



Tuesday 14 September 2010

Project Manager
Queensland Waste Strategy Consultation
Natural Resources and Environment
Department of Environment and Resource Management
GPO Box 2454
Brisbane QLD 4001

Dear Sir/Madam

Trust Nature Far North Queensland (TNFNQ) would like to offer its support to the renewal of Queensland's waste management strategy, and to take up the invitation to comment on the document, "Queensland's Waste Strategy 2010–2020: Waste Avoidance and Recycling Consultation Draft" (the Draft Strategy).

TNFNQ is the initiator and developer of the Vital Soils Project, a collaboration between TNFNQ, the Tablelands Regional Council and the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group. The Vital Soils Project uses an advanced composting process to convert local municipal and agricultural waste into "probiotic" compost. This process uses the compost as a medium to breed diverse populations of beneficial microorganisms, essential to soil and plant health. These microorganisms will amount to over 50% of the compost's biomass. This compost is a premium resource highly beneficial to local agriculture. There are significant similarities between the intentions and goals of the Draft Strategy and the Vital Soils Project.

- **Changing the focus, page 12**

The Vital Soils Project is committed to the waste=resource mentality embraced by the Draft Strategy. The compost process replicates natural processes and embodies the Draft Strategy's identification of the need for a shift from the present linear system of thinking to a loop-closing system in which waste becomes a valuable resource.

- **The guiding principles: Sustainability, page 14**

The Vital Soils Project is a local solution which addresses local social, economic and environmental issues, and which also maximises benefits to all Queenslanders. The project allows local municipal and agricultural waste to stay in the region, thus minimising the costs and environmental impacts of long distance transport. As well as creating local green jobs, and reducing landfill and greenhouse gases, the agricultural use of Vital Soils Project compost improves

crop productivity and nutritional value by improving soil and crop health. This increased health reduces agriculture's dependence on petrochemical fertilisers, pesticides and weedkillers, thus reducing both input costs for farmers and the environmental impacts of such products. Moreover, because the compost increases the number of beneficial microorganisms in the soil, it improves the soil's ability to sequester carbon, and to hold nutrients in a non-leachable form, which reduces damaging run-off to aquatic ecosystems, including the Great Barrier Reef.

- **The guiding principles: Engagement, page 14**

The Vital Soils Project has established a strong partnership between private industry, local government and community organisations, taking these stakeholders views into consideration, facilitating and encouraging shared responsibility, and providing an active role for all stakeholders.

- **The vision, page 18**

The Vital Soils Project makes the most of recycling and resource recovery opportunities, and is both an innovative solution to waste management and a business opportunity for dealing with unwanted materials. Local municipal and agricultural waste generators are provided with an alternative waste management option, and their waste becomes a resource for the local agricultural industry.

- **Goals and Targets, page 19**

The Vital Soils Project recovers and recycles municipal and agricultural waste, thereby reducing green and organic waste to landfill. This reduction of course reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfill, reduces the climate change impacts of local waste management, and reduces the region's ecological footprint. The project has already created six full time equivalent new green jobs, and has the potential to create many more.

- **Engagement, information and knowledge management, page 27**

The Vital Soils Project understands that engagement and education must underpin behaviour changes, better decisions and long-term improved practices. An important part of the project is the education of farmers and the community in the science, application and benefits of compost use, and the ongoing support of farmers in the transition to independence from petrochemicals.

- **Action 11: Market development for recycled organic products, page 36**

The Vital Soils Project is already developing markets and uptake for recycled and organic products. The project is particularly focused on the supply and uptake of a premium 'fit-for-purpose' product that can provide multiple benefits for agriculture and the environment.

- **Action 12: Regional resource recovery support programs, page 36**

The Vital Soils Project creates a new, sustainable model for municipal and agricultural waste management which other regional councils will be able to replicate. By focusing on production of a premium 'fit-for-purpose' product the project generates revenue by sales of product, rather than relying on gate fees. This makes this operation economically attractive for Councils. The project could be used

as a model for the planned strategic projects to be undertaken in regional Queensland with the intention of reducing waste disposal, improving resource recovery and creating green jobs in regional areas.

- **Action 15: Household green and organic waste collection, page 37**
Because the Vital Soils Project provides a means to convert green and organic waste into a resource, the Tablelands region would be an ideal location for the trial of new collection options.
- **Action 19: Community gardens project, page 37**
The Vital Soils Project involves a number of qualified permaculturalists, with extensive experience in community gardens, organic farming and education. The Tablelands region would be an ideal location to begin establishing community gardens and permaculture projects.

TNFNQ supports the vision and intentions of the Draft Strategy but also believes that the document overlooks a vital link with agriculture. Agriculture is both a significant producer of organic waste, and a significant consumer of products whose use is both environmentally damaging, and unsustainable in the long term, yet agriculture is not mentioned in the Draft Strategy. Through the use of composting, to convert waste to a resource for agriculture; agricultural waste can be avoided; organic waste diverted from landfill; and unsustainable and damaging petrochemical farm inputs can be avoided.

TNFNQ proposes the following amendments to the Draft Strategy:

- the inclusion of agriculture as a stakeholder and strategic partner
- the inclusion of targets for the avoidance and reduction of agricultural waste
- the inclusion of compost projects linked to agriculture, such as the Vital Soils Project, as a strategy for waste management innovation

TNFNQ believes that the Vital Soils Project meets the Draft Strategy's vision. By linking private industry, local government, community groups, agriculture and permaculture, the partners involved in the Vital Soils Project are developing a cost-effective model for transforming waste into a resource, which will be replicable in other regions. The Draft Strategy expresses the intention to build on existing programs and achievements, and to facilitate and develop sustainable local solutions for local issues. By the time the Draft Strategy becomes policy, the Vital Soils Project will have implemented many of the Draft Strategy's stated goals. Therefore, TNFNQ would like to see projects such as this supported as part of the renewal of Queensland's waste management strategy.

TNFNQ looks forward to receiving feedback on this submission, and to the success of Queensland's new strategy.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Daniel Handley
Director, Trust Nature Far North Queensland