



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

Submission Number: 1

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NEW INQUIRY: THE WASTE MANAGEMENT OF ABSORBENT HYGIENE PRODUCTS

Andrea Friend Livingstone Shire Councillor Queensland – 2020 to Present (previous employee 10 years)

Portfolio Councillors (Not Divisional)

Portfolio Holder – Waste Management, Environment, Water, Sewerage, Pest Management, Local Laws, and Council Local Native Plant Nursery.

Brief Historical Data and Facts Livingstone Shire Council: Livingstone Shire Council Proclaimed 1903, forced state amalgamation 2008, and De-amalgamed 2014. Estimated Population (2021) – 38,771, with approximately 18,000 ratepayers. Our council is a coastal council that is located on the Tropic of Capricorn and the southern Great Barrier Reef.

Our assets include Yeppoon Landfill utilising a gatehouse contractor and has a current cell life of two to three years. Included are three transfer stations within Livingstone Shire. There are two FTE staff with a temporary funded position filled until early 2023. Currently we do not have the budgetary allowance to employ a ‘Waste Education Officer’, who is desperately and urgently needed. Having been a past employee of Livingstone Shire Council, it is my opinion and those of council officers, that it is most definitely education which drives behavioural change and not compliance alone.

Acknowledging this urgent requirement for waste and recoverable education, I moved a motion in September of 2020, resolving *‘THAT Council establishes a reusable nappy and sanitary products cashback scheme, in the form of a monthly draw, as per Option One, for the financial year 2020/2021.’* (Passed unanimously).

Background for Context - Extract from Officers Report dated 15th September 2020:

1. Establish a nappy cashback scheme, effectively in the form of a competition or lucky draw, like the Sustainable Nappy Cashback currently offered by Brisbane City Council. This would involve residents entering a monthly draw to win back their investment, or part of it, in reusable nappies and sanitary products (Up to \$100 in value).

The following products would be eligible for a rebate for:

- Reusable sanitary pads.
- Reusable sanitary cups.
- Leak proof underwear.
- Wet bags for reusable sanitary items.
- Cloth nappies.
- Reusable swim nappies.
- Reusable inner liners for nappies.
- Reusable baby wipes.
- Wet bags for reusable nappies; and
- Reusable nursing breast pads.

'Eco-nappies' have not been included as they are not fully biodegradable (despite claims they are), often containing plastic tabs and back sheets, elastic, and absorbent gel. Introducing a rebate scheme for Livingstone residents for reusable nappies and sanitary products would be a good first step towards encouraging more sustainable behaviour in our community. The rebate scheme would also be compatible with current governance mechanisms such as the *Queensland Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy*, *Livingstone Community Plan: Towards 2050*, and the *Sustainable Livingstone* program.

What Were the Outcomes:

This successful trial was extended for another year into 2022.

Some statistics related to nappies in the kerbside waste streams, derived from waste audits conducted by Envirocom in 2022 and 2017:

May 2022:

2.81% of the Kerbside General Waste Stream is Nappies – 0.32kg/weekly

No contamination of Nappies in Kerbside Recycling

June 2017:

1.76% of the Kerbside General Waste Stream is Nappies

0.77% of the Kerbside Recycling Stream is Nappies (Contamination – should not be in recycling bin)

While nappies in the general waste bin have increased, this can be attributed to several factors:

- This audit took in a bigger area and was conducted over 5 days – the 2017 audit was conducted over 3 days so more varied in properties.
- There is no contamination this time around in the recycling bins from nappies; and
- This audit also gave us the weight of each material type – the 2017 audit didn't.

We have seen a small positive change after conducting this trial with incentives, however it is vital Livingstone may obtain funding for a Waste Education officer to continue the momentum in behavioural change, especially within the primary schools.

I think the challenge here is trying to work out whether we have changed the behaviour of anyone or whether our investment has largely just reaffirmed the good behaviour of that small percentage who would do what's best for the environment regardless.

Assuming the national average 12.5 births per thousand population we expect roughly 500 births per year, in Livingstone Shire, therefore we have engaged less than a sixth of those mothers (c.80).

Overall, there's 243 tonnes of this waste going into our landfill annually, the challenge is whether we just engaged the 10% who strive to do the right thing rather than the 80% who we can educate and influence to make a real change in that figure.

Cloth or Disposable Nappies:

Our incentivised trial did not extinguish the need for young mothers to cease using the plastic disposable nappies altogether. In noting this I do think, a change in legislation in the manufacturing sector (for packaging), education and incentives are the keys to behavioural change. There is minimal educational material for local government areas to access and utilise, in this area of reusable, renewable, and recyclable, absorbent hygiene products.

Adult Sanitary Products:

In February 2022 I put forward a Notice of Motion
THAT

- 1) Council's Waste Department prepare a policy in relation to the supply of a short-term second bin service for ratepayers requiring one due to medical necessity.
- 2) The Council costs for this short-term service be, waived for up to eight weeks.

This passed unanimously. Our council, through compassion, understands the need for assistance with end-of-life home care and will shoulder the burden of costs associated with the plastic products that end up in our landfill cell.

Local government across our states and territories understand the requirements of our community and desperately need reforms and financial assistance to accommodate those in need.

Manufacturers:

To reduce the plastic packaging of these products, I believe that a legislative change would place manufactures on notice to make this change through compliance. It is the plastic tabs, plastic strips protecting the adhesive, individual soft plastic protection of sanitary pads, plastic tampon applicators and wrapping etc. that cause the most damage to our environment and ecology.

Environmental Impacts:

As a category 3 coastal council and a Reef Guardian council, Livingstone Shire Council, is dedicated to introducing several strategies. These include a Biodiversity Strategy and A NEW DIMENSION - A Strategy for the Management of Resource Recovery and Waste in Livingstone Shire to 2030.

Behavioural change noted within this strategy includes:

PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

1.1 Education

Actions:

Employ a dedicated Waste/Sustainability Education Officer to promote the circular economy:

Deliver an annual Waste Education program targeting primary schools

Develop specific education campaigns on topics such as Sustainable Livingstone, Illegal dumping and littering, the 3 R's - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, Plastics, Disposal of invasive species etc

Develop a dedicated Resource Recovery and Waste Education Centre

1.2 Empowering the Community

Actions:

Identify community champions and provide supporting resources

Run events throughout the year such as the Sustainable Livingstone Expo, National Recycling Week and various workshops and forums on specific waste and sustainability topics

Employ behavioural change education experts at events

Develop online training sessions for the community

Maintain and update the Livingstone Waste Wise App

Engage with local businesses to promote waste reduction to visitors to Livingstone shire

Develop incentive/subsidy programs ***including Reusable Nappies and Sanitary products, Worm Farms, Composting Bins, Mulchers***

1.3 Monitoring and Evaluation to gauge program effectiveness

Actions:

Establish appropriate baseline and ongoing monitoring programs to track success of behavioural change programs and inform the necessary adjustments to education programs

What Regional Councils, in all States and Territories Need Moving Forward:

Federal Government Assistance

- Funding for education officers.
- Change of packaging requirements
- Educational Materials that are consistent across our nation
- Alternative products that are affordable

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue.

Kind Regards

Councillor Andrea Friend

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