

EWASTE STEWARDSHIP - A COMMUNITY CONSENSUS

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Summary:

The Wellington Waste Forum, including seven local government authorities and business representatives from the greater Wellington region, reached consensus this year in calling on central government to declare electronic waste a priority product and set a timetable for the development of product stewardship regulations. A remit based on this consensus was adopted unanimously at the local government New Zealand AGM. With a united voice from the local government sector, central government must take action to address this escalating problem.

The eDay collections of computer equipment from 2006 to 2010 helped to raise awareness of the problem and the current government-supported TV Takeback programme is helping to divert old TV sets from landfills. But this will soon be over and then what? New Zealand urgently needs ongoing sustainable solutions from the start of 2014. When the government subsidies end, consumers will face the full cost of recycling electronic waste and there is already strong evidence that schemes relying on consumers paying at the time of disposal will simply not work.

There is widespread consensus that product stewardship is the solution with the costs of recycling being included in the price of new products. The legislative framework for product stewardship has been in place for five years now and no voluntary schemes for electronic waste have emerged in this time. We believe that none will until central government intervenes and gives producers and importers confidence that there will be a level playing

field for all suppliers. How much longer do we need to wait before our environment leaders accept there is clear market failure and set a timetable for action?

In this paper, Laurence and Paul present the outcomes of the LGNZ Conference and provide some suggestions for finding a permanent solution for this growing and challenging waste stream.

1: Early awareness of eWaste

A regional waste forum was operating 30 years ago in Wellington under the name of Litter Council. The Litter Council was split into Keep Wellington Beautiful and the Wellington Region Environment Agency, through the original Litter Act.

About 2005, Celia Wade-Brown, now Mayor of Wellington, met together with Laurence Zwimpfer, who chaired Computer Access New Zealand (CANZ), a not-for profit community organisation promoting computer refurbishment and Tim Findlay from Remarkit, a Wellington-based computer refurbisher, to consider the problem of ewaste. By 2006, Wellington City was developing their building at the Southern Landfill, Porirua City Council had Trash Palace, and the Hutt Valley had Earthlink, and all were taking used electronic equipment for sale and recycling.

In 2006, Tim Findlay persuaded one of his business partners, Dell Computers, to support a free computer eWaste collection day (eDay) in Wellington. The 2020 Trust organised volunteers for the day and Remarkit arranged for the eWaste to be packaged and shipped to Australia for recycling.

There was tremendous enthusiasm for the event, with the Mayor and various Councillors, turning out to support Council staff and volunteers to deal with the thousands of cars. I also participated on the actual day.

Interest in eDay quickly spread to other centres and by 2010, over 60 collection sites, from Kaitaia to Invercargill and even one in the Cook Islands, were participating in the annual collection event (www.eday.org.nz).

2: Waste forum gathers strength from 2008

In 2010, Lower Hutt had two eWaste collections, as part of the Hazmobile collections. Sandy Beach-Croft remembers the collections as rather over-whelming with over 1200 cars arriving on one day. Traffic people were not happy.

After supporting eDay for four years, the eDay Trust's application to the Waste Minimisation Fund in October 2011 was turned down by government, and this resulted in the event being cancelled. The event cost over \$1 million dollars, and the huge recycling and logistics of running eDay as a not-for-profit trust, was then no longer possible.

In 2006, the CANZ Trust, the predecessor of the eDay Trust, published a report calling on the electronics industry and government to develop a product stewardship scheme; an outline of how the scheme could work was included as part of the report, with a suggested 6-month timeframe. eDay was only ever intended as an interim solution for raising awareness, and to buy some time while permanent recycling solutions were put in place. By 2010 it was clear that no progress was being made towards a permanent solution, so the eDay Trust shifted focus to requesting that a product stewardship scheme be put in place immediately. Government Minister for the Environment at the time, the Hon Dr Nick Smith demurred, stating that product stewardship was at least three years away. This was seen as ill-informed as any delay would be too late for the analogue TV switch-off planned for 2012/13.

For the Wellington region, this loss in funding resulted in a return to just collecting Household Hazardous Waste.

At the same time, the Wellington Region Waste Forum began to gain some real political momentum both within the Waste Forum itself and outside.

Under the Act councils were required to develop a Waste Management and Minimisation Plan (WMMP) by 2012, with the Act recognising the current New Zealand Waste Strategy goals of reducing the harmful effects of waste, and improving the efficiency of resource use.

Prior to 2011, Greater Wellington Regional Council was reluctant to participate in the Forum, believing that that the Waste Management and Minimisation Act was only relevant to district and city councils. The situation changed in 2011, when David Lee, a strategic planner for GWRC, pushed to be the standing representative, and Paul Bruce the political appointee. Both David and Paul believed that waste issues and solutions had a regional context, and that GWRC should be an important player in waste minimisation/management. GWRC became a core member of the forum, contributing to its planning and development.

The Forum was strengthened by producing its first regional waste strategy. The Waste Forum was used as a networking tool to develop initiatives such as the regional climate change strategy, and was then seen as a model for regional collaboration. In adopting a Plan, the councils recognised that they did not control much of the waste stream in the region, since large volumes of waste are produced and managed by the private sector.

It became a highly motivated and functional group, with no hostility or tension. Its sessions were well attended with 30 to 35 members of all 9 Wellington local authorities, including one councillor and 1-2 officers for each council, MfE (Natasha Lewis), NGOs such as Sustainable Trust, Waste industry and contractors consultants such as Fullcircle, Mana Recovery (Eliz Meaclean), Enviroschools (Jacky Harswell), Conscious Consumers, Transpacific, SKM.

Over the last recent triennium, the Forum was also lucky to have a very effective chair in Jill Greathead (Carterton District Council) and secretary Sandy Beath-Croft from Hutt city.

3: Fast forward to 2011

The publication of **Ewaste in New Zealand: Five Years On** in June 2011 with key author Laurence Zwimpfer, was an extremely useful stimulus and tool for action. Laurence

advocated for product stewardship of eWaste to the Forum, and another letter was sent to the Minister for the Environment, Hon Dr Nick Smith, backing up the eDay Trust's position. Once again, the Minister's reply was a stalling one. This time, Dr Smith indicated that that he wanted to ensure that infrastructure was in place prior to making any product mandatory. It was another disappointing response.

The successful eWaste stewardship legislation in Australia resulting from cooperation between industry and Government, should also have been ringing a few bells for rapid harmonisation and closer economic cooperation on this issue.

4: eWaste Remit to LGNZ AGM

The Forum's approach to the Minister indicated the strong regional unity on this issue, and Paul Bruce decided to move a remit at this year's Local Government national AGM.

Paul's remit, drafted with the help of Laurence Zwimpfer and the eDay Trust, was supported by all Councils of Wellington region, and seconded by Dunedin's Mayor, Dave Cull.

It was passed unanimously at LGNZ AGM on 21st July 2013.

The remit called on central government to:

- Declare electronic waste (eWaste) a priority product under the provisions of the Waste Minimisation Act (2008)
- Set a timetable for the development of regulations requiring all importers of electronic equipment to sign up to a product stewardship scheme for eWaste at the point of manufacture, assembly or entry to New Zealand
- Collaborate with suppliers of electronic equipment in progressing a co-regulatory approach to product stewardship, aligned with Australia

New Zealand's eWaste problem is escalating

- The safe disposal of increasing amounts of eWaste is a challenging issue for New Zealand. Most New Zealand communities do not have easy access to free (at the point of disposal) eWaste recycling services. Valuable materials can be recovered from eWaste, but the return on these is not sufficient to cover all the costs of collection, transport and recycling. Many consumers are unable or unwilling to pay the real cost of eWaste recycling at the time of disposal.

Product Stewardship provides the optimum long-term solution for eWaste

- Product stewardship provides a permanent long-term solution where all the costs of eWaste collection, transport and recycling are met by electronic equipment suppliers; in effect, the cost of recycling becomes included in the price of new products.
- This is the approach adopted in most developed countries and can totally avoid the need for any funding support from central government or local authorities. Voluntary user pays product stewardship schemes for eWaste have not succeeded anywhere in the world.
- As there is likely to be considerable synergy, New Zealand should pursue the co-regulatory approach implemented in Australia from 1 July 2012
- The co-regulatory approach requires suppliers of electronic equipment to take responsibility for funding and managing eWaste recycling schemes. This approach results in 'free drop-off' for the public at the end of life (EoL) recycling facility. This factor is critical to optimise public participation, maximise EoL collections rates, and thereby ensure:
 - The numerous documented and internationally accepted harm resulting from inappropriate disposal is avoided
 - The significant globally scarce resources in eWaste are used most efficiently and economies of scale are maximised and work to favour reducing the per unit recycling cost – thereby minimising any perceived burden of environmental compliance cost upon the general economy

- Government regulations are necessary to ensure participation by all suppliers and prevent “free-riders” gaining a business advantage. Government regulation is also required to ensure minimum recycling standards, such as those now provided by the Australian and New Zealand eWaste standard, AS/NZS 5377, apply evenly to all participants in the eWaste recycling sector. The necessary transparency, traceability, accountability, quality assurance and ‘all inclusive level playing field’ required for New Zealand to meet fully its international obligations, can most effectively be implemented by backstop co-regulation of the product stewardship of eWaste

Central Government

- Government has supported eWaste awareness-raising schemes since 2007, including eDay, RCN e-Cycle, and currently is providing subsidies for analogue TV take-back schemes
- The Waste Minimisation Act (2008) provides the legislative framework for the development of product stewardship schemes – both voluntary and compulsory
- No voluntary product stewardship schemes have been developed for computer or TV equipment in the four (*now five*) years since the legislation was passed
- The Minister for the Environment (Hon Amy Adams) has provided direction to MfE to explore options for mandatory producer responsibility for electronic waste but there is no evidence of any progress being made

Local Authorities

- A number of regions have elected to support the establishment of a local e-Cycle collection centre and in some cases, are subsidising the cost of eWaste recycling
- Local authorities should not be subsidising eWaste recycling schemes, whether this is from ratepayers or from Waste Minimisation Fund returns, when international experience shows that product stewardship approaches work better
- Local authorities should limit any investment in short-term eWaste collection infrastructure, as this may not form part of longer term industry-funded scheme

LGNZ has notified Minister of Environment Amy Adams of the remit by letter and also directly through LGNZ President Lawrence Yule. Minister Adams has indicated through her secretary 3rd October that consideration is being given to the matter.

5: Waste Minimisation (TV Product Stewardship) Amendment Bill

Meanwhile Green MP Denise Roche, has placed a private member's Bill in the parliamentary ballot.

Denise Roche's Bill requires the development of a product stewardship scheme for televisions requiring producers to take responsibility for the end of life of their products. Under this Bill, the producers of televisions will pay a fee for every television their import or manufacture and the fee will be used to fund the infrastructure and operational costs of TV recycling. Two years after the commencement of the scheme, disposal of televisions at landfill will become prohibited.

Though TV is only a small part of the waste stream, Ms Roche believes that the bill could easily be widened, and there is still the option for the Minister for the Environment to declare any item a priority product under the original (Waste Minimisation) Act.

The Bill will need a regulatory impact statement, submissions from the Public, and consultation with importers and manufacturers.

6: Making eWaste a Priority for WasteMINZ

It was pleasing to see Sue Coutts' eWaste article in a recent issue of Revolve, WasteMINZ's magazine. Sue has played a leading role for many years supporting eWaste initiatives such as eDay and more recently the e-Cycle initiative with RCN. But it is alarming that it has taken so long for WasteMINZ to recognise this growing waste stream. We have encouraged WasteMINZ to set up a sector group for eWaste, but have been turned down in the past. Maybe the publication of Sue's article in Revolve and the inclusion of an eWaste session at the 2013 Conference is a sign that this is now being recognised as a priority.

We need to move forward together with a united voice in calling for a product stewardship solution if we are to get the attention of Minister Adams and the electronics industry. Local authorities have made their views clear at the LGNZ AGM and the eDay Trust has convened a roundtable of eWaste recyclers and other stakeholders, coinciding with the WasteMINZ Conference. WasteMINZ needs to play its part.

7: Conclusion and the way forward

A regional forum, if well facilitated, can bring all players together and become a model for regional and national collaboration, and a community consensus.

The Government is now well out of step with the Public, local Government and industry, and needs to move fast and set some timetables if it is not going to lose more face and respect.

The Government has consistently failed to recognise the need for follow-on regulations to implement the provisions of the (Waste Minimisation) Act. The switchover to digital television created a fantastic opportunity to address this issue. Instead, Government went back to a subsidised interim take-back scheme, not unlike eDay (TV Takeback: <http://www.tvtakeback.govt.nz/>), leaving unaddressed computers and televisions currently coming into the country and into the future.

Initiatives focused on product stewardship are in the national interest and are most relevant to all local government because eWaste recovery and recycling is a cost to all of us. This would also stop the increase in illegal dumping of eWaste.

Local Government must be wary of quick fix schemes and publicity stunts that don't increase community awareness of an issue, for short-term political gain, and push that eWaste be immediately made a priority product.

There are indications of strong support from recyclers, Importers and manufacturers. But in such a highly competitive market, no-one will make a move until Government ensures a level playing field and makes eWaste recycling mandatory. The Waste Minimisation Act

(2008) provides the necessary framework; we must all join together in insisting that Government take immediate steps to declare all ewaste priority products so that we can urgently progress towards product stewardship.

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