



Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee

Chris Stanton  
Committee Clerk  
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Committee  
House of Commons  
London

26 October 2007

Dear Sirs,

**Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee - Waste Strategy for  
England 2007**

I am writing to present the LARAC response to the request for submissions to the above committee, which is contained below, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide information on the above subject.

The comments below are sent on behalf of the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC). LARAC is an association of well over 400 local authorities across England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland whose waste management and recycling professionals' co-ordinate and operate waste management services. Membership is drawn from all types of authority including statutory Waste Collection (WCA), Waste Disposal (WDA) and Unitary.

Overall LARAC believes that the English Waste Strategy does not provide enough leadership to take the country as far forward as it could. We are also concerned that Government intend more legislation for local authorities yet are taking a voluntary line with the private sector, which has a much larger component of the total waste stream.

If you have any queries on this response or would like to discuss the matter further then please contact me on (phone) or (email).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Marshall  
Chair, LARAC



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**How policies proposed by the Waste Strategy will be implemented and the roles of those responsible for the production and disposal of different classes of waste - including industrial, business and household waste. Localisation as opposed to centralisation of waste management.**

1. LARAC feels that one of the keys to the success of the Waste Strategy is going to be the strength of the strategic lead that comes from Central Government. Whilst we think the Strategy provides a large amount of the right sentiment we do feel that it is lacking in the overall leadership and vision within a number of Government departments including the treasury that is required if England is to deal effectively with consumption, resource management and its environmental impacts.
2. There needs to be a focus on the fact that waste generally is a latent resource and that fact is not particularly changed as a result of the current waste classifications, in terms of household, commercial, industrial etc. Current targets are generally set sectorally and applied narrowly to certain classifications of waste. By looking at the whole waste stream in the round there is greater potential to make progress overall on recycling and keeping resources in economic use. The Landfill Diversion targets for local authorities and the Packaging Targets for the private sector are examples of where separate target regimes have created potential conflicts that mean the two sectors are not working as closely together as could be possible, or sharing a common goal.
3. LARAC also believes that a very strong emphasis should continue to be placed on the 'Producer Responsibility' principle and that product design should have continued economic use of the resources of a product as one of its key principals. By designing in durability, reuse and 'recycleability' then products will be easier for local authorities and others to deal with and so ensure that resources are not lost to the economy.
4. If the policies and plans with the Strategy are to be implemented and delivered as set out then clear leadership and sufficient resources within DEFRA will be paramount. At some levels the department appears to be one that officials pass through before going on to 'bigger' areas rather than being an important priority in its own right. This lack of continuity can then lead to experience being lost to the department as soon as it has been gained and personal contacts and networks with non-governmental organizations, important for the development of sound policy, being disrupted.



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5. LARAC believes there is place for both more centralisation and more localisation of waste management. Whilst we believe strongly from a local authority point of view that one size does not fit all local situations, we would concede that is room for some rationalisation and consolidation of techniques and equipment. For example, voluntary agreements on the colour of containers for the collection of different materials could bring about procurement efficiencies and also answer some of the public concerns about the different systems in place across the country.
6. We do believe that local authorities have made great strides in increasing recycling of waste in the past ten years and this is due in part to the fact that they have introduced schemes applicable to their areas. This has meant that they have had to innovate which has helped maintain the pace of change that we have seen. Centralisation from this viewpoint would stifle innovation and could lead to a slowing down in progress as well as introducing inefficiencies to some areas. That said information sharing will help ensure that we are not reinventing the wheel and the work that WRAP does in this (and other) areas is to be welcomed and commended.

### **The Role for and the implementation of regulations, and their enforcement**

7. LARAC is disappointed that once again regulations seem to be placed on the public sector disproportionately compared with the private sector. Whilst we appreciate the need to maintain the competitiveness of the UK economy and business by not imposing undue regulation, if the Strategy is to achieve the aim of making a serious contribution to climate change and one planet living it could be argued that more action is needed.
8. Given that household waste is a smaller component of the overall waste stream than commercial or industrial waste we feel that a level playing field needs to be achieved between the public and private sector in order for the Waste Strategy to deal effectively with commercial and industrial wastes as well as municipal wastes. This works both ways. On one hand, for example, the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme increases the risk and potentially the cost of increasing trade waste provision for local authorities, but not private sector organizations. On the other hand, the decision to exempt all



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municipal waste from the requirement to be further pre-treated before being landfilled on account of councils being required to operate kerbside (household) recycling schemes under the WET Act may be considered to discriminate against private sector operations.

9. That said we do feel that targets for local authorities on the whole have had a positive effect and have been a significant driver in gaining local political support for the expansion of recycling schemes. From a practitioner's point of view targets appear to have worked and we therefore see them as an essential element in leveraging money into authority waste management services when authorities are allocating resources.
10. If voluntary measures are to be proposed for the private sector that strict timetables should be used for their agreement and introduction. If these timetables are not met than previously published regulations could then be introduced. Whilst this is a very simplified example, it is interesting that whereas the Landfill Allowance Scheme that involved local authorities was introduced to a strict timetable, the Packaging Regulations and The WEEE Directive, involving the private sector, had a much drawn out implementation period.
11. Adequate resources must be provided for the Environment Agency and local authorities to carry out enforcement duties at the same time as working with Magistrates and Judges to develop suitable deterrents to back up enforcement action. That said a view needs to be taken on why we are regulating and policing environmental activities as there are instances where one set of regulations stops a greater environmental benefit from being achieved. An example of this was the Animal By Products Order which put back composting 5 years in the UK and means we are further back from achieving Landfill Directive targets than we could have been. This also exemplifies the need for the Government as a whole to prioritise and lead environmental stewardship.

## The classification of waste

12. As mentioned earlier the way in which as waste is classified can sometimes conflict with achieving greater environmental benefits from waste. There continues to be uncertainty and perceived risk with regard to what is municipal waste and household waste, even though the Environmental Protection Act provides certain definitions.



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13. The definitions of waste should be framed in such a way that their limits are clear and they do not work against achieving environmental benefits. In some cases, targets and legislation may be formed by waste definitions whilst the greater environmental benefit would be gained by changing the definitions themselves.
14. From a local authority point of view the continued exclusion of home composted waste from the definition of municipal waste would mean that a key element of waste reduction and valuable tool in meeting the Landfill Directive would not be available. Yet there is industry wide agreement that home composting is preferable to kerbside collections for composting waste.
15. If the Strategy is to lead to a change from seeing waste as a waste to seeing waste as a resource then the point at which an item is classified as a waste could become critical. If an item is seen as a resource until it really does have no further economic use, or there is no intention to gain any economic use out of it, then at that point (but not before) it should become a waste, provided that overall its continued use, re-use or further recycling doesn't significantly increase pollution. At present items are too quickly classed as a waste and do not become a resource again until after they have ~~are~~ physically been through the recycling or reprocessing system. This places economic and regulatory barriers on keeping those items in the economic cycle and so means that more resources are lost to the economy than need to be.
16. This change in outlook from waste to resource needs to be mirrored in the definitions and classifications of waste if England is to make the step change needed in sustainable consumption.

### **The proposals for financial incentives to increase household waste prevention and recycling**

17. LARAC was dismayed with the proposals contained within the Strategy for household incentive schemes and responded to the accompanying consultation accordingly. Given the overwhelming evidence from other European countries on the benefits and practicality of direct and variable charging schemes it was surprising that such systems were not proposed for England, even allowing for the Government's



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obsession with controlling local authority expenditure. Indeed that Strategy flew in the face of the very evidence it was providing.

18. It is undeniable that introducing charging systems will be a very brave political decision but once again evidence from several other countries show that it can be done. Therefore we still believe that local authorities should be given the power (Not Duty) to implement direct/variable charging schemes within their area to increase and enhance the collection of materials for re use and recycling. This power could come subject to certain conditions relating to having suitable and appropriate collection and communications systems in place along with proof of consideration of affordability for all residents.
19. Local authorities and their representative organizations have worked with Government throughout the consultation period to try and find a way to make the proposed schemes work but it was felt this was just not possible as they have so far been presented.
20. LARAC believes that England should take the examples and experiences of other countries in this particular field and apply them here. This would bring a type of 'producer' pays principle to householders and should enable a stronger link to be made in people's minds between purchasing decisions and waste generation. At present it is too easy for householders not to take personal ownership of the waste problem, it often being seen as something that 'the council should do'.

### **The role of composting**

#### **The promotion of anaerobic digestion for agricultural and food waste.**

21. Composting in its widest sense will play a key part in local authorities achieving their targets under the LATS scheme. However if we are to pay full regard to the waste hierarchy then home composting needs to be placed on a firmer footing within the LATS than it currently has.
22. We are aware of the large body of work that WRAP has undertaken to provide reliable and robust methods for measuring the impact that home composting has. We strenuously urge the Government to adopt these models -and allow home composting to count towards the LATS targets before more local authorities implement universal and free green waste collection systems that may not actually be needed.



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23. As already mentioned the introduction of the Animal By Products Order inhibited the growth in central composting provision at a time when it was just starting to take off. If composting is to play a greater part in landfill avoidance then the specification of compost as a product even when produced from a mixed waste stream must be reviewed. In this way, MBT processes capable of producing a high grade bio-product fit for purpose for spreading on land or landscaping would be promoted and low-cost MBT processes that create only a biowaste for disposal would be disincentivised. Regulations governing small-scale (community) compost operations should be further reviewed to avoid unnecessary barriers being established against their operation.
24. Soil erosion and loss of humus is a growing concern across the globe and a contributor to the problem of flooding after extreme weather. Waste and resources policy should be seen as an opportunity to return humus and nutrients to soils through the composting of waste.
25. In-vessel and anaerobic decomposition processes also have the potential to play a vital role in future treatment of organic wastes. LARAC supports the high priority the Government has given to these processes in the Waste Strategy 2007. However, more could be done through the Government's investment strategy, through streamlined procurement procedures, and through proportionate regulation of processes already established in Europe to bring these technologies into widespread use more rapidly in the UK.

**The Government's approach to waste minimisation, for example consideration of responsible packaging, including examination of the different materials used and the potential for reusable packaging and return schemes.**

26. It is felt that the Waste Strategy does not provide enough practical support for waste minimisation despite the lip service it gives to the waste Hierarchy. Whilst LARAC has always maintained that local authorities have limited influence over the amount of waste produced per household, measures the Government proposes for waste prevention appear to be subordinate to the promotion of re-use and recycling, for example measures to incentivise recycling and increase landfill tax.



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27. As stated above an ability to charge householders directly for waste collections could have an impact on the amount of waste that householders produce. Otherwise waste prevention, over and above recycling, it can be a difficult message to get across to the public given that there is sometimes difficulty in selling the recycling message.
28. We believe that better product design has the potential to have a significant impact on waste minimisation. Studies on the light weighting of packing, for example glass bottles, have shown that substantial benefits could be accrued by manufacturers adopting 'best in class' designs as standard. Given the aim of reducing the carbon impact of waste management this would bring about the double gain of a reduced call on primary resources and the savings in transport impacts that light weighting will have.
29. Greater emphasis should also be placed on new ways of using packaging including that of reusable packing. The Packaging regulations have had the effect of improving performance in this area with more retailers using transit packaging that is multi use rather than one use. More thought should be given to reducing further the application of single-use packaging where there is a practical alternative, for example in mail order and delivered goods. A simple example would be the use of cardboard, which can be readily recycled by householders, instead of polystyrene for goods that require protective packaging that are delivered to households.
30. This is an area where tougher regulation on the private sector could bring large resource benefits without undue economic disadvantage.

**The potential for the proposals in the Waste Strategy to tackle the UK's contribution to climate change, in particular through the reduction of methane emissions from landfill.**

31. The restriction of waste being disposed of to landfill should be a primary goal for all involved in the waste management industry. Equally it should be noted that advances in landfill design and regulation mean that nearly all landfill sites today capture landfill gas and many larger sites use it to generate electricity. In fact 25% of the UK's currently renewable energy comes from this source.
32. That notwithstanding LARAC believes that the Waste Strategy could place a significant role in the UK's contribution to climate change by



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enabling resources to be kept in economic activity instead of going for disposal or even recovery. Therefore focus should be given to putting in place the resources, infrastructure and legislative climate to enable high levels of recycling to be achieved.

33. In order to focus the outcomes of recycling on what we trying to achieve serious consideration should be given to the way targets are developed and assessed in the future. This should see a move away from tonnes to targets that measure and reward CO2 savings. This means that the focus would move to the materials that cause the most environmental harm rather than being on those that are the heaviest.
34. This principle should be applied across the board so that all waste streams are treated in this manner. As stated previously the priority given to municipal waste has been disproportionate to the tonnages relative to commercial and industrial wastes. If the Government want to gain the maximum CO diversion from the waste arena that it can more work will need to be done on the other waste streams to have the potential desired effect.

The adequacy of the existing infrastructure, such as energy from waste facilities with heat recovery; the UK's capacity to process materials collected for recycling with heat recovery; the UK's capacity to process materials collected for recycling; and the potential for Government action to encourage the most efficient novel technologies.

35. The UK lacks much of the infrastructure it needs on all levels if the ambitions of the waste Strategy are to be realised. Government strategic investment, intervention and support are going to be required if this is to change in the medium term. This will include looking at land use planning issues and public acceptability of waste management facilities in their area.
36. PFI is the Government's main "big idea" for investing in waste infrastructure. Despite the targets for PFI contracts having been modified from "contracts" to "facilities", this model has a number of serious disadvantages for local authorities. It militates against innovation and competition in the waste management industry. It is only applicable to large municipal contracts. The process of gaining PFI credits and monitoring of contracts is very onerous and delays by several months or, occasionally, years, the construction of facilities now urgently needed to help the UK achieve its Landfill Directive



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targets. Investment models based on PFI do not encourage the development of merchant plants that local authorities may share with private sector user organizations, so they do not encourage greater integration of treatment of municipal with non-municipal waste streams. The Government should offer a number of alternative investment models, incentives and opportunities to public and private sector organizations operating in partnership to develop facilities of all sizes, as well as PFI.

37. Materials are still routinely sent overseas for processing and while this is an acceptable route for them it is still not ideal. Given the potential carbon benefits of home processing along with the economic and social benefits the Government and others should do all they can to encourage investment in the UK materials processing infrastructure. LARAC endorses the work carried out by WRAP and other organizations in this area and would like to contribute to the faster development of the indigenous recycling infrastructure.
38. We are in danger of being engulfed in a vicious circle where increased targets mean more material is being collected placing further demands on home markets with then more material exported or used in alternative end markets. These end markets, such as aggregates for glass, are legitimate but do not keep the resources in economic activity and so have a smaller impact on the carbon reductions.