

SAY NO TO THE WASTE CLUB – SUMMARY POSITION PAPER

The draft proposal to renew the National Packaging Covenant shows no evidence that it will be able to effectively reduce packaging waste. Rather, there is strong evidence that the problem will continue to grow – as it did during the NPC’s first five-year term.

The groups that form the Boomerang Alliance adopt very different public profiles and work on a range of diverse issues; we celebrate our diversity and welcome the appeal of environmental protection by the wide range of audiences we represent. The Boomerang Alliance – Australian Conservation Foundation; Environment Victoria; Friends of The Earth; Greenpeace Australia Pacific; NSW Nature Conservation Council; Queensland Conservation Council; Total Environment Centre; West Australian Conservation Council and Zero Waste Action Group represent millions of members, supporters, donors and volunteers who are overwhelmingly sick of packaging rubbish.

Burgeoning levels of packaging production (which exceeds 3 million tonnes p.a.) and a growing trend in ‘out of home’ consumption are putting unacceptable pressure on recycling services, particularly in regional and rural Australia. We must reverse this trend by capturing wasted resources more effectively or limiting consumption.

THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT PACKAGING:

1. Australia produces over 3,365,062 tonnes of packaging per annum;
2. Despite the ‘hype’ regarding the success of recycling programs – recovery of post consumer packaging for recycling and/or waste-to-energy is a poor 20.1%;
3. The cost of kerbside recycling has skyrocketed to \$294,484,994 per annum;
4. Packaging items represent 85% of all litter collected on the annual Clean Up Australia Day;
5. Collecting and disposing of litter costs approx. \$50,000,000 in Victoria alone; and
6. 116,830 tonnes of the resources collected by kerbside recycling are lost through contamination.

If the definition of insanity is to compulsively repeat the same action and expect different results, then the NPCC’s fixation with the same ineffective policy approach and reliance on antiquated methods of recovery is certifiable.

- After five years operating under the National Packaging Covenant, the National Packaging Covenant Council (NPCC) could provide no evidence of any environmental improvement or reductions in packaging waste. Conversely, there is strong evidence that total packaging waste to landfill is increasing.
- Submissions made by local government, NGOs, and other stakeholders overwhelmingly believe that the NPC is an ineffective, inefficient, and irresponsible approach. In submissions to the NPC review process, most submissions called for substantial structural change to the core document. The NPCC has ignored these submissions and retained the core NPC principles with only minor reporting and administrative changes to the NPC MkII.

- Despite the fact that most local councils across the country refuse to participate in the NPC as currently proposed, the Covenant Council continues to be completely reliant on local government operating kerbside recycling as the sole method to recover packaging waste.
- Despite overwhelming calls to introduce strong overarching targets and goals, the NPC MkII has failed to implement any minimum standards of performance or targets to measure overall performance.
- Current policy initiatives by states and territories have strong commitments to EPR and/or zero waste approaches. The NPCC approach rejects EPR outright, and ignores the core 'closed loop' principles of zero waste. This sets the NPCC on a policy collision course with its own jurisdictions.
- Despite trends that have seen up to 50% of major food and grocery items now consumed 'away from home', the NPC MkII has failed to develop strategies to minimise litter or ensure that this type of consumption is recycled.
- Recovery rates for packaging are at best stagnant and in many cases declining. This is partly because householders are increasingly confused about what can be recycled (recent research by Planet Ark shows nearly half the community are unsure what they can or cannot put into recycling). The NPC MkII continues to ignore these trends and fails to improve conformity of base packaging materials or mandatory labelling for recycling.
- The NPC MkII ensures that consumers and producers remain disconnected from the costs to deal with packaging waste. This allows the supply chain to disregard packaging as cheap and provides no incentive for consumers to do the right thing.
- The NPC MkII continues to "outlaw" discrimination between different forms of packaging – this is ridiculous. Intelligent discrimination between different materials is a core principle of environmental management and policy.

AGENDA FOR ACTION – THE REAL WAY FORWARD

The first step is to send the NPCC back to the drawing board, with a specific and urgent directive from the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) to engage with key dissenting stakeholder – local government and the NGO sector – to enter into critical negotiations until all parties reach an agreement. An independent and mutually agreed facilitator should be appointed to steer this process.

Specific requirements that the EPHC should require of the NPCC to move forward should include:

1. development of overarching targets to achieve key goals in resource conservation, waste avoidance, recycling rates, and wider issues within ecological lifecycle – such as 80% recovery by 2010;
2. a mandatory commitment to continuous improvement with a minimum acceptable performance standard that ensures trends for overall loss of resources are reducing, not increasing;
3. definitions of the level of responsibility that the supply chain bears and a plan to shift (over time) a fair share of the burden onto industry;
4. a critical independent assessment of EPR and other economic instruments; and
5. funding for an independent assessor to compare and contrast different approaches against the NPC so that an impartial and informed assessment can be made.

Long term, we need to embed the waste hierarchy into the NPC and ensure that it pursues an approach that is consistent with the public policy approach.

Attached in the Appendices is a detailed assessment of the specific failing of the NPC MkII and NPCC approach. Rather than repeat earlier requests, we provide this brief summary of the key issues that have already been identified to the NPCC:

1. The strengthened Covenant must provide compulsory benchmarks for improved environmental outcomes which can be achieved by avoidance, reuse and recycling. The Covenant must set sector-wide targets which focus on reduction, reuse and recycling of packaging materials. These sector-wide targets must translate into compulsory, individual targets for signatories.
2. The NPC MkII must drive substantial changes in the way goods are delivered to consumers and the way packaging users are provided with options and incentives for reuse and recovery.
3. Action plans should include detailed activities, targets or measurable outcomes (that reflect the higher level targets that have been set for the industry sector or packaging material type), timelines, responsibilities, funding allocations, measures to adopt the Environmental Code for Packaging and information on how data will be collected to measure performance. Compulsory components must be highlighted and reported on.
4. Abandon the 'should not discriminate between different forms of packaging' clause, which is contrary to a genuine commitment to product stewardship. In the case of raw material suppliers, signatories should commit to develop, or continuously search for and specify, the lowest impact materials available.
5. Appoint a multi-stakeholder group including technical and academic expertise and environmental and consumer affairs representatives to revise the current environmental Code of Practice for packaging. The Code should act as a screening mechanism to prevent new packaging materials entering the market that contain hazardous elements and that are not fully compostable, reusable or recyclable.
6. The composition of the Council should be prescribed so as to provide for a balance of all interests consistent with the philosophy of shared responsibility embedded in the Covenant and so as not to be at the discretion of industry and government representatives.
7. We support proposals for better oversight and evaluation of signatories' action plans and the notification and follow up of non-signatories. However, consistent with the intent of the NEPM, sufficient resources must be allocated to ensure compliance. Failure to reach targets embedded in action plans should trigger mandatory imposition of policy instruments aimed at achieving the relevant target for material efficiency and recovery.
8. Companies should be required to conform to AS/NZS 14021: 2000 *Environmental Labels and Declarations – Self declared Environmental Claims and Labels*. This requires environmental claims to be relevant and specific. For recyclable packaging we recommend the use of *mobius* loop (as per the Standard) but with specific information added such as percentage and type of recycled content ('50% post consumer recycled content') and instructions for take back or recycling.

Regardless of any policy framework developed within the NPC process, a stronger reform agenda to develop specific solutions will also need to be developed. This should include development of specific EPR and other 'end-of-pipe' schemes at the state and national level.

Specific actions for investigation should include:

- landfill bans on all packaging waste materials;
- mandatory 'Plain English' labelling indicating the packaging's recyclability; and
- investigation of market based 'take back' schemes to recover high quality, uncontaminated resources (glass, aluminium, steel, PET).

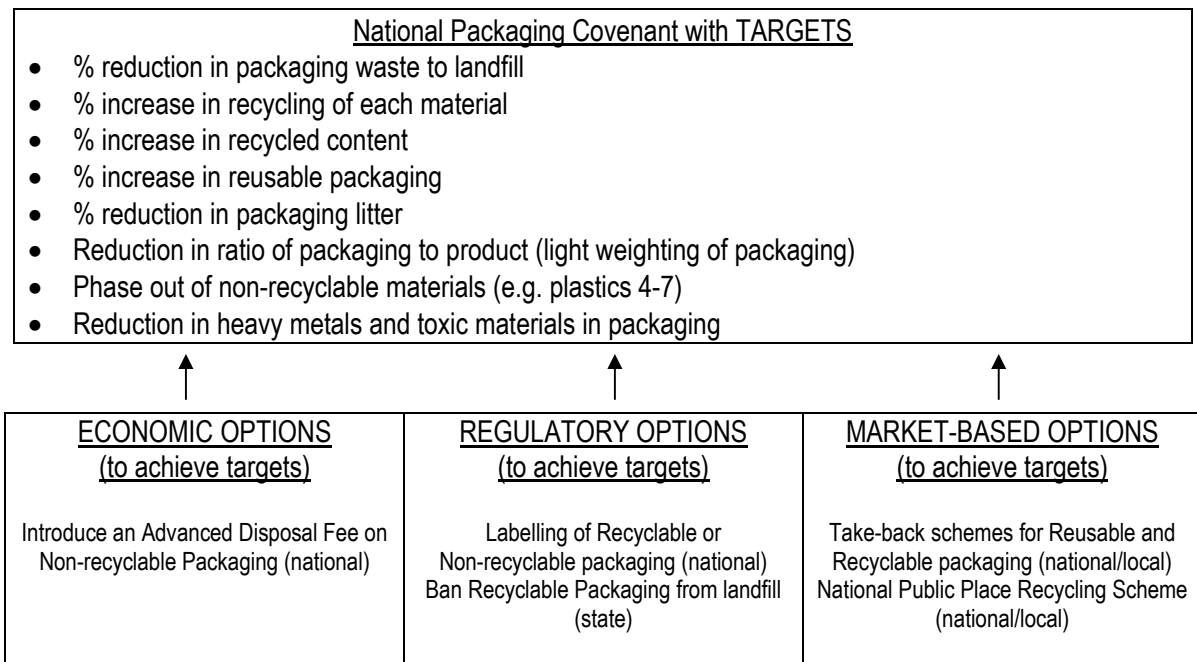
The Boomerang Alliance suggests that these steps will deliver a long term strategy that doesn't disadvantage industry and will significantly reduce the ultimate levels of packaging litter and losses to landfill, whilst maximising the recovery of valuable resources.

A schematic of the best practice approach will effectively look as follows.

A NATIONAL PACKAGING STRATEGY – THE COVENANT AND BEYOND

Aim: A national strategy to ensure packagers, manufacturers, retailers and consumers achieve resource efficiency through minimising packaging, increasing reuse and recycling, and reduced litter.

Goal: By 2010 at least 80% of all packaging materials will be recovered for recycling and no packaging material will be landfilled.



Finally, while the Boomerang Alliance can accept that industry sees schemes like Container Deposit Legislation as discriminatory, there is an urgent need to develop some form of penalty and reward system that will encourage better community participation and refresh the strong social ecology values associated with recycling. The adoption of an EPR based system containing strong price signals to incent recycling behaviour is the only way to stop packaging from wasting Australia.

For more information about the Boomerang Alliance and its position in relation to the National Packaging Covenant, contact Dave West on 0404 093 718.