

Ref:

19 April 2022

Sheridan Rapmund  
IPART  
PO Box K35  
Haymarket Post Shop  
NSW 1240

Dear Sheridan

**RE: Murray River Council Feedback on the IPART Draft Report – Review of Domestic Waste Management Charges**

In response to IPART's request seeking feedback on the draft decisions as part of the IPART Draft Report on the Review of Domestic Waste Management (DWM) charges, Murray River Council do not support a benchmark waste peg. Please find below our responses to the draft decisions as requested and further information in support of our position on this matter.

**Response to draft decisions**

**1. Do you think our proposed annual “benchmark” waste peg will assist Councils in setting their DWM charges?**

No, Council does not believe that the proposed benchmark waste peg will assist Councils. This is due to the differing size and location of Councils influencing the cost of services. The NSW Government has mandated new kerbside services such as Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) by 2030 and a range of key reforms that may significantly impact the service charges and are out of Councils control. Inevitably, there will be increases above the proposed rate (1.1%) to reach NSW diversion targets that are highlighted in the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041. A waste peg will not support the identified reforms outlined within this strategy. The benchmark proposed is unreasonable for 2022/23, and is not reflective of the true cost for Councils. This rate will not cover increases in CPI and contractor charges.

**2. Do you think the pricing principles will assist Councils to set DWM charges to achieve best value for ratepayers?**

Murray River Council would welcome guiding principles – clear guidance on what is and isn't included within the charge would be beneficial, however does not support that only incremental costs can be attributed to the DWM charge.

**3. Would it be helpful to councils if further detailed examples were developed to include in the Office of Local Government's Council Rating and Revenue Raising Manual to assist in implementing the pricing principles?**

Yes, Council would welcome examples, developed in consultation with the sector to support the interpretation of the guiding principles.

**Additional feedback:**

- Changes to Murray River Councils DWM charge are undertaken in consultation with our community.
- The current service and charge reflect the community's waste minimisation aspirations.
- Rate peg restricts innovation and could be contrary to current waste minimisation legislation – the focus transitions to financials and not to resource recovery outcomes.
- Any variance between the revenue raised and the expenditure incurred is restricted for the purposes of domestic waste management services only.
- Benchmarking DWM charges across the state is inappropriate as variations in services, environment and delivery costs are significant.
- 1.1% peg will not cover increases in CPI and contractor charges, this is unreasonable as it does not reflect the true costs for Councils.
- Under proposed pricing principles rural Councils in particular will be disadvantaged due to reduced economies of scale and tyranny of distance.
- A peg will result in reduced resource recovery services and undesirable environmental outcomes.
- A large number of NSW Councils are yet to introduce a FOGO and/or recycling service, this cannot be achieved without a justified rise in DWM charges. Councils will not be able to cover these costs particularly as this is now to be made mandatory.
- Council is concerned that a benchmark waste peg will progress to a mandatory requirement in the future which is not preferred.
- Being named in an annual report will be misleading to the broader community and impact on Council's brand. It may imply Council is overcharging and/or are inefficient.
- Councils must maintain a positive DWF and not cross subsidise with other funds. Pegging will restrict good governance of this fund.
- Councils view is that ratepayer concerns can be raised directly with each Council as part of the annual budget development/submission process. There is also the opportunity for ratepayers to raise their concerns with the regulator if they are dissatisfied with a Council's response.
- Additional guidance developed with the sector could improve consistency with respect to the process and principles applied, however it should be noted that the challenges faced when delivering waste management services and the level of service offered can vary from Council to Council.

- There is an opportunity for Councils, the OLG and IPART to work collaboratively on strengthening the guidance available to Councils and the community regarding the development of domestic waste charges and associated costs.
- Council does not support DWM charges being regulated by IPART as the environment and market is regularly changing and the charge should be adjusted to reflect this active industry.
- It is not a concern that DWM charges are increasing faster than rate peg. This is a reflection of the industry and the increased expectations of communities with regard to innovative waste services.
- Council believes waste services should always be customised and relevant for their respective communities. For example, metro and regional centres have economy of scale advantages which present waste management opportunities at an affordable price, as well as end use opportunities and related industry support.
- Councils experience indicates that there is effective competition within the market and DWM services can be outsourced. The decision to outsource or provide the service in-house should remain solely with the local Council.
- Allocation of overheads should remain the responsibility of the respective Councils, which should be an auditable, transparent transaction and only levied against DWM charges where applicable.
- Council supports greater clarity and guidance on what services can be levied against DWM charges which may provide greater consistency across Councils.

Murray River Council acknowledges there is a wide variation in the number and type of DWM charges and services provided across Councils, and that further guidance into how DWM charges are set would be beneficial. Murray River Council believes it is delivering good value for ratepayers, additionally providing the opportunity for the community to submit any concerns they may have in regard to fees and charges. Council do not support regulation applied to DWM charges but would prefer guidance on this issue.

Should you require further information, please contact Brian Holmes, Manager Waste and Compliance on 1300 087 004.

Yours sincerely



Terry Dodds  
Chief Executive Officer