

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Working group offers fresh look at remote waste management potential**

The rubbish adding to landfills in the Big Rivers region could soon be providing financial and environmental benefits to its three Regional Councils, thanks to a collaboration driving a rethink on remote waste management.

The Big Rivers Waste Management Working Group (BRWMWG) comprises representatives of Roper Gulf Regional Council, Victoria Daly Regional Council and West Daly Regional Council, and was funded by the Northern Territory Department of Health, the Councils and in-kind support from Katherine Town Council.

BRWMWG Co-ordinator Liam Harte said its purpose was to assess how waste was being managed at landfills operated by the Regional Councils, and to provide expertise and support to improve operational practices for the betterment of communities and the environment.

“The main waste management issues in the communities is that they are, in many cases, using outdated landfilling methods in landfills, which were improperly designed without separating recyclable and hazardous materials,” he explained.

“Addressing this will go a long way towards improving the health and environmental outcomes from these sites.”

Resource recovery has long been overlooked at remote Waste Management Facilities due to the costs involved with transporting materials to a processing centre, but Mr Harte said he believed there was potential for the BRWMWG to lead a unified approach that would provide the economy of scale needed to make recycling financially viable.

“By collaborating, the group can achieve better economies of scale for recyclable materials, which otherwise may have been unfeasible to manage, and can more efficiently organise regional transport of waste,” he said.

Roper Gulf Regional Council Director of Council and Community Services Sharon Hillen said exploiting resource recovery opportunities would allow the organisation to create an additional revenue stream and boost local employment.

“Resource recovery can be a viable industry, and an employer of unskilled labour in remote areas, if we can identify a marketplace for the Big Rivers region’s Councils as a collective,” she said.

“There’s money to be made in resource recovery, and anything we can do to prevent material going into the dump is a cost recovery for Council, because that means we’re not having to rebuild, upgrade or extend a facility to take on more life.

“I think Roper Gulf could go it alone, but collectively, through the Big Rivers Waste Management Working Group, we’ve been able to attract the funding of Government, who recognise that our economy of scale across the region is far greater than us as individual Councils.”

As part of the BRWMWG initiative, every landfill in the Roper Gulf region will be inspected, with facilities in Borroloola, Ngukurr and Numbulwar set to undergo the most radical makeovers in order to be eligible for Environmental Protection Agency licencing under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*.

The Council has secured several grants, which it will combine with its own sourced revenue to fund the upgrade of identified landfills within its Local Government Area.

Mrs Hillen said the grant allocation demonstrated that the Government recognised the importance of waste management in remote communities, adding that the creation of the BRWMWG had allowed the Council to prioritise changes to infrastructure and operations at its three largest landfills.

“Government understands the huge quantum leap Council has to make to get our dumps up to scratch,” she explained.

“It’s not only redesigning the physical infrastructure, but it’s changing people’s mindset about accessing the dump and improving their environmental and personal safety, and the use of dumps in the past.

“Council certainly would not be at this point today if we didn’t have the support and the level of technical expertise that the group has brought to the table.”

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