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NEW NATIONAL CARBON COMMITTEE FOR WASTE INDUSTRY

The Waste Management Association of Australia has moved to strengthen the voice of the waste industry in forming a National Carbon Committee as the Government finalises the Australian Emissions Trading Scheme (AETS).

President of the new division, Mike Ritchie, said that it is important that potential contribution from the waste industry is recognised in any scheme and is not lost in the debate about the major emitters like power stations.

“The waste industry has the ability to produce, at relatively short notice, savings of more than 35 million tonnes of Co2 emissions annually. That would represent nearly 7 percent of total CO2 emissions.

These reductions can be achieved through three simple and relatively low cost actions:

- ◆ Better capturing landfill gas from existing landfills
- ◆ Limiting the amount of organics which are dumped in landfills (creating methane gas, a potent greenhouse gas), and
- ◆ Capturing the embodied energy of materials by better recycling and reuse

A 35 million tonne reduction in emissions is the same as would be achieved by taking all cars off Australian roads. That is a significant contribution.

“We can achieve this by diversion from landfill and improved recycling using existing technology – chiefly advanced waste treatment facilities - but we need the right sort of regulatory signals from Government”, Mr Ritchie said.

“The Government won’t make final decisions on emissions trading until later in the year, but the Garnaut Review’s discussion paper has concluded that along with stationary energy, transport, and industrial processes, emissions from waste can be “accurately measured or estimated at reasonable cost and could be covered by an Australian ETS commencing in 2010”, Mr Ritchie said.

“If waste is to be included in an AETS then there is an enormous task to be able to accurately measure the landfill gas emissions from landfills. In particular there are hundreds of old landfills and small regional landfills which contribute to more than 15 million tonnes of emissions. It will be critical to

develop accurate measurement and models to account for these emissions, particularly for Council and private operators.

“The National Carbon Committee is also concerned about the lack of specific recognition of recycling in the proposed ETS. It means that significant emissions that might be avoided through using recycled waste rather than raw materials, are not directly recognised and valued by the scheme.

“We would encourage Garnaut and the AETS designers to consider including recycling as a generator of offset credits and that this be specifically recognised in the scheme. That would send a positive message of encouragement to all those households and businesses which are busily recycling across Australia”.

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