

CABINET PAPER PROACTIVE RELEASE COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Eugenie Sage	Portfolio	Associate Minister for the Environment
Name of package	Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage	Date of release (published)	20/02/2020

List of documents that have been proactively released		
Date	Title	Author
20/02/2020	<i>Report on Overseas Travel Hon Eugenie Sage</i>	<i>Office of Hon Eugenie Sage</i>

Information withheld	
<p>Some parts of this information release are not appropriate to be released and, if requested, would be withheld in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).</p> <p>Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the Act that would apply have been identified and are listed below.</p> <p>Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.</p>	
Section of the Act	Reason for withholding
s6(a)	<i>To prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand</i>
S6(b)(i)	<i>To prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by – the Government of any other country or any agency of such a Government.</i>

Other consultation

IN CONFIDENCE

Office of the Associate Minister for the Environment

Chair

Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Eugenie Sage

1. As Associate Minister for the Environment (Waste), I visited Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane over a four-day period from 8-12 July 2019 to learn from the Australian experience in tackling waste issues to help inform my policy work on waste issues.¹ I met with government representatives (federal, state² and local)³, public policy experts⁴ innovators⁵ and industry representatives.⁶
2. In Brisbane, I met with the Hon Trevor Evans, Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management to discuss marine, conservation and waste issues.
3. During the visit to Australia, I explored the following key topics:
 - Australia's zero-waste initiatives.
 - Container return schemes.
 - Australian experience around their landfill levy models.
 - Enforcement issues in the waste sector
4. A key theme to emerge from discussions was the focus that Australian Federal and State governments are placing on waste and recycling initiatives.
5. Australians on average produce 2.25 kilograms of waste per person per day whereas New Zealanders produce on average 3.6 kilograms of waste per person per day. The total amount of waste generated in Australia per year is about 64 million tonnes.⁷ The three major waste materials are construction and demolition waste,⁸ organics and fly ash.⁹

¹ I was accompanied by Sam Buckle (Deputy Secretary, Ministry for the Environment), Tessa Vincent (Ministerial Advisor), and for some visits by Sam Cox and Bill Dobbie (Australian High Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade).

² Janet Rice, Senator for Victoria;

³ Including Hon Trevor Evans, Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management.

⁴ For example, Environmental Protection Authorities, environmental departments and Re-Loop Pacific.

⁵ For example, Alex Fraser Group and Sustainability Victoria.

⁶ For example, the Victorian Waste Management Association, TOMRA Cleanaway and Coca-Cola Amatil.

⁷ For the years 2014 – 15, *Australia National Waste Report 2016*, June 2017 in Environment and Communications References Committee, *Never waste a crisis: the waste and recycling industry in Australia*, June 2018 at 9.

⁸ Referred to in the report as "masonry": including concrete, bricks and rubble.

⁹ *Australian National Waste Report 2016*, p 19. This is followed by hazardous waste, paper and cardboard, metal, plastic and glass

6. Like many countries, Australia relied heavily on overseas markets like China to buy and reprocess recyclable waste.¹⁰ Approximately 30 per cent of Australia's recyclable waste was sent to China for processing. s6(a)
7. Australia made progress on waste policy in 2018, with an updated National Waste Strategy, a Threat Abatement for marine litter and National Packaging Targets. Recent environmental protection initiatives include a \$100 million Environment Restoration Fund to "support practical action on waste and recycling, the protection of rivers, waterways and coasts, and further support for threatened and migratory native species".
8. Other steps include an Australian Recycling Investment Plan to increase Australia's recycling rates, tackle plastic waste and litter, accelerate work on new recycling schemes and continue action to halve food waste by 2030. At the state government level, similar plans are being developed with significant levels of investment being channeled into a resilient recycling sector.

Victoria

9. The Environmental Protection Authority noted that investment in waste management and recycling was a priority for the Victorian Government. Victoria has a landfill levy but no container return scheme, although it does have a strong kerbside recycling scheme s6(b)(l)
10. Landfill levies were also discussed with the Victorian Environment Protection Authority which noted that key considerations were the amount of the levy, and what to do with the levy funds. If the levy's purpose is to raise funds, then lower levies may suffice, but if its purpose is to make landfill use less desirable than recycling, then the levy needs to be higher. Levy increases needed to be complimented with increased enforcement to prevent fly tipping and dumping. Industry representatives of Victorian Waste Management Association made the same point. State EPAs a lead investigations into commercial-level and hazardous illegal dumping and have a significant 'hands-on' approach with considerable resources dedicated to compliance and enforcement.

11. s6(b)(l)

12. The Victorian EPA noted that there was a big focus on "collaborative government procurement" to try and attract new participants and investment into the waste

¹⁰ Approximately 30 per cent of Australia's recyclable waste was sent to China for processing and Australia's existing recycling infrastructure, like New Zealand's, is struggling to cope.

and recycling market. s6(b)(i)

13. I made a site visit to Alex Fraser - a leading producer of sustainable materials for the civil construction industry and saw first-hand efforts to re-cycle as much waste as possible in new construction (e.g. crushed glass used like sand in road construction, tyres used in bitumen for roading). There is a ten year commitment to use 1 million tyres per year in road construction in Victoria.

New South Wales

14. My meetings in Sydney focused on learning about its container return scheme. Distinctive features of the NSW scheme compared to those in South Australia and Queensland include:

- many collection points (460 across the State);
- significant use of reverse vending machines (which account for 80% of returned containers, are very convenient for consumers);
- the scheme is managed by the beverage industry, but (heavily) regulated by the NSW Government; and
- good uptake – 50% of all beverage containers sold are recycled.

15. The good uptake has created an issue of how to ensure that the large volume of returned containers (400,000 per day) are recycled safely and sustainably, and how to create a market for the resulting recycled products (such as crushed glass).

Queensland

16. Queensland has only recently introduced a Waste Disposal Levy (effective 1 July 2019) and a Container Deposit Scheme (1 November 2018). This has enabled Queensland to learn from the other States' experiences. Unique features of its scheme reflect the large size of the State and its highly dispersed population. Many of the collection points are run by social enterprises and there are mobile collection points.

17. s6(b)(i)

Establishing a CRS broadly requires three stages: design, procurement and implementation. Advice received both by industry and government groups was that these three can take up to three years. There was strong advice that a rushed timeframe will lead to negative outcomes, with implications for the productivity and sustainability of an effective model within the waste economy. Good design is critical to optimise

beverage container returns, benefit social and charitable enterprises, avoid the potential for fraud and ensure the scheme operates efficiently.

18. In Brisbane I met with the recently appointed Federal Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management, Hon Trevor Evans. The Federal Government is now giving a higher priority to waste reduction, as demonstrated by the establishment of his portfolio. This requires co-operation between the Federal and State Governments given that States are responsible for waste management while the Federal Government has access to funding.
19. There is potential for further trans-Tasman cooperation on waste and recycling, both because New Zealand and Australia are tackling similar issues at the same time, and also because we have two of the most integrated economies in the world. Collaboration could range from information exchanges, to increased consistency across the Tasman on packaging and product stewardship, to considering development of complimentary waste and recycling infrastructure, to fostering development of trans-Tasman markets for recycled material.
20. There is also scope for enhanced cooperation between Australia and New Zealand on waste reduction initiatives in the Pacific Island countries.
21. I wish to acknowledge the support provided by officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Ministry for the Environment.

Proactive release

22. I propose to release the paper within the required 30 business days, following due diligence and consultation.

Recommendation

23. I propose Cabinet note this report on my travel to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, Australia over the period 8 – 11 July 2019.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Eugenie Sage
Associate Minister for the Environment