



Zero Waste Alliance UK's response to the DEFRA's Call for Evidence in relation to the Draft Structural Reform Plan dated 16 July, 2010

Introduction

Zero Waste Alliance UK is a company incorporated on charitable trusts in May 2002 as a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales with registered number 04452297. We became a registered charity on 3 January 2008. The Company's Objects are: -

"The provision, preservation and improvement of the environment for the benefit of the public by the development, provision and promotion of sustainable waste management practices and to advance the education of the public in all matters relating to this. (Sustainable waste management practices include waste minimisation, minimisation of pollution and harm from waste, reuse of waste, recycling of waste, waste recovery activities and recovery of pollutants from contaminated land in accordance with Waste Strategy for England 2007)"

ZWA UK currently has a board comprising of representatives from the community and public sector. There are linkages through these representatives to Zero Waste Europe and Zero Waste International Alliance. These links form a clear part of our knowledge economy and position within the global Zero Waste community.

We have a rapidly growing membership that includes public sector representatives, academics, community waste sector representatives and environmentalists.

In July 2002 the Zero Waste Charter was launched at the House of Commons, and has since received wide national and international backing.

Zero Waste Alliance UK (ZWA UK) consulted widely to produce its Memorandum of Evidence entitled "UK National Waste Policy – A Bridge Half Built" as a response to the former government's consultation which led to the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee "Waste Strategy for England 2007" and that submission may be found at pages 350 to 354 of the evidence contained in Volume II of the Third Report of Session 2009-10, HC 230-11, distributed by TSO, ISBN 978 0 54322 6.

ZWA UK undertook extensive consultation with our membership and wider group of people for the preparation of “UK National Waste Policy – A bridge Half Built” and have actively participated in the shaping of the UK Governments strategies concerning waste and resource management, its links with climate change and enabling communities and individuals to work towards zero waste in the UK.

This response is limited to our area of interest and expertise which is in supporting a strong and sustainable green economy, resilient to climate change in particular in actions to “Drive a ‘zero waste’ agenda” and in driving public sector practice across government since the two are inevitably linked.

Definition of Zero Waste

We are concerned that the Government interprets the term ‘Zero Waste’ correctly. This has been borne out of misinterpreting zero waste as simply zero waste to landfill, as can be seen in areas of Wales and Scotland. By limiting the definition, we severely limit our potential to achieve a Zero Waste economy.

Zero Waste International Alliance’s definition of Zero Waste remains the only peer reviewed and internationally adopted definition of zero waste. We have adopted the definition at our recent AGM in 2009.

"Zero Waste is a goal that is both pragmatic and visionary, to guide people to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are resources for others to use. Zero Waste means designing and managing products and processes to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them. Implementing Zero Waste will eliminate all discharges to land, water or air that may be a threat to planetary, human, animal or plant health."

We strongly recommend the Government adopt the bona fide Zero Waste definition, as we are confident that through the maximisation of additionality, it will significantly contribute to the achievement of its aspirations in the context of a Big Society.

Achieving a Zero Waste economy

Zero Waste UK have had a long standing commitment to achieving a Zero Waste economy, a case that was first promoted in 1999 in the UK by one of our key members Robin Murray in his book “Creating Wealth from Waste” (<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Creatingwealthfromwaste.pdf>).

His observation that waste is a sector that discourages trade forms the key challenge facing the achievement of a Zero Waste economy. A transition from the old post war practices of bin collection and disposal, which remain the focal point of our Waste Management infrastructure, into services that are focused on the economic activity of resource management, and driven to phase out waste by following the waste hierarchy is essential.

However, we are not working from a blank canvas. The work that Zero Waste Europe has undertaken in developing a strategy is appropriate to both this consultation and to that of a Big Society:

- **Promote** the concept of Zero Waste at a national and local level
- Ask communities and businesses to **adopt** Zero Waste as a goal and plan how to achieve it
- **Engage** the community and the informal sector to innovate and promote Zero Waste
- **Work** closely with the existing/emerging reprocessing industry, reuse & remanufacturing businesses.
- Support **Zero Waste procurement** policies and programmes
- Involve businesses and institutions in **EPR**
- Promote the effects of Zero Waste in **creation of employment** and **reducing emissions** -fighting climate change-
- Promote Zero Waste as the way to conciliate human existence with the world's finite resources.

(see Zero Waste Principles Europe <http://www.zerowasteeurope.eu/principles-zw-europe/>)

Across the world these principles are already accepted. Zero Waste is the methodology underpinning the treatment of waste in New Zealand (having led on Anaerobic Digestion technology) and is being followed in many parts of Australia. Across the US, Zero Waste has become a key driver in community led recycling. This has had significant results in establishing a new green economy that provides new business opportunities and employment.

Can Zero Waste be achieved?

There is clear evidence that in the context of zero waste, large-scale solutions are not as effective as smaller more responsive measures. Evidence is provided in the implementation of DEFRA's New Technology Demonstrator Programme (2003). The key driver for investing £30m for ten research projects was to assess new waste technologies in the hope that successful ones would be adopted by the waste management industry in delivering municipal waste contracts. This has not been the case. The only successful projects (Anaerobic Digestion and Composting) have not had the uptake that was hoped for, and the findings of the Mechanical/Heat Treatment and Advanced Thermal Treatments were problematic to say the least.

However, by using an incentive of £10,000 per project, the Zero Waste Places Standard was introduced and has been highly successful. Evidence that they need to be extended across the UK and built upon, as has been seen in Wales and Scotland, where National strategies have reaped unexpected benefits and proved that a recycling rate of +75% can be achieved, and that communities can be effectively engaged in aspiration of achieving zero waste.

Further to this, the Presteigne and Norton Zero Waste project is investigating how far a community if given the right incentives can go toward achieving Zero Waste. The project is already looking at recycling or composting 88% reduction in waste (164 tonnes out of 187 tonnes) More detailed information about this project can be found at: http://cwmharrylandtrust.org.uk/presteigne_norton_zero_waste.html. This project has taken a participatory approach with the local community in the implementation of the scheme. Utilising local community volunteers in all aspects of the service, including informal cafe consultations and bring and take events alongside a community payback whereby householders nominate a local group to receive the value of the recycling.

The role of communities in achieving Zero Waste

The Community Waste Sector have led the implementation of recycling, re-use and composting programmes across the UK since the early 1990's. Many of the existing community-led projects have become Social Enterprises, and the opportunity to replicate these successful models and develop the infrastructure has been put in place. The community enterprise model provides direct benefits to the most vulnerable members of society through the provision of affordable or no cost goods and items, from food to furniture, training and volunteering opportunities often leading to employment. In addition the sector is closer to the grassroots than local government and could, given sufficient resources truly engage with the communities they serve.

Local communities will play a central role in achieving Zero Waste. However, adequate education and communications must be developed as an ongoing commitment to achieve the transition to a zero waste society. The community sector has successfully integrated such outreach work with service delivery and such models and pilots could be rolled out geographically with local delivery partners.

We are proud that the Green family, who operate My Zero Waste website (www.myzerowaste.com) are ZWA UK members. The website aims to help UK householders to reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfill. They show on a daily basis just how they are reducing their own landfill waste by highlighting the pitfalls and sharing their mistakes and successes. Likewise Karen Cannard, the rubbish diet blog, pioneered zero waste in the home in Suffolk. Born out of a Zero Waste Week initiative led by Bury St Edmunds BC, Karen reduced her residual waste from one and a half bin bags to just one plaster, www.rubbishdiet.co.uk. Further information on Karen's journey to zero waste is appended.

Varying degrees of effort are required to achieve successful community engagement, and the amount of input often varies depending on the demographic of the population. The middle classes need very little stimulus to resource and continue initiatives such as zero waste weeks, given the appropriate information and resource packs. On the other hand, more vulnerable groups in society require a different approach, activities such as give (bring) & take days are effective engagement tools in these communities, but they lack the resources within their communities to continue such activities unaided, grant funding for resources is often in dire need.

The Way Forward

The transition to a zero waste economy is essential if the UK is to decouple economic growth and increased wasting. ZWA UK members support the extension and improvement of EPR as a mechanism to address issues surrounding production and consumption. The role of EPR should be utilised both as a mandatory requirement and as voluntary initiatives depending on the impact and priority of measures identified. Members consulted felt that the priority area for focus is redesign and improved intelligence through the development of partnerships with academia. Members also supported the recent Zero Waste Europe initiative for Zero Waste accreditation. This is based on peer reviewed standards that are aligned with the ZWIA definition for Zero waste, the kite mark is currently being piloted in a couple of EU municipalities.

Education of the resource management sector is also essential, from operatives to doctorates. ZWA UK suggests building on the work currently being carried out in Wales in establishing a Zero Waste Academy, that will provide training around all aspects of Zero Waste, linked into NVQ accreditation and enabling a progression to achieving more professional qualifications.

It is essential that there are public figures with a specific responsibility for Zero Waste at all levels from Government down to local activists. The establishment of area-based Zero Waste Ambassadors will provide a focal point for this. Through the work of the ZWA UK, a range of Zero Waste practitioners based in the UK have promoted Zero Waste over the past decade, both at home and across the world. Likewise, overseas speakers who are involved in Zero Waste projects have visited and addressed conferences and community events.

This awareness raising has proved invaluable in introducing more people to Zero Waste and local action has followed. By building on this work and establishing a Zero Waste Ambassador programme, the concept will gradually become common to all sectors of our communities.

A cascading programme of small and medium scale programmes aimed at the community, delivered by the communities they serve will bring about ownership and encourage our residents to become involved and overcome the immense negativity that a section of our national press promote, when the future of their beloved black bins are threatened. This will be a key driver in change at community level and turning the nation onto Zero Waste.

Zero Waste Alliance UK
7th October 2010