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Action needed to improve waste management

In his latest report today the Auditor General found although there has been improvement in the management of waste since 2012, none of the 2015 Waste Strategy targets for the diversion of waste from landfill had been met.

Acting Auditor General Glen Clarke said Western Australians are very high producers of waste and our recycling rates are well below the national average.

'With most of our waste ending up in landfill, the risk and cost to our environment through toxins and methane is far more than most of us realise.

'The audit assessed whether strategies to reduce the state's reliance on landfill for dealing with household, construction, demolition, commercial and industrial waste have been successful.

'We found the data used to inform waste management progress at the local, regional and state level, was incomplete and unreliable.

'Reporting on recycling activities is voluntary. Currently, only 62% of licensed waste operators return data which is not verified or audited, measurement methods vary from weighbridges to visual estimates and regional waste production is estimated based on metropolitan data.

'Reliable data is needed to understand the WA waste and recycling industry, prioritise projects and provide information about the effectiveness of the Waste Strategy,' Mr Clarke said.

A lack of coordination and cooperation due to uncertainty or different views about respective roles and responsibilities exists between the Waste Authority and the Department of Environment Regulation (DER).

This situation is affecting the planning and implementation of waste strategies and projects, promotion of key messages, the prioritising of effort and funding of approved projects.

The report recommends that the Waste Authority and DER clarify and communicate their roles.

There is also no long-term plan that identifies future waste facilities in the Perth metropolitan and Peel region, which has resulted in local governments, regional councils and industry making their own waste management choices that do not necessarily align with the Waste Strategy.

Mr Clarke said Western Australians produce 6.2 million tonnes of waste each year and population increases are likely to see waste generation increase unless there is concerted effort to avoid, reduce and recycle waste.

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'Diverting waste from landfill is a shared responsibility and requires action from state and local governments, industry and the wider community.

'Government needs to lead by example and provide good practice waste management planning and guidance, as well as simple messages and incentives to engage the community in waste avoidance and minimisation,' Mr Clarke said.

The Auditor General's report *Western Australian Waste Strategy: Rethinking Waste* (Report 23 – October 2016) is available on the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au

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