



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr Ed Cocks MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products

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Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Paterson, Ms Clay and Ms Castley

Re: Inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products

The City of Stonnington (Council) welcomes the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity (ECCB)'s inquiry into and report on matters relating to absorbent hygiene product waste (including nappies) in the Australian Capital Territory. Council supports the use of sustainable alternatives to single-use hygiene products, such as nappies and sanitary products, to reduce the volume of disposable products entering our waste systems. Disposable absorbent hygiene products already contribute to a significant percentage of the residual waste stream, and as more local government areas roll out Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) collection services to process food and garden materials, and move toward fortnightly garbage collections, this will become more apparent. Community concerns over the smell of absorbent products (such as nappies) have been reflected by a number of Councils that have adopted a fortnightly garbage service, so the move to investigate and support reusable options prior is recommended.

Council is also particularly supportive of the ECCB's examination of the environmental impact of single-use and reusable hygiene products across their entire life cycle, focus on the usage of absorbent hygiene products across multiple sectors, opportunities for collaboration between stakeholders, and exploration of incentive programs and education materials to reduce waste.

Environmental impacts of absorbent hygiene products

The environmental impact of absorbent hygiene products, such as nappies, is well-documented, with Sustainability Victoria reporting that 3.75 million disposable nappies are used each day in Australia and New Zealand and the bulk ending up in landfill. Each nappy requires about a cup of crude oil for its production and is estimated to take around 150 years to break down in landfill. The impact of reusable cloth nappies (primarily through detergents,

water and energy use) is also worth exploring and comparing to single-use products, as should their accessibility, and clear education around extending their life should also be highlighted for the community. Council is pleased to note that this is a key term as part of the Inquiry.

Community and care settings

The usage of absorbent hygiene products across the community and care sector, including aged care, disability care, schools, and early childhood services, is well understood, however the use of reusable products in these settings can be challenging due to the up-front cost, time investment and support required. For reusable products to be offered and promoted in such settings, it is crucial that there is training and education around the suitability of items, how to choose them and how to care for them and extend their life, for staff, carers and users where appropriate. Secondary schools in particular provide ample opportunities to educate young people about reusable menstrual products and provide access to these products where possible. These settings are key hubs in the community and provide a significant opportunity to normalise and transition to more sustainable products and provide access to members of the community.

Strategies to address limitations to collaboration between stakeholders

For reusable absorbent hygiene products to be normalised, promoted and improved, Council acknowledges the importance of collaboration between stakeholders at all levels of government, in businesses and in the community. Governmental bodies have significant influence over the community and key stakeholders and should lead by example. To address this, Council has recently participated in a Sustainability Victoria funded *Reusable Nappy Study* (the Study) along with along with 11 other Victorian Councils. The Study aimed to identify a best practice reusable nappy program to incentivise behaviour change and reduce disposable nappy waste in households, by engaging and supporting parents and addressing key identified barriers. Upon its publication, the Study may be a valuable resource to the ECCB's inquiry and further research into incentive programs and education.

Council will also be undertaking a similar joint feasibility study on reusable sanitary and incontinence aids in order to reduce waste and increase reusable products in the state. While the results from these studies will be particularly relevant for the Victorian context, Council is keen to share its findings to support further behaviour change and deliver consistent, accessible educational materials to highlight the benefits of sustainable and reusable products.

Incentives to boost reusable absorbent hygiene products

A number of Councils have introduced rebates to incentivise the purchase and use of reusable nappies already, which will be detailed in the Study. The City of Stonnington has elected not to commence this as there was unclear data to the effectiveness of these rebates in encouraging households to adopt these practices. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish if rebates helped those who were already considering or supported the use of reusable products or had already committed to reusables. This informed the decision to partake in the Study which will provide further information and advice in this area.

Availability of and access to education materials

The importance of access to relevant, clear and accurate education materials cannot be overstated. There are a number of opportunities to promote hygiene products in the community and provide access to education materials and programs through local networks, including Maternal Child Health Centres, Early Learning Centres and Libraries. While there is a wealth of information online, and a number of providers offer education and workshops in the space, a clear set of consistent standards for the different products on the market would assist with educating the public. This should be a key consideration when considering education materials. Similarly, education materials must be developed to suit the community and engage disadvantaged groups through consultation, awareness-raising and support.

Council's Waste Strategy & Engagement team will be pleased to provide further commentary or clarification if required. [REDACTED] can be contacted at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Amy Yang

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