

17 December 2019

Verbal Submission to Yarra Council on Options for a Holistic Waste Service

YCAN would like to congratulate Council officers on a thorough investigation of options for a Holistic Waste Service for Yarra, that included a successful trial in Abbotsford. We'd also like to applaud its wholehearted embrace of a multi-bin solution (something YCAN has been calling for for some years) with the goals of waste reduction, diversion from landfill and maximum waste recovery. After the refusal of the Chinese market to take our recycling waste, we'd like to acknowledge Council's thorough (and successful) search for local contractors to collect and process the recyclable waste, in a way that will reduce contamination and result in a high value product.

The decision to have a separate glass collection, which will be recycled into new bottles, is particularly pleasing.

YCAN supports the adoption of Option B which would result in four bins: recycling without glass: glass only; food and green waste; and general rubbish. All fortnightly except for weekly food and green waste.

We are also pleased to see that there is a requirement for all Council operations to undertake the same practices as residents.

We agree with the proposal not to provide compostable bags for food waste, which could lead to non-compostable bags being used. Some sort of permanent, solid, bench-top, lidded collection vessel could be provided. This might reduce the so called "yuck" factor in the house, if the food waste is enclosed until emptied into the FOGO bin. After all, the majority of residents already put all their food waste in their general bin and seem to cope with any smells. If the FOGO collection is weekly, it's hard to see what the difference is.

We agree with the residents surveyed that there should be the option of a smaller FOGO bin. As well as a 120-litre bin being too large for many properties, there will be residents who compost their food scraps and use the bin for green waste only.

On the topic of green waste, if the on-call collections are no longer available, we wonder how larger branches are going to be disposed of? Though many people will be able to cut them down to fit in the bin, there will be those who do not have equipment to cut up branches, and those who are, because of infirmity or disability, unable to cut them up.

We applaud the emphasis on the importance of community engagement and stress the need to be mindful of the diversity of languages, and literacy and education levels in Yarra's population when it comes to designing a final communication strategy.

The only real concern we have with the proposed waste service, is that there is no incentive to encourage people to continue to reduce the waste they produce in the first place. Particularly plastic waste, which can be recycled into other plastic items, but eventually will deteriorate past the point of being able to be recycled, and end up in landfill, where it will never break down into harmless substances. With a profit-driven model of recycling, contractors will want to grow their businesses in good capitalist style. The worry is that they will require ever-growing amounts of recycling to process, and that there will be no incentive for residents to reduce their use of plastic (which is made from petroleum, producing greenhouse gases in its manufacture) and become Proudly Plastic Free.

These concerns aside, YCAN would again like to congratulate Council officers on their efforts in producing a workable model of collection and separation of recycled materials, suitable for the inner-suburbs. We look forward to the final plan and its implementation in the near future. It will be a model for other municipalities to follow.