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Toward Sound Management of End-of-Life Vehicles in New Zealand

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Abstract

New Zealand has a problem with an increasing number of motor vehicles being abandoned at the end of their useful life. The environmental and associated social costs created by this problem are expected to increase with the rising number of vehicles entering the country. In addition, there are environmental concerns regarding some aspects of the legal disposal of end-of-life vehicles (ELVs). The exact magnitude of both problems is unknown and attempts made to address them have been ad hoc and success limited. This thesis sets out to quantify the problems and provide policy makers with tools to improve the overall management of motor vehicle disposal in New Zealand.

To assess the extent and cost of the abandoned vehicle problem, local authorities are surveyed. The legislation dealing with car ownership, transferral and disposal and its implementation are scrutinised for weaknesses that allow ELVs to be abandoned without penalty. The automobile recycling industry is surveyed to determine the environmental impact from the industry's activities. Using semi-structured surveys, policies and practices used in other countries for the management of ELVs are investigated and assessed for effectiveness. Their application to the New Zealand situation is ascertained.

Of the vehicles which are deregistered each year, one in five is dumped. The direct cost to local authorities, to deal with the 25,500 vehicles abandoned each year, is more than six million dollars. In addition, practices and standards for the removal and disposal of hazardous substances from ELVs vary nationwide, adding to the environmental burden caused by vehicle disposal.

Recommendations for the improved management of ELVs target four areas, legislation, institutional practices, entry into the recycling system and dismantling operations. Minor changes to legislation and institutional practices combined with rigorous enforcement will close the data gaps and overcome free-rider problems. A disposal charge added to the registration fee of vehicles entering the country will allow ELV owners to dispose of their vehicles free-of-charge. Improved environmental performance by automotive dismantlers can be achieved through licensing and consistent monitoring from within the industry. Implementation of these recommendations will lead to better management of ELVs, through changed behaviour by private individuals and dismantling operations, and a reduction in the environmental costs associated with vehicle disposal.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures	viii
List of Photographs	ix
Chapter One	
Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background	2
1.2 Problem Statement	3
1.3 Aim and Objectives.....	4
1.4 Importance of the Research.....	4
1.5 Thesis Outline	5
Chapter Two	
Economics of Waste Management.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Externalities and Social Cost	9
2.3 Motor Vehicle Disposal and the Issue of Externalities.....	12
2.4 Property Rights.....	14
2.5 Role of Government	17
2.6 Recycling.....	19
2.7 Policy Instruments.....	23
2.7.1 Introduction.....	23
2.7.2 Regulatory instruments	24
2.7.3 Economic instruments	29
2.7.4 Suasive instruments.....	37
2.7.5 Evaluation criteria for environmental policy instruments.....	40
Chapter Three	
Recycling and Disposal of End-of-Life Vehicles	45
3.1 Introduction	46
3.2 The Evolution of ELV Recycling	46
3.3 Current Recycling Process for ELVs	48
3.4 Economic Issues Within the Automobile Recycling Industry	53
3.5 Environmental Impacts of ELV Disposal	55

Chapter Four	Context and Research Methodology.....	58
4.1	Introduction.....	59
4.2	Recent Changes in the New Zealand Motor Vehicle Fleet.....	59
4.3	Research Methodology.....	65
4.3.1	Survey of the New Zealand automobile recycling industry.....	65
4.3.2	Local authority surveys regarding the disposal of ELVs.....	66
4.3.3	Analysis of New Zealand’s motor vehicle legislative framework and the institutional practices supporting it.....	69
4.3.4	International case studies regarding the management of ELVs.....	71
Chapter Five	End-of-Life Vehicle Recycling and Disposal in New Zealand.....	74
5.1	Introduction.....	75
5.2	Overview of the ELV Recycling Process in New Zealand.....	75
5.3	Automotive Dismantling Facilities.....	77
5.4	Mobile Crushers.....	82
5.5	Metal Shredding Operations.....	84
5.6	The Steel Mill.....	89
5.7	Redvale Landfill.....	90
5.8	Tyre Recycling.....	92
5.9	Waste Oil Recovery.....	93
5.10	Recycling Car Batteries.....	94
5.11	Conclusion.....	95
Chapter Six	The Abandoned Vehicle Problem in New Zealand.....	97
6.1	Introduction.....	98
6.2	The Abandoned Vehicle Problem in New Zealand.....	98
6.2.1	The extent of the abandoned vehicle problem.....	99
6.2.2	Factors hindering the tracing of abandoned vehicle owners.....	102
6.2.3	Local authority provision of collection sites for ELVs.....	105
6.2.4	Initiatives aimed at reducing the abandoned vehicle problem.....	107
6.3	New Zealand’s Motor Vehicle Regulatory Framework.....	115
6.3.1	Responsibilities and functions of the Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA).....	117
6.3.2	Vehicle registration.....	119
6.3.3	Continuous vehicle licensing.....	122
6.3.4	Vehicle change of ownership.....	127
6.3.5	Cancellation of vehicle registration.....	132
6.3.6	Reregistering a vehicle.....	135
6.3.7	Areas of weakness with institutional practices.....	136

6.4	Examination of the Legislation Relevant to Abandoned Vehicles.....	139
6.4.1	Examination of the laws relating to removal, notification, and disposal of abandoned vehicles.....	139
6.4.2	Examination of the legislation impacting on the ability to trace abandoned vehicle owners.....	142
6.5	Conclusion.....	143
Chapter Seven	International Case Studies Regarding the Management of End-of-Life Vehicles.....	144
7.1	Introduction.....	145
7.2	The Netherlands.....	146
7.3	Germany.....	152
7.4	Sweden.....	160
7.5	United Kingdom.....	168
7.6	Synopsis.....	177
7.6.1	Policy instruments used in the management of ELVs.....	177
7.6.2	Automobile recycling.....	182
7.6.3	Legislative and institutional practices regarding vehicle licensing, disposal, and abandonment.....	184
Chapter Eight	Discussion.....	187
8.1	Introduction.....	188
8.2	Externalities Arising from the Management of ELVs in New Zealand.....	188
8.2.1	Externalities arising from the management of ELVs.....	188
8.2.2	Factors that contribute to the externalities.....	191
8.3	Discussion of Institutional Practices.....	193
8.3.1	Continuous vehicle licensing and notification of change of vehicle ownership.....	193
8.3.2	Registration cancellation and vehicle disposal.....	195
8.3.3	Legislation concerning abandoned vehicles.....	196
8.4	Policy Options Regarding Access into the Recycling System.....	197
8.4.1	Disposal fee charged to the last user, or the use of a regulatory instrument.....	197
8.4.2	Refund for an ELV entering the recycling system.....	198
8.4.3	Free acceptance of ELVs.....	200
8.4.4	Location of access to recycling system.....	207
8.4.5	Suasive approach targeting vehicle owners.....	207
8.5	Policy Options for ELV Depollution and Monitoring of Automotive Dismantling Operations.....	208
8.5.1	Depollution of ELVs.....	208
8.5.2	Monitoring of dismantling operations.....	209

8.6	Discussion of ELV Recycling Rates, and Disposal of Automobile Shredder Residual (ASR).....	211
8.6.1	Recycling rates for ELVs	211
8.6.2	Landfill disposal of ASR and hazardous components from ELVs	214
8.7	Discussion Concerning Age Restriction for Vehicle Imports.....	215
Chapter Nine	Conclusion and Recommendations.....	217
9.1	Introduction	218
9.2	Sources of Externalities and Contributing Factors.....	218
9.3	Recommendations for ELV Management in New Zealand	219
9.3.1	Vehicle licensing recommendations	222
9.3.2	Vehicle change of ownership recommendations.....	222
9.3.3	Vehicle disposal recommendations.....	223
9.3.4	Legislative recommendations: liability and responsibility for abandoned vehicles	223
9.3.5	Legislative recommendations: notification requirements regarding abandoned vehicles	224
9.3.6	Recommendations for accessibility into ELV recycling system....	225
9.3.7	Suasive initiatives targeting vehicle owners	226
9.3.7	Depollution of ELVs and monitoring of automobile dismantlers	226
9.3.8	Recommendation for New Zealand's ELV recycling rate.....	227
9.3.9	Recommendations for disposal of ASR and hazardous components from ELVs	227
9.4	Relative Importance of the Recommendations and their Costs and Benefits.....	227
9.5	Recommendations for Further Research.....	232
	Bibliography.....	234
	Personal communication (pers. comm.).....	249
Appendix One	Questionnaires for the Surveys of Local Authorities	251
Appendix Two	The Automotive Industry and the Trade Wastes Bylaw: Guidelines	258
Appendix Three	Land Transport Safety Authority Functions, Forms and Follow-Up Letters	269
Appendix Four	Legislation Regarding Abandoned Vehicles and Motor Vehicle Registration and Licensing	318
Appendix Five	Automobile Recycling in the Netherlands	331

List of Tables

Table 3.1:	Estimated Material Composition of an Average European Passenger Car (as a percentage of total weight).....	51
Table 3.2:	Negative Environmental Impacts from ELV Disposal	55
Table 4.1:	Average Age of the New Zealand Passenger Car Fleet	64
Table 6.1:	Estimates of the Number of Vehicles Abandoned Nationwide, and the Resulting Costs Incurred by Local Authorities	100
Table 6.2:	Success of Local Authorities in Tracing Owners of Abandoned Vehicles and Recovering Costs.....	101
Table 6.3:	Hindrances to Tracing Owners of Abandoned Vehicles.....	102
Table 6.4:	Hindrances to Prosecuting Owners of Abandoned Vehicles	103
Table 6.5:	Availability of ELV Collection Sites by Local Authorities.....	105
Table 6.6:	Local Authority Levies for ELVs Left at Collection Site	106
Table 6.7:	Local Authority Estimates of Cost to Strip ELVs.....	107
Table 6.8:	Amnesty Period: Number of Abandoned Vehicles Compared with Expected Number of Abandoned Vehicles.....	109
Table 6.9:	Local Authority Suggestions to Address Abandoned Vehicle Problem	113
Table 6.10:	Responses to Local Authority Suggestions to Address Abandoned Vehicle Problem	114
Table 6.11:	Number of Vehicles on Register with 'Unconfirmed' or 'Incomplete' Ownership Status.....	130
Table 6.12:	Annual Vehicle Registration Cancellations	134
Table 6.13:	Registration Figures for Light Motor Vehicles in 2002.....	137
Table 7.1:	Sweden's Refund and Disposal Charge Since Inception in 1975..	162
Table 7.2:	Sweden's Refund and Disposal Charge in Real Prices.....	162
Table 7.3:	Policy Instruments Used in ELV Management in Case Study Countries	178
Table 7.4:	ELV Recycling in Case Study Countries	182
Table 7.5:	Institutional Practices Impacting on Abandoned Vehicle Numbers	184
Table 8.1:	Local Authority (LA) Levies for ELVs at Collection Site in 2002.....	192
Table 9.1:	Motor Vehicle Licensing and Disposal: Current Practices and Recommendations.....	221
Table 9.2:	Costs and Benefits to Stakeholder Groups Resulting From Policy Recommendations.....	231

List of Figures

Figure 2.1:	The Efficient Level of Vehicle Abandonment	12
Figure 2.2:	The Solid Waste Network	19
Figure 4.1:	Annual Registrations for Passenger Cars Entering New Zealand	61
Figure 4.2:	Used Imports (“Ex-overseas” Registrations) as Percentage of Total Passenger Cars Imports.....	62
Figure 4.3:	Age of Used Passenger Cars Entering New Zealand, 2000-2002.....	63
Figure 4.4:	Cumulative Age of New Zealand Passenger Car Fleet in 2002	64
Figure 5.1:	The New Zealand ELV Recycling Process and Balance Sheet	76
Figure 6.1:	New Zealand Motor Vehicle Legislative Framework.....	116
Figure 6.2:	Vehicle Registration.....	120
Figure 6.3:	Vehicle Relicensing	124
Figure 6.4:	Change of Vehicle Ownership	128
Figure 6.5:	Cancellation of Registration and Vehicle Destination	133
Figure 6.6:	Proportion of ‘Lapsed’ and Cancelled Registrations in 2002 (Including Declared Vehicle Destinations).....	135
Figure 8.1:	Externalities Arising From the Current Management of ELVs in New Zealand	189
Figure 8.2:	Effect of an Up-Front Disposal Charge and Free Acceptance of ELVs	202
Figure 8.3:	Effect of Certification and Monitoring Costs for Dismantlers, in Addition to Up-Front Disposal Charge	210

List of Photographs

Photograph 1:	Vehicles abandoned on the Akatarawa Road.....	x
Photograph 2:	Car hulks piled up at an automotive dismantling facility	81
Photograph 3:	Car hulk entering ELV Flattener.....	83
Photograph 4:	Car hulk emerging from ELV Flattener	83
Photograph 5:	Crushed car hulks being transported to the Metal Shredder	84
Photograph 6:	Car hulks piled up for the Metal Shredder	85
Photograph 7:	Metal Shredder at Sims Pacific Metals Ltd., Auckland	86
Photograph 8:	Metal going down the chute into the shredder	86
Photograph 9:	Shredded cars being conveyed to the magnetic drum.....	88
Photograph 10:	Separated ferrous metal ready for the Steel Mill	88
Photograph 11:	Car abandoned on Cliff Road, Palmerston North	110
Photograph 12:	Vehicles abandoned on the Akatarawa Road.....	112

“Society has come to realise that the term ‘throwaway’ is misleading: in practice there is no ‘away’.”

Fishbein (1994, 4)



Photograph 1: Vehicles abandoned on the Akatarawa Road