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IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLID WASTE POLICY OBJECTIVES IN NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate various instruments available for implementing waste policy, in order to determine the most suitable set of policy instruments for achieving solid waste policy objectives in New Zealand. The thesis will also examine the Government's current waste policy before proceeding with the evaluation of the implementation instruments.

"Waste" and related terms have not been adequately defined in New Zealand policy or legislation making it difficult to define the boundaries of the issue. Definitions of "waste" and "solid waste" are therefore proposed.

The Government's waste policy is critiqued and amended to provide a policy basis for this thesis and a suggested policy for the Government to adopt. The current policy is considered to be lacking in that it does not clearly set out intended goals and objectives. A new objective is proposed of ensuring that policy and action is focused on areas of highest risk and/or impact through the collection of reliable data on all types of waste.

Data on various waste streams are currently sorely lacking. As a result, the Government's waste policy has focused on domestic waste and packaging, as two areas with the highest profile and most reliable data, without determining whether this is the most appropriate action to take.

Aspects of the waste policy framework are reviewed, namely: current legislation, development of the current waste policy and the current policy work carried out by the Ministry for the Environment. It is found that the focus of waste policy in the 1970s moved from addressing issues of packaging and limited landfill space, to considering waste as a misplaced resource in the mid-1980s. The change in focus was largely due to the economic climate although it coincided with moves to collect data about waste streams, raising awareness of waste streams which had previously been largely ignored. The Resource Management Act 1991 again altered the focus of waste policy with the emphasis on the "effects" of activities. The risk and/or impact of materials on the environment is now particularly relevant, highlighting the need for adequate information regarding these effects.

Although base-line data is necessary, a warning is given to the Ministry for the Environment that this should not lead policy back to "end-of-pipe" solutions. This approach would be inappropriate given the approach of the Resource Management Act 1991 and the inclusion of the waste hierarchy in the Government's waste policy.

Each party's perception of their role and responsibility and the roles of the other parties in waste policy decisions were determined by conducting interviews with members of industry and central and local government, and by holding three discussion groups with members of the public of differing ages. From these discussions a national postal survey of householders was undertaken.

The survey aimed to identify attitudes and behaviour relating to packaging and resulting waste in New Zealand. Packaging and packaging waste were chosen as the topics of the discussion groups and subsequent survey owing to the amount of resources that has been directed by Government at this segment of the waste stream and the perception that packaging is considered by the public to cause one of the biggest problems in the waste stream.

This thesis primarily studies instruments to implement waste policy objectives as it is considered that this aspect is currently not being adequately addressed by the Government's waste policy, the decision-making environment and by the parties involved in waste policy decisions.

Implementation instruments for waste policy fall broadly into four groups: Regulation, Economic Instruments, Voluntary Initiatives, and Education and Information. Those instruments that are used most often around the world are critiqued and their potential application to New Zealand is evaluated.

The instruments examined in detail are subsidies, deposit-refund schemes, product charges, user charges, purchasing policies, waste reduction targets, environmental labelling schemes and cleaner production programmes. A number of other instruments are reviewed in less detail.

The evaluation of specific instruments' potential application to New Zealand is carried out against the steps of the internationally recognised waste hierarchy, the hierarchy being: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Residual Management, as this is an accepted objective of the waste policy. This evaluation enables a review of the actions currently being undertaken by central and local government, industry and the public in this area.

Instruments which have the potential to most greatly affect the level of achievement of waste policy in New Zealand are considered to include:

- i) Regulation clarifying the desired outcomes, objectives and implementation instruments of the waste policy;
- ii) Regulation defining more of the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in waste policy decisions;
- iii) Existing subsidies directed towards cleaner production programmes and 'Waste Analysis Protocol'¹ landfill surveys;
- iv) User charges for all waste collection, treatment and disposal services;
- v) Negotiated targets with industry sectors to reduce the amount of waste produced and disposed of;
- vi) Education and information to ensure that the philosophy of the waste hierarchy is practiced by individuals and organisations.

Using a range of instruments covered in this thesis to implement the waste hierarchy will result in a significant move towards the achievement of the accepted goal of the waste policy, that of maximising net benefits to New Zealand.

¹Ministry for the Environment, Waste Analysis Protocol. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, December 1992.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Thesis Goals and Objectives	1
1.2	Definitions of Waste	3
1.2.1	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development	
1.2.2	United Nations Environment Programme	
1.2.3	World Bank	
1.2.4	New Zealand	
1.2.5	Proposed Definitions	
1.3	Constituents of the Waste Stream	10
CHAPTER 2	METHODOLOGY	13
2.1	Literature Review	13
2.2	Discussion Groups	13
2.3	Postal Survey	14
2.4	Interviews	15
2.5	Work Experience	16
2.6	Justification of a Qualitative Approach	17
PART I	WASTE POLICY FRAMEWORK	19
CHAPTER 3	WASTE POLICY ENVIRONMENT	20
3.1	Scope of Current Waste Policy	20
3.2	Legislative Framework	21
3.2.1	General Overview	
3.2.2	Territorial Authorities	
3.2.3	Regional Councils	
3.2.4	Central Government	
3.2.5	Related Legislation	
3.3	Development of the Current Waste Policy	27
3.4	Current Waste Policy Work of the Ministry for the Environment	31

CHAPTER 4	CRITIQUE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S WASTE POLICY	33
4.1	Current Government Waste Policy	33
4.2	Critique of Current Waste Policy	33
4.2.1	Goals and Objectives	
4.2.2	Implementation Instruments	
4.2.3	Need for Data Collection	
4.2.4	Concluding Comments	
4.3	The Polluter Pays Principle	39
4.4	The Waste Hierarchy	43
CHAPTER 5	PERCEIVED ROLES IN WASTE MANAGEMENT	46
5.1	Central Government	49
5.2	Territorial Authorities	50
5.3	Industry	51
5.4	Public	52
5.5	Conclusion	52
PART II	IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUMENTS	54
CHAPTER 6	REGULATION	56
6.1	Critique	56
6.2	Bans	58
CHAPTER 7	ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS	60
7.1	Introduction	60
7.2	Subsidies	61
7.3	Deposit-Refund Schemes	65
7.4	Product Charges	72
7.5	User Charges	76
7.6	Recommendations	81

CHAPTER 8	VOLUNTARY INITIATIVES	83
8.1	Rationale	83
8.2	Purchasing Policies	86
8.3	Overseas Packaging Waste Reduction Targets	88
	8.3.1 Negotiated Targets	
	8.3.2 Legislative Targets	
8.4	Critique of German Packaging Ordinance	104
8.5	Application of Packaging Waste Reduction Targets to New Zealand	106
8.6	Recommendations	108
CHAPTER 9	EDUCATION AND INFORMATION	111
9.1	Environmental Labelling Schemes	113
	9.1.1 Rationale	
	9.1.2 Overseas Environmental Labelling Schemes	
	9.1.3 "Environmental Choice" Labelling Scheme	
	9.1.4 Conclusion	
PART III	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WASTE HIERARCHY	122
CHAPTER 10	ACHIEVING THE REDUCTION POLICY OBJECTIVE	123
10.1	Introduction	123
10.2	Cleaner Production	124
	10.2.1 Application to New Zealand	
	10.2.2 Recommendations	
10.3	User Charges	135

CHAPTER 11	ACHIEVING THE REUSE POLICY OBJECTIVE	137
11.1	Instruments	137
11.1.1	Cleaner Production	
11.1.2	Waste Registers	
11.1.3	Exchange Areas	
11.1.4	Deposit-Refund Schemes	
CHAPTER 12	ACHIEVING THE RECYCLING POLICY OBJECTIVE	140
12.1	Introduction	140
12.2	Territorial Authority Recycling Schemes	141
12.3	Industry Recycling Schemes	142
12.4	Barriers to Recycling	145
12.5	Instruments	147
12.5.1	User Charges	
12.5.2	Education	
12.5.3	Purchasing Policies	
12.5.4	Voluntary Waste Reduction Targets	
12.5.5	Cleaner Production	
12.5.6	Deposit-Refund Schemes	
12.5.7	Recycled Content Mandates	
CHAPTER 13	ACHIEVING THE RECOVERY POLICY OBJECTIVE	150
13.1	Introduction	150
13.2	Composting	151
13.3	Methane Utilisation	152
13.4	Incineration	153

CHAPTER 14	ACHIEVING THE RESIDUAL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVE	155
14.1	Introduction	155
14.2	Instruments	157
	14.2.1 Regulation	
	14.2.2 Economic Instruments	
	14.2.3 Voluntary Initiatives	
14.3	Recommendations	162
CHAPTER 15	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	163
APPENDICES		163
1.	Discussion Group Results, April-May 1993	171
2.	Attitudes towards Packaging Waste, October 1993	176
3.	Packaging Survey	190
BIBLIOGRAPHY		194