

Compost WA – A Special Interest Group of the WA Branch of the
Waste Management Association of Australia

Submission on the
Department of Environment Regulation Guidance Statement:
Regulating the Use of Waste Derived Materials

Introduction

COMPOST WA is affiliated to Compost Australia and is a special interest group of the Waste Management Association of Australia (WMAA) WA Branch that represents, promotes and supports the Recycled Organics (RO) sector of the Waste Management industry in WA.

The Waste Management Association of Australia (WA Branch) is the peak body for waste management professionals in Australia and has nearly 300 members in WA.

This submission is in addition to the separate submission made by the WA Branch.

Compost WA Position Paper

Compost WA produced a Position statement in 2006. This Position statement was one of the outcomes of a stakeholder workshop attended by over 75 stakeholders in the WA RO sector.

Members have had the opportunity to review this statement and it has been included as part of this submission to the DER Consultation Paper. The Position Paper takes a holistic view of waste recycling and the whole of government issues affecting successful recycling. The position outlined in the paper are still relevant today.

Revision of AS4454

The Australian Standard (AS4454) for soil conditioners and mulches was revised as part of a national process over several years. The new standard was released in 2012. This provides for standards relating to manufacturing processes to ensure that recycled organic products meets pasteurisation and biosecurity standards (biological contamination). Additionally new product standards have been set for physical and chemical contamination.

Together, these requirements protect public health and the environment – a key outcome required by DER.

The AS4454 standards specifically apply to products for unrestricted use, generally in home garden markets, and are not always applicable to farming or rehabilitation markets. The AS4454 standard provides for the development of fit-for-purpose products suitable for specific markets, outside of the 'unrestricted' market. The DER will need to consult with industry to understand how AS4454 relates to these professional and commercial production markets. The AS4454 includes a statement

specifically warning regulators not to use AS4454 as a blanket standard to cover all potential uses of recycled organic products.

It is strongly suggested that DER consults with industry to discuss how this standard can be used to simply and cost effectively help the DER achieve its objectives.

Additionally, the standard does not necessarily relate to MSW-derived composts and specific guidelines may be required for the direct use of these products.

Where waste materials, including MSW-derived composts, are used as ingredients to a process that conforms to a recognised standard it is suggested that those ingredients cease being a waste once they have been transformed through a quality assured, controlled process into a product.

Greenwaste and biosecurity

The 'biological contamination' of shredded green waste has been implicated in the spread of several new important diseases of native and exotic trees and bushes. The community is well aware of the serious damage done Phytophthora die back disease (commonly known as the biological bulldozer).

New disease organisms have been discovered and the spread of these may be related to the common practice of using unpasteurised shredded green waste.

The NSW EPA has recently introduced a requirement that all greenwaste must be pasteurised prior to release into the market. This is a clear example of a waste stream that is causing significant environmental and economic damage. The DER should be considering this in its review.

Quality assurance systems

Many manufacturers are adopting internationally recognised quality management systems such as ISO 9001. Such systems already meet many of the objectives described in the DER Consultation Paper.

It is strongly recommended that the DER explores how to incorporate the use of existing management systems to meet DER needs. This would reduce the administrative costs for DER, leverage benefits from existing processes, simplify implementation and accelerate achievement of DER objectives.

A system that is simple is far more likely to be successful.

Simple parameters can be used to encourage the behaviour and outcomes DER require. These might include requirements that manufacturers of WDM:

- Operate under a DER license and maintain the licence.
- Are members of a professional association
- Maintain accreditation for third party, independently audited manufacturing processes (such as ISO 9001)
- Products must meet the minimum processing standards to ensure pasteurisation, as per AS4454, to reduce weed, pests and pathogen risk

- Disclose ingredients and product characteristics to the market
- Open their site to prospective customers for inspection of products

Imposing an extra layer of regulation on top of companies that are already ISO 9001 compliant does not necessarily add any value and may have the perverse outcome of reducing the recycling activities that government policy seeks to encourage.

Government policy around 'Green Procurement'

The importance of green procurement policies within government is self-evident

Whole-of-government approach

The proposed DER regulations should be seen in the context of whole-of-government regulation. Integration across departments is vital.

There are many examples of contradictory actions and decisions between different departments. This should be a consideration.

There is simply no point in DER supporting 'end of waste' provisions if other government departments do not accept those decisions.

Questions

Question 1

a) *Which waste streams should DER develop material guidelines for?*

With respect to Recycled Organics the industry already has sufficient material guidelines embedded within current industry standards and a wealth of research that has demonstrated beneficial outcomes from the use of recycled products. It is arguable that the RO industry does not require specific material guidelines.

Simple operational requirements for manufacturers of RO products may be all that is required to ensure that most recycled products are fit for purpose and do not require further regulation. These operational requirements may include:

- Operate under a DER license and maintain the licence.
- Members of a professional association
- Maintain accreditation for third party, independently audited manufacturing processes (such as ISO 9001)
- Products must meet the minimum processing standards to ensure pasteurisation, as per AS4454, to reduce weed, pests and pathogen risk
- Disclose ingredients and product characteristics to the market
- Open manufacturing site to prospective customers for inspection of products

The key need for the RO industry is support to develop a market. This may take the form of a limited rebate to end users to help create market pull. Such a rebate, over a limited time period, could be a low cost and efficient way of achieving the recycling targets set by government.

- b) *What do you think the priority order for the development of the material guidelines should be and why?*

Recycled products where there is no, or limited, current active market and a demonstrated need for such regulation should be the target. It is likely that Recycled Organics will be lower priority than the other waste streams identified by DER.

Investment in regulation will impose cost. In the case of recycled organics it may be better to adopt simple, effective guidelines describe above and then make better use of government investments through the implementation of a rebate system to 'kick start' market growth. Once the market sees the value of recycled products there will inevitably be a self-sustaining market that requires no further support.

Question 2

- a) *Are you willing to participate in workshops to help inform the development of material guidelines?*

Yes

- b) *If so, which waste streams would you like to be involved with?*

Recycled organics

Question 3

- *How should DER's costs associated with regulating waste-derived materials be recouped from industry –*

The recycling industry delivers outcomes that support government policy. The imposition of additional costs is counterproductive and may reduce the delivery of these outcomes.

All government departments are required to deliver an efficiency dividend to government. DER will need to be innovative in delivering improved outcomes at no increase in cost. Examples of how this can be done have been suggested above. We suggest that DER works closely with industry to find innovative solutions.

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