Would Minister Sage consider food waste reduction targets and would it result in investment in local infrastructure to take organic waste?

A. Work is already underway on the landfill levy, which will generate more income, and there is the development of a new waste strategy at a later date that could address this. The updating of the waste strategy wasn't prioritised as we wanted to get some practical work under way first. There may also be changes to the WMA to look at how we encourage a reduction in food waste, so it is part of bigger policy and not just through the provincial growth fund. However, procurement work is being done with MBIE and reducing waste in office supplies could be a criteria if the government was investing in any sectors. What needs to be considered is what are the strings that are attached to that and also advocacy for waste minimisation criteria. However, the bigger picture is the waste strategy and WMA and in terms of councils, WMMP plans may be required to include more detail eventually.

There is some strategic work being done with Grant Thornton that is part of the wider landfill levy work. Decision on consultation on this are still to be made.

Q. Is there any movement on helping composting facilities deal with microplastics?

A. The solution lies at the start not at end. So, for example, the microbeads ban. Scion is doing more work on the scale of the microplastics problem. We need to work on avoidance first

Recycling markets

Q. In the short term global markets for fibre and plastic export markets are closed and local markets limited, what are Minister's thoughts on addressing these challenges?

A. The challenges in the fibre space are well recognised but the large piece of work being done on it is not as advanced as we would like. There have been suggestions of NZ being part of a large processing mill in Australia or the adaptation of mills in NZ, but this won't address the large range of paper types which provides a challenge. So investment needs are significant and still ongoing.

MfE has been building on the Chief Science Advisor report 'Rethinking Plastics' and has developed a plastic plan. This is looking at investment in processing infrastructure and recognising declining oil and virgin plastic resin be cheaper, so maybe regulation is needed. There are plans to limit the types of plastic that can be used for packaging - a narrower range of plastics makes it more economic for reprocessing facilities. Some plastics such as cutlery etc may be phased out but this is not developed sufficiently to go to cabinet yet.

Q. Could HDPE recycling onshore be made a priority as we have capacity but the barrier is competition with offshore markets?

A. HDPE and PP needing processing would be a priority after PET. I am heartened by recent discussions with AgRecovery as lots of ag chemical containers are made with HDPE. Applications to the WMF are encouraged. Plastics NZ have also been in discussions around the desire to have more processing onshore. Dairy companies need to take a lead as the beverage industry has in terms of onshore recycling of PET.

Q. There is a barrier regarding getting collected recyclables to market. Is there any legislative intent to require manufacturers to have a minimum recycled content in products to create demand for onshore recycling?

A. This is an idea that is part of many issues being looked at in the plastics plan. It is not efficient in terms of a regulation process on its own, it has to be part of a wider package so may come through in that plastics plan body of work. This has been suggested by a range of organisations.

Q. How do you see councils supporting a national investment plan for onshore recycling, taking into account overseas markets may pay more for materials?

A. Councils have a critical role in this. The thinking behind the landfill levy work is to provide an economic incentive to reprocess and recover materials onshore in a market affected by COVID. If businesses can get higher prices offshore it is expected that they still will export recycling materials but we will not be exporting waste.

Councils WMMPs

Q. The current situation requires councils to be nimble but WMMP plans are cumbersome and time consuming as per the requirements of the WMA Act. Can it be changed to allow councils to change plans quickly to respond to situations such as COVID-19?

A. The landfill levy work has also looked at other WMA changes and this may be included. We are also keen to hear of other ideas that could help councils in the short term. There is possibly an opportunity in the current legislation to give direction to TAs to allow them to make changes to plans more rapidly but we need clarification about types of change needed to be made. Please email them through.

Health and Safety Guidance

Q. Will there be any guidance around reusable i.e coffee cups or refillable containers or for refill stations, bulk bin stores etc once we are back at level 3?

A. Not aware of any work on this but some of the details are still to be worked out. Will pass that on to MBIE to get an answer. Question to be emailed to shaun.lewis@mfe.govt.nz . Any guidance will also be put on the official COVID website.

Q. Reusables comment from Plastics NZ – it will likely be viewed through a H&S lens on, so mechanisms need to be in place to ensure customers and staff are safe. If in place reusables may be allowed.

Circular Economy

Q. Regarding CE outcomes and the waste hierarchy. Are there any plans for reuse infrastructure i.e. sterilisation infrastructure?

A. That depends on whether you're suggesting government provide funding or that the private industry put forward proposals for this. It has to be driven by the private sector with government contribution.

Q. In terms of requirement for waste minimisation to be standard part of life going forward, has any consideration been given to waste minimisation for new C&D projects as part of economic growth plans post-COVID?

A. Please send through your ideas for a list of requirements for this! At the moment we have no time or capacity to develop that into some criteria. Please pass on ideas for this.

Thanks and #Standatdawn

“Join us at 6:00am on Saturday 25 April. Stand at your letterbox, at the front door, in your lounge rooms balconies, in your driveway ... but please stay within your bubble”.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

<http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/corporate-documents/anzac2020.htm>