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FOREWORD

Last century saw unprecedented improvement in the material wellbeing of people around the world, including New Zealand. But change came at a cost: rapid development meant more waste, which polluted the environment and often put stress on the natural systems supporting life.

This generation is working towards a better understanding of how to live sustainably — how to meet our own needs without compromising those of future generations. We are making good progress in managing waste disposal but little in reducing waste. Forging a path towards sustainability means finding ways to break the link between development and environmental degradation.

Reducing environmental stress means not only reducing the waste we generate but also changing the way we think about our use of resources. We must recognise the value of all resources, including the land, air and water we still use as dumping grounds. We must also recognise that we have no right to squander these resources — they are crucial life support systems for this generation of human and non-human species, and for generations to come.

The New Zealand Waste Strategy presents a new vision for minimising waste and managing it better. It sets out a practical programme of large and small actions for the medium term, as well as some far reaching, longer-term commitments.

The strategy's origins lie in government's commitment to reducing the waste stream, and local government's desire for more effective and efficient waste management and minimisation. Wider public concern about our growing waste problem has also motivated development of the strategy.

In May 2000, *Local Government New Zealand* and the Ministry for the Environment together began developing and implementing a strategy for change. The Working Group on Waste Minimisation and

Management was formed and gave its initial advice in December 2000 in the discussion paper *Towards a National Waste Minimisation Strategy*. This was followed in early 2001 by public consultation and submissions. The Working Group gave its final advice in August 2001, capping off an invaluable contribution to the strategy.

The results of this process are before you now. The strategy sets ambitious new goals requiring us to be smarter about environmental protection, social wellbeing and economic development. This challenge is also a wonderful opportunity to shift investment and resources from managing waste disposal, to more efficient use of materials and resource recovery. The strategy's success lies in all our hands — in what we do individually and jointly — and we ask you to play a part in making it happen.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The way we handle waste is crucial to our capacity to live sustainably. Waste is a significant risk to human health and the environment, and tangible evidence that we are making inefficient use of resources. Reducing New Zealand's waste is a cornerstone of government's commitment to sustainable development. Local government is crucial to putting this into effect, and all New Zealanders must take responsibility for reducing waste and managing it better.

This strategy covers solid, liquid and gaseous waste, and recognises that moving *towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand* is a long-term challenge.

It has three core goals:

- lowering the social costs and risks of waste
- reducing the damage to the environment from waste generation and disposal
- increasing economic benefit by more efficient use of materials.

New Zealand's waste problem is large, and growing. Reducing waste cannot succeed without a system that manages waste from the point of generation through to disposal. A more effective, integrated approach to material and resource efficiency is needed at every stage of production and consumption.

Up to now, waste policies have tended to focus on *end of pipe* solutions by dealing with disposal rather than prevention. Yet there is a direct link between the amount of waste we produce and our rate of economic growth. The long-term challenge is to break this link and achieve sustainable growth by learning how to use resources more efficiently — to produce more with less.

This strategy sets challenging but achievable national targets for:

Waste minimisation, with specific targets set for:

- organic wastes
- special wastes
- construction and demolition wastes

Hazardous wastes, with specific targets set for:

- contaminated sites
- organochlorines
- trade wastes

Waste disposal.

Core policies

Five core policies form the basis for action:

A sound legislative basis for waste minimisation and management

New Zealand has no specific waste legislation. The strategy suggests changes necessary for an effective legal foundation, clarifies the function of key players, including central and local government, and recognises the Crown's responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi.

Efficient pricing

Pricing policies that, as far as practicable, reflect the full costs of waste disposal are crucial. Progress is underway on more efficient pricing policies, but further development and application of those policies is a cornerstone of the strategy.

High environmental standards

High standards are essential to protect the environment and public health. Implementation and monitoring of environmental performance standards is a strategy priority.

Adequate and accessible information

Lack of good information hampers effective waste minimisation and management. The strategy recognises that information is vital, and that central government can set up national information systems and facilitate public information and education programmes.

Efficient use of materials

More efficient use of materials will have the biggest long-term impact on waste reduction. Greater efficiency will not only reduce material use but offer more re-use and recycling options.

Four programmes will help central and local government put these policies into practice. These address:

1. institutions and legislation
2. waste reduction and materials efficiency
3. information and communication
4. standards and guidelines.

Many of the strategy's proposals need further consideration and consultation before policy decisions are made. Others build on work being done by government, individuals and organisations throughout the country.

Monitoring and evaluating progress towards targets will be essential, and will be carried out by the Ministry for the Environment, in collaboration with local government. A system will be in place by February 2003, and a first review of national targets is timed for 2003.

Our waste is our responsibility. Those who can and must play a part in moving *towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand* include waste generators, central and local government, Maori, the waste industry and its professional bodies, community and voluntary groups, and business. As individual generators of waste, we must acknowledge how much waste we generate, be prepared to pay for it, and stay informed about how best to reduce and manage it.