



Norfolk Island Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

1 August 2017

Ms Robin Adams
Mayor
Norfolk Island Regional Council
Bicentennial Complex
Norfolk Island 2899

E: mayor@nirc.gov.nf

Waste and Environment – Plastics categorised as ‘non-recyclable’ by Norfolk Island Regional Council

Dear Mayor,

I refer to the Norfolk Island Regional Council’s (NIRC) recycling guide which was recently provided to the Norfolk Island community through Australia Post. There are questions that the Chamber of Commerce requires answers to within 10 days of the date of this letter.

1. Why is plastic, specifically commodity and standard plastics, categorised by Council as a 'non-recyclable' material on Norfolk Island when:

- Plastic is one of the world's biggest problems regarding waste and pollution (both on land and in the sea), and
- Plastic is successfully recycled in many places across the globe.

*"The success and dominance of plastics starting in the early 20th century led to environmental concerns regarding its slow decomposition rate after being discarded as trash due to its composition of very large molecules. Toward the end of the century, one approach to this problem was met with wide efforts toward [recycling](#)... the very chemical bonds that make them [plastics] so durable tend to make them resistant to most natural processes of degradation."
(source: Wikipedia)*

The Chamber **should not** have to highlight this, as it is so obvious and undisputed, but the Chamber will do so to make its point: it is a known fact that plastic **does not** break down unless the plastic has been made using biodegradable plastic or is a bioplastic. It is also a known fact that many plastics break apart/away to form what is known as *microplastics*.

Therefore, the Chamber requests immediate clarification and a detailed and thorough explanation on:

- a) Whether Council is intending to burn plastic waste on Norfolk Island or if it is going to use it for landfill?
- b) What **measures and study** has Council taken to determine the cause and effect of this – especially long term – on the community, local businesses and the island itself?
- c) Has a risk analysis – specific to the Norfolk Island environment – been undertaken? If so, the Chamber requests a copy of this documentation. If an analysis has not been done, then the Chamber asks why not? Council should provide an immediate explanation to the Norfolk Island community and local businesses with regards to this.
- d) If Council is going to place plastic in a landfill, where then is the location of this landfill and what assessment and tests have been made to determine that this is a safe area and that no further/future environmental damage or catastrophe will ensue? Again, the Chamber requests a copy of any relevant documentation which provides evidence of this.

*"Many of the controversies associated with plastics actually relate to the additives: organotin compounds are particularly **toxic**... For example, plasticisers like adipates and phthalates are often added to brittle plastics like polyvinyl chloride to make them pliable enough for use in food packaging, toys, and many other items. Traces of these **compounds can leach out of the product**... Some compounds leaching from polystyrene food containers have been proposed to **interfere with hormone functions and are suspected human carcinogens**... Whereas the finished plastic may be non-toxic, the monomers used in the manufacture of the parent polymers may be toxic. In some cases, small amounts of those chemicals can remain trapped in the product unless suitable processing is employed. For example, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has recognised vinyl chloride, the precursor to PVC, as a human carcinogen." (source: Wikipedia)*

"...If the plastic is incinerated, it increases carbon emissions; if it is placed in a landfill, it becomes a carbon sink." (source: Wikipedia)

The following critical question now has to also be asked:

2. How can Council expect Norfolk Island to be the 'Best Small Island in the World' when it is not a leader and is not setting an example in helping to reduce a huge, global crisis (the issue of plastic); and when it - as South Pacific island - is not a leader and is not setting an example by making absolutely every intent it can to reduce this problem? Even more so when there is the issue of the great Pacific garbage patch (see attached documents).

Norfolk cannot and never will be able to attain the fictitious and illusory title of being the 'Best Small Island in the World' until it discontinues contributing the problem.

The act of simply just banning plastic bags on Norfolk does not warrant Council a free and congratulatory tick where plastics are concerned. The issue of plastic as a whole should have been paramount and addressed as one of the top three waste issues on the island.

One final point:

Incineration of plastics

"Controlled high-temperature incineration, above 850°C for two seconds, performed with selective additional heating, breaks down toxic dioxins and furans from burning plastic, and is widely used in municipal solid waste incineration. Municipal solid waste incinerators also normally include flue gas treatments to reduce pollutants further. This is needed because uncontrolled incineration of plastic produces polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins, a carcinogen (cancer causing chemical). The problem occurs because the heat content of the waste stream varies. Open-air burning of plastic occurs at lower temperatures, and normally releases such toxic fumes." (source: Wikipedia)

Chamber requests specs on the proposed incinerator Council is planning to purchase for Waste Management.

Reference is now made to the Norfolk Island Regional Council's *Community Strategic Plan 2016-2026*, which the Chamber raises as highly questionable and at odds with the incredible issue of Council not recycling plastic:

Section 7: Our vision for the future

Strategic Direction 1: An environmentally sustainable community – our choices benefit our natural environment and our community:

Objective 1: Use and manage our resources wisely.

Objective 2: Preserve a healthy environment.

Strategic Direction 5: An Informed and accountable community – we are transparent and accountable for our individual and collective decisions and actions:

Objective 9: An informed community.

Objective 10: Transparency in decision making.

The Chamber requests a full and comprehensive explanation as to why the Norfolk Island Regional Council is not adhering to these two Strategic Directions with regards to plastic being labelled as 'non-recyclable'.

Regards,

Norfolk Island Chamber of Commerce Committee

CC via Email: Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash, and
Cr Rob Buffett, Cr John McCoy, Cr Dave Porter, and Cr Lisle Snell, Claire Quintal (Team Leader, Waste Management) of the Norfolk Island Regional Council