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Landfills part of the solution, says ALOA chair

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Recently re-elected for a second term, the Australian Landfill Owners Association's chair Colin Sweet, may guide the organisation through interesting times if a carbon tax or trading scheme is enacted in the next 12 months even if it does not extend to waste already in the ground. He spoke to *Inside Waste* about some issues confronting the landfill sector and how it can gain more recognition for its positive contribution to helping mitigate climate change.

Earlier this [month](#) *Inside Waste* published a report on the Federal Government's Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) and the possible impact on landfill owners and operators of the scheme.



The CFI will provide farmers, forest growers and landfills with opportunities to generate carbon credits for sale in domestic and international markets. To be eligible to receive CFI credits, abatement projects would need to meet scheme eligibility criteria and apply a methodology approved for use under the CFI.

The key issues for discussion between landfill operators and the government are the treatment of legacy waste under any scheme and what Colin Sweet refers to as a "perennial problem in our industry", that is finding a fair and accurate method for measuring methane emissions from landfill.

"I think the opportunity for our industry is to sell ourselves as being part of the solution to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions and we are a valued player in the renewable energy market and by and large our efforts don't get recognised or acknowledged," said Sweet, adding, "One reason for ALOA's existence is to communicate with participants so people understand some of the good things that happen in the landfill industry".

"We support initiatives to implement an early response to climate change," said Sweet, "The industry of its own volition implemented landfill gas collection and therefore reduced emissions without regulation".

In the past year ALOA has focused its efforts both nationally and in relation to state-based issues particularly in Queensland with the introduction of a commercial waste levy looking likely.

Close to Sweet's "backyard" the challenges confronting QLD landfill owners and operators of the proposed levy on business and commercial waste are not fully known. However, if there was ever a time for landfills to justify their existence it would be now, with Queensland sites taking in unprecedented levels of waste following the natural disasters which have beset the region.

"We have been operating at levels that we could never have foreseen in terms of volumes and urgency...and getting it into safe disposal," said Sweet.

"It was pretty much everything that residents put on footpaths, so whatever had been damaged...from what was in the fridge to furniture, carpet and building products."

Sweet said the association understands that the proposed waste levy will not be implemented by the suggested date of July 1 but the government will aim to enact it before year's end.

"The government has already determined that they will introduce a levy and we really need to see the regulations in advance of the legislation being enacted so we can understand and fulfil what our obligations are," said Sweet.

"...our members are of the view that we need between three and six months to get our understanding and infrastructure in place to charge the levy and give it to the government."

When asked whether he thought the NSW government would lift caps on landfill inputs, Sweet said one lesson from the floods in Queensland is that landfills are a necessary part of the waste cycle.

"In Queensland something like 350,000 tonnes of waste was landfilled in the first month after the floods", he said.

"We need landfill as a back up for natural disasters...as a safe, secure, long-term solution it isn't being recognised as an essential service."

Key landfill events taking place in 2011:

ACLCA short course on Landfill Engineering and Environmental Management

Marcy 2-4, 2011 - Melbourne

Host: Australian Contaminated Land Consultants Association

Details: www.aclca.org.au/cms-events/index.php

The 4th National Landfill Conference and Expo

August 31-September 2, 2011 - Glenelg, SA

Host: WMAA National Landfill Division

Details: www.landfill.com.au

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