

'Waste crisis' looms despite levy gains

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Environment editor

NSW faces a looming waste crisis as landfills prepare for a spike in dumping in coming years, generating a tax windfall that the industry says will do little other than bloat government coffers.

Figures in the Berejiklikan government's half-yearly budget review released late last year show Treasury will collect an extra \$133.4 million this fiscal year alone from its waste and environment levy, and an additional \$726.7 million over four years.

For 2018-19, that fillip will supply a fifth of the total projected tax revenue boost of \$661.8 million. Based on a Sydney metro levy of \$141.20 per tonne, the increase implies about an extra million tonnes of waste a year will be headed for landfills - straining capacity.

"There is not much space at all," Rose Read, chief executive of the

National Waste and Recycling Industry Council, said. "It's getting closer and closer to being a real risk if something falls over."

Contributing to the expected jump in landfill-borne waste are China's "National Sword" waste import ban, Sydney's construction boom and the introduction next July of a landfill levy in Queensland. The northern neighbour has been taking perhaps 800,000 tonnes annually of NSW detritus.

Colin Sweet, CEO of the Australian Landfill Owners Association, said NSW has "a critical problem ... we are getting very close to a pinch point", with just three major landfill sites serving Sydney.

Only two of them can take so-called putrescible or organic waste: a facility operated by Suez at Lucas Heights and one by Veolia at Woodlawn, near Canberra.

It would only take a bushfire in the Royal National Park or one that cut the rail link south - waste freight to Woodlawn is only by

the levy was funding the nation's largest waste and recycling program Waste Less Recycle More.

"\$802 million is being invested to drive waste avoidance, increase recycling, support organics collections, managing problem wastes, new waste infrastructure, and programs to tackle illegal dumping and litter," the spokeswoman said. Funds had gone to 1160 projects, diverting 2.39 million tonnes of waste from landfill annually, and creating nearly 1000 jobs.

The EPA was also leading work to develop a 20-year Waste Strategy for NSW, she said.

Mr Sweet, though, said that strategy was probably a year away from completion, and that any new landfill site would probably take a decade to open. "NSW has been very slow to react" to the range of challenges, he said.

Gate Faehrmann, the Greens environment spokeswoman, said the government was using the levy largely to "prop up their budget bot-

tom line instead of responding to the serious and escalating waste crisis in NSW".

Jeff Angel, head of the Total Environment Centre, said the major challenges - increasing tonnages of waste in the absence of substantially effective policies that make big advances on recycling and waste avoidance - had been known for the last two decades.

"We don't want more landfills, incineration and wasted resources, but that is the future we are facing if government, industry and the community don't get on top of the problem," Mr Angel said.

Tony Khoury, head of the Waste Contractors and Recyclers Association of NSW, said his industry had been "disappointed" in the government's handling of the sector.

He cited its introduction of the so-called "proximity principle" in 2014 aimed at stopping the carting of waste more than 150 kilometres in an effort to spur local recycling and waste avoidance schemes.



Filling up

China's "National Sword" waste import ban, Sydney's construction boom and the introduction next July of a landfill levy in Queensland are contributing to the problem.

train - to leave Sydney's councils unable to empty residents' bins.

"Uncollected putrescible waste becomes an immediate threat to human health - imagine garbage bins full and overflowing with rotting garbage," Mr Sweet said.

A spokeswoman for the Environment Protection Authority said