

Abbreviated Speech Notes from Rob Fenwick - Chair of Waste Advisory Board

As presented to the 2008-2009 Annual General Meeting John Webber introduced Rob Fenwick – Chairman of the Waste Advisory Board to the meeting.

Rob congratulated John Webber on promoting glass packaging recycling for well over 30 years.

He noted that it is an interesting and dynamic time for anyone exposed to waste minimization and the concept for product stewardship. There has been very little publicity about the Act and the introduction on July 1st of the levy. There is no political mileage in introducing a waste tax or more legislation and so this has been kept at a low profile which has led to two things: Firstly made it difficult for the sector to engage with people and secondly gives the impression that this is not an important priority for National... but the Packaging Industry should not be deceived about this.

Glass is to be commended for its leadership and getting on and dealing with its own issues. It has recognized that there is a risk to industry in the medium term of doing nothing.

Glass in introducing a levy system and good governance as acknowledged the difficulties around glass in a national sense – freight, distribution and sustainable reuse. This has meant that it needs to “paddle its own waka” and commence the processes expected under the Act.

He as an observer of the packaging sector generally, regards glass as an excellent model for developing and lodging its scheme. While he was unable to comment on the scheme itself but in terms of developing a voluntary scheme glass is an exemplar.

Glass is doing what consumers expected from it. Education and the engagement of young people are totally appropriate.

Understanding The Waste Advisory Board

In respect of the Board it was created in response to need for an independent group to provide advice on a number of matters. Legislators in the previous government needed to find process to fairly administer waste levy funds. The fund is hypothecated and needs to be distributed fairly back to sectors. The Board provides an advisory function to Minister. The Minister must consult the Board before making any decisions on waste and on product stewardship. The Board advises on guidelines of product stewardship schemes and advises on the need for regulations – and the cut off point between mandatory and voluntary schemes. The Board will advise on how effective the levy is and on the need for regulations.

Rob noted that New Zealand has a very poor record of national data on waste and that the Act was supported by both sides of Government.

So far the Advisory Board has been involved in the production of the Discussion Document; looked at the issue of cover material for landfill and provided advice to the Minister on this which differed from that of his Ministry.

The Minister has confirmed Government’s commitment to waste as a priority for this Government. Whilst he has talked in terms of Top 5 priorities and some might say 5th is hardly a priority packaging, in fact it sits up against very serious considerations including climate change, introduction of an EPA, review of EMA and water issues. Rob takes this as a strong vote of confidence from the Minister that waste is a big issue as there are lots of other things issues that have dropped off the agenda.

The process is classic Blue Green politics and the Act is the first piece of legislative framework that introduces price mechanisms ie. a levy to change behaviours. The introduction of the levy to capture the cost of externalities and to tax the bad performers is classic Blue Green policy that Minister Smith and before him Simon Upton have been involved in for some time.

Rob had set up the Blue Green Party and then got involved with the NZ Business Council for Sustainable Development and its emphasis has been on establishing price indicators to make change. \$10 per tonne is not much and NZ is a laggard in terms of other countries – the EU landfill tax has been in place for a decade. The UK tax is now 50 pounds per tonne and in Germany it is Euro 400 the conclusion is price indicators work.

New Zealand will see pricing of carbon, pricing of nitrates to show true cost of dairy farming on our waterways.

The Board has a good working relationship with the Minister and Ministry. It is independent and will provide robust and independent advice and the Board when it thinks the Ministry has got it wrong.

The Board has just considered a 20 year future for NZ in terms of waste. Today we have a market driven consumer led society. In 2029 stewardship of resources will be more common and there will be an understanding and underlying value of resources. There will be stockpiling resources in expectation of finding valuable future use. Commodity prices will have changed; throwaway society will be in decline; organic waste will be a priority for diversion from landfill; e-waste will have disappeared; waste will be designed out of a lot of products – New Zealanders will be future makers not future takers

Rob stated that the Board has had to be realistic in terms of product stewardship. There are unlikely to be any 'big hairy goals' in Year 1. The Government is encouraging voluntary schemes. There will likely be 2-3 mandatory schemes in Year 1. It would be unwise to take on too many schemes without the resources to police them.

However we must not think this will be the way of the future.

He considered there is a good chance that the packaging sector will be considered as a priority product and that interested parties shouldn't consider for a minute that the discussion paper is a signal of 'lack of teeth' by a centre right Government.

The Government is determined to make sure waste minimization is successful.

In response to a question as to what are key drivers for selection of priority products? ie. Are they Environmental harm?

Rob advised that the Act talks specifically about reducing environmental harm. Environmental harm does not exclude the use of non renewable resources so any waste stream has a function of environmental harm. Agri chemicals may have more environmental harm than glass, but this doesn't mean that glass is removed from the equation.

Advisory Board member Sheryl Stevens commented on the different perspectives as to what are environmental issues for different communities. In the inner cities, broken glass on road is a major issue. City dwellers don't have a connection with agrichemicals. She noted that people lead and Governments follow. Sheryl stressed the need to educate and get people involved in recycling and recycling glass into new bottles. Good news stories should be promoted.