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Business Waste Reduction Project Mullumbimby Business Waste Survey Report

Introduction

The Business Waste Reduction Project, an initiative of the North East Waste Forum (NEWF) is aimed at assisting businesses within the region to reduce the quantity of waste they generate and send to landfill through more efficient waste management practices. The service is free to business and is supported by your local council. The waste practices and attitudes of businesses in the Mullumbimby CBD were surveyed in May 2011 in order to assist local business and improve waste reduction outcomes where possible.

Benefits to Business

Implementing more efficient waste management and resource use practices has the potential to bring the business and wider community many benefits, including:

- Reduced waste collection and disposal costs;
- Improved operational efficiency, reduced production costs and improved staff morale;
- Improved environmental credentials & enhanced corporate image;
- Conserving natural resources, energy and water;
- Reduced pressure on landfills & less impact on the environment from air & water pollution.

Existing Waste & Recycling Services

The waste and recycling service options currently available in Mullumbimby:

- i) Byron Shire Council (via waste contractor Solo Resource Recovery) can provide
 - ✓ 240L or 140L red lidded wheelie bins for waste (weekly or 2 x weekly collection)
 - ✓ 240L yellow lidded wheelie bins for comingled recyclables (weekly or 2x weekly collection)
- ii) Private Waste Contractors can provide
 - ✓ bulk bins for waste, cardboard/paper, recyclable containers
 - ✓ 240L wheelie bins for cardboard/paper or recyclable containers.

Survey Summary

A total of 53 businesses in the Mullumbimby CBD (including Burringbar, Dalley, Stuart and Station Streets) responded to the survey.

The graph at Figure 1 below illustrates business responses regarding participation in the recycling of cardboard/paper, comingled recyclables and food organics. The positive response indicators are inclusive of those businesses that have a recycling collection service as well as those who claimed they recycled via alternatives such as taking home, or where the items were taken for reuse.

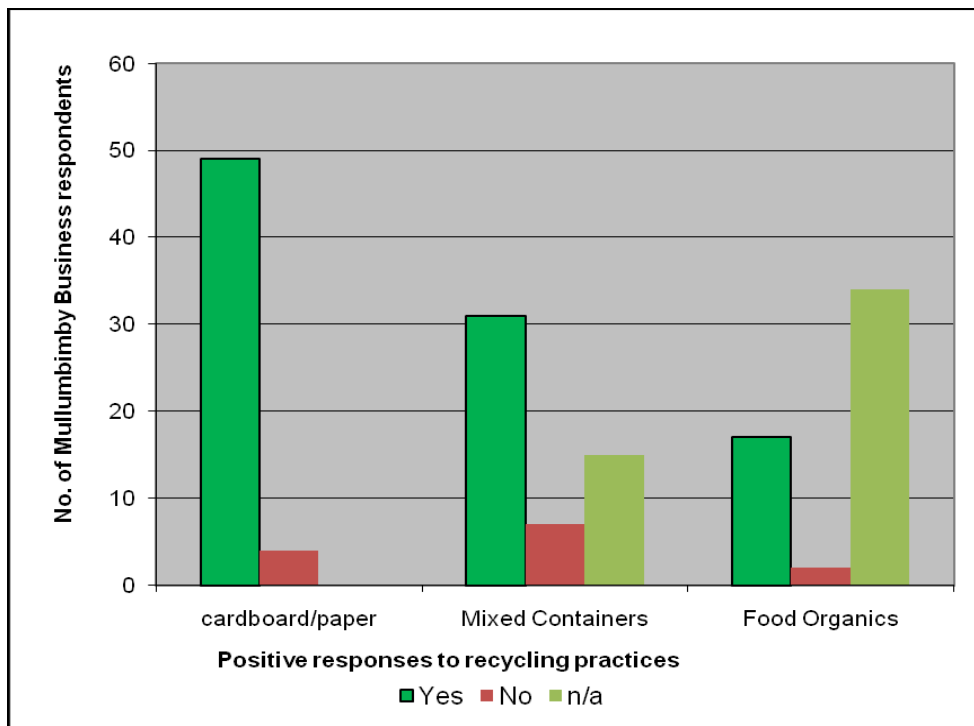


Figure 1. Positive Business Responses to Recycling Practices

Overall the survey results were very encouraging with the majority of participating Mullumbimby businesses taking steps to reduce the waste they send to landfill through a variety of recycling and reuse options. Opportunities still exist for some improvements in the rate of recycling and diversion of waste from landfill, particularly from some of the larger hospitality and retail businesses.

The survey results indicate that:

- 92% of surveyed businesses are recycling or reusing their cardboard & paper;
- 58% of businesses are recycling mixed containers (glass, plastic, metal, liquid paper board);
- 11% businesses had no waste or recycling services;
- 8% of businesses were sending all/most of their waste to landfill.

Obstacles to minimising waste and maximising recycling include:

- ❖ Reliance on building owners/agents to provide services through lease agreements;
- ❖ Concerns about cost and space for bins;
- ❖ Lack of knowledge regarding available services;
- ❖ Contamination of commercial bins through illegal dumping by the public.

Amongst the food and hospitality businesses surveyed 89% were recycling some or all of their organic waste through local gardeners and food producers. An estimated 5,800 litres of organic waste is being recycled from surveyed Mullumbimby businesses each week. Informal collection is not always a feasible or long term solution for businesses and 68% of the above businesses stated that they would be interested in a Council commercial organics collection service if one became available in future.

79% of surveyed businesses said that they also undertook other sustainable actions in their businesses beyond recycling cardboard and containers. The most popular 'other' sustainable business practices were: offering discouraging plastic bag use and/or offering customers an alternative to plastic bags; switching off appliances when not in use; and reduced paper use &/or reuse of paper.

Conclusion

There are still many opportunities for businesses to further improve their sustainable waste practices through various waste minimisation, recycling and reuse strategies relevant to their particular business. Some of the more innovative practices already taking place include: donating unsold magazines to schools for use in art projects; bicycle inner tubes made into bungies, tree supports and 'waste to art' clothing; milk container lids collected for school cash back scheme.

During the survey emphasis was placed on the potential savings for businesses through reducing waste to landfill costs, which can then offset the cost of recycling, whether through a commercial service or separation and self delivery to Myocum Waste & Recycling Centre. The continuing promotion of recycling and its benefits, with an emphasis on the increasing cost differential between waste and recycling (due to the government waste levy) should encourage more businesses to take up a recycling service in the future. Engaging building owners/agents through the provision of relevant information will also assist in ensuring that waste and recycling services and costs are adequately embodied into lease agreements.

Byron Shire Council congratulates business on their recycling efforts whilst the North East Waste Forum, on their behalf will continue to:

- provide assistance and support to interested businesses where possible;
- promote successful waste reducing businesses and the benefits they gain;
- continue business networking; and
- increase the distribution of information via the NEWF's E newsletters.

Business Highlights

Promoting the sustainable waste practices of local businesses is an ideal way to share knowledge and success, strengthen local networks, engage others and reward those demonstrating leadership for their efforts. A number of Mullumbimby businesses stood out from the crowd for their efforts in sustainable waste management. A brief summary of some of them are outlined below.

❖ Mullum Cafés & Restaurants

An estimated 80 - 90% of waste from the hospitality stream is recyclable, reusable or compostable with 25% of this being food waste (*source 'Sustainability Victoria' 2005*). Many of the hospitality businesses surveyed in Mullum have adopted practices that are significantly reducing the waste they send to landfill. Most have a Council recycling service in place to divert the commingled containers (glass, plastic, metal, cartons) and either have or share a bulk bin service for cardboard recycling, and/or reuse it, give it away or take it to the tip.

The recycling of food organics and compostable paper is commonplace with most separating it out to take home or have collected for composting or animal feed. In this way, businesses are reducing their waste and the associated costs of disposal, which will result in significant future savings as the cost of waste to landfill continues to increase each year.

Karen Oxford of the Poinciana Café said, "for successful recycling in a busy café environment, training is essential. Once staff know why we do it and how simple it is, they get right into it". Organics from the Poinciana are collected and composted by a local organic farm, which then



provides herbs and other fresh produce back to the café. This is a great example of 'closed loop recycling'.



At La Table Café & Restaurant organics are collected regularly by the local Community Garden for composting. All takeaway food containers are recyclable (coffee cups and lids) or biodegradable (plates, clams, cutlery) and so suitable for composting. Most of the menu at La Table is organic or biodynamic and the seafood is from sustainable sources only, further demonstrating the business's commitment to minimising environmental impacts and maximising sustainable operating practices.

❖ **Stewart's Menswear**

Many small retail businesses produce relatively small volumes of waste but still have to carry the significant financial costs involved in disposing of it. Gerard Walker of Stewart's Menswear on Burringbar St has found that by minimising his waste where possible and using Council's Waste & Recycling Centre at Myocum, he can overcome his business's lack of available space for bins and save money on disposal costs. Gerard said "I reuse the large plastic bags that clothing is delivered in to separate and store waste and recyclable containers. Once a month I fill up my UTE with flattened cardboard boxes and the bags and head to the tip. There's a small charge for the waste but the separated cardboard and recyclable containers are free. Recycling isn't hard to do and in the long run it's better for our environment and so for us all".

❖ **The Mullum Newsagency**

At the Mullum Newsagency business owners Dean & Janelle Stanford and their staff are taking steps to reduce their impact on the environment and help their local community. Many of their unsold newspapers are given to locals for garden mulching and magazines are donated to student art projects. They have a Council recycling bin service for disposing of any paper, cardboard and recyclable containers that can't be reused and any food scraps from staff lunches are taken home for the chooks.



The community can drop used printing cartridges into the special cartridge collection box located at the store as most printing cartridges are 100% recyclable. They are sent away to be reprocessed into new plastic products, such as garden furniture and rulers. Owner Janelle said "The business also provides alternatives to plastic shopping bags including paper and other reusable bags. The money raised from the sale of the reusable bags goes to a local charity". Other sustainable business practices at the Newsagency include: saving paper by emailing out accounts and invoices to customers; and saving money and electricity by installing new energy efficient lighting and arranging regular maintenance of the air conditioning equipment.

Further Information

The North East Waste Forum encourages businesses wishing to improve their waste management practices and sustainability to check out the business waste reduction DIY toolkit and other useful resources online at www.northeastwasteforum.org.au. The Project Coordinator can be contacted for support on ph. 02 6687 4945 or business@northeastwasteforum.org.au