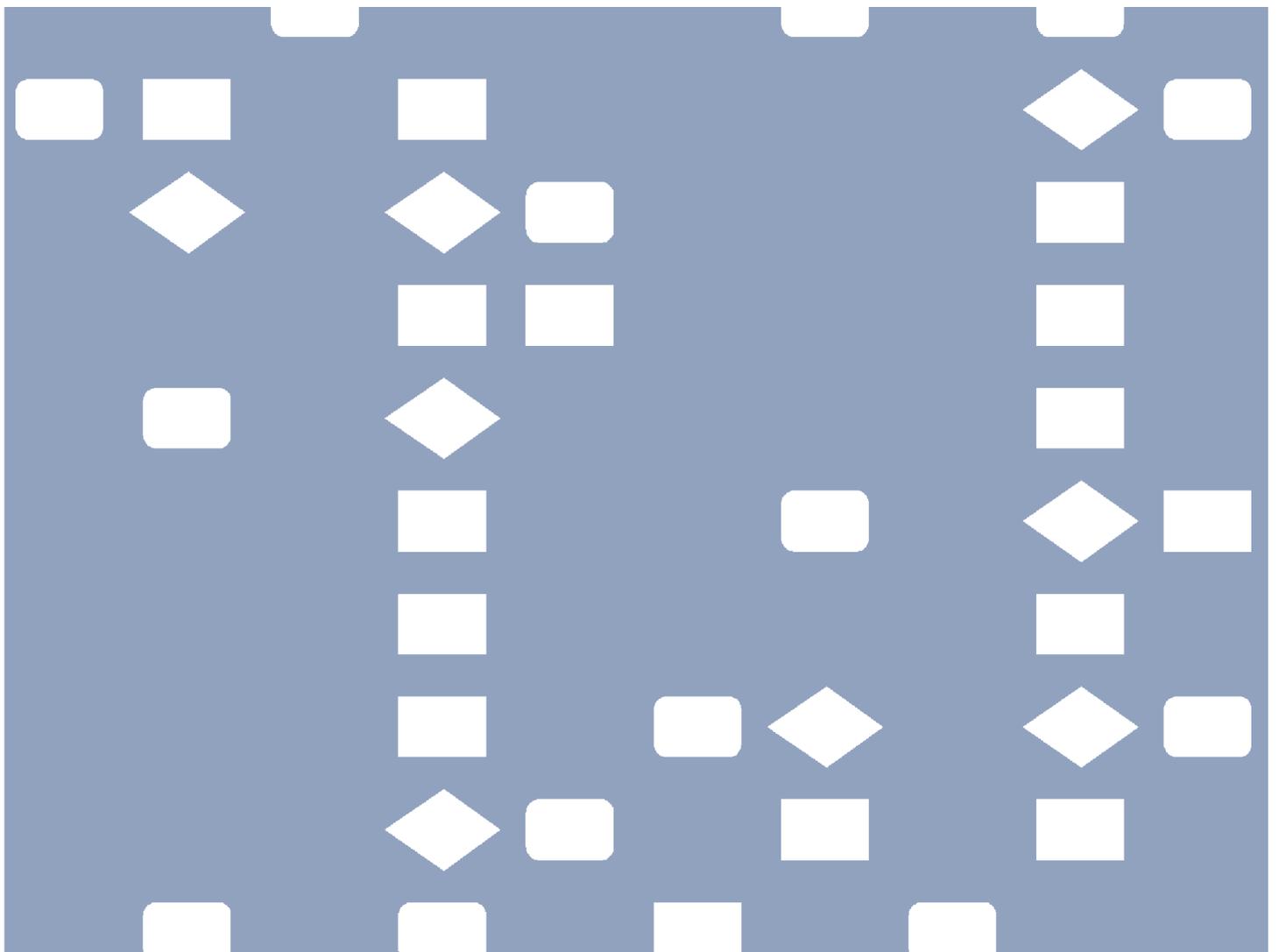


# EVALUATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL'S NATIONAL WASTE DIALOGUE

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Summary Final Report  
Diane Warburton  
Shared Practice



# Chief Executive's Message

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Dear reader,

It is my pleasure to present the Summary Report of The Environment Council's (TEC) National Waste Dialogue (NWD).

Consisting of a series of stakeholder dialogue processes that ran between 1999 and 2002, the NWD was an experimental approach to addressing a complex sustainability issue. Proactive in nature, it was the first time that The Environment Council initiated and led a dialogue process, without the security of a problem holder.

In taking on this challenging project, TEC made several key assumptions:

- That stakeholder dialogue was an appropriate model for addressing the issues of sustainable waste management; and
- That TEC (as an independent, facilitating organisation) could provide appropriate neutral leadership for these processes.

These are tested in the evaluation, which also addresses

- Tackling waste management issues through dialogue
- Whether the process was effective
- Stakeholder commitment to proactive processes
- The role an independent convenor can play
- Whether the dialogue produced anything.

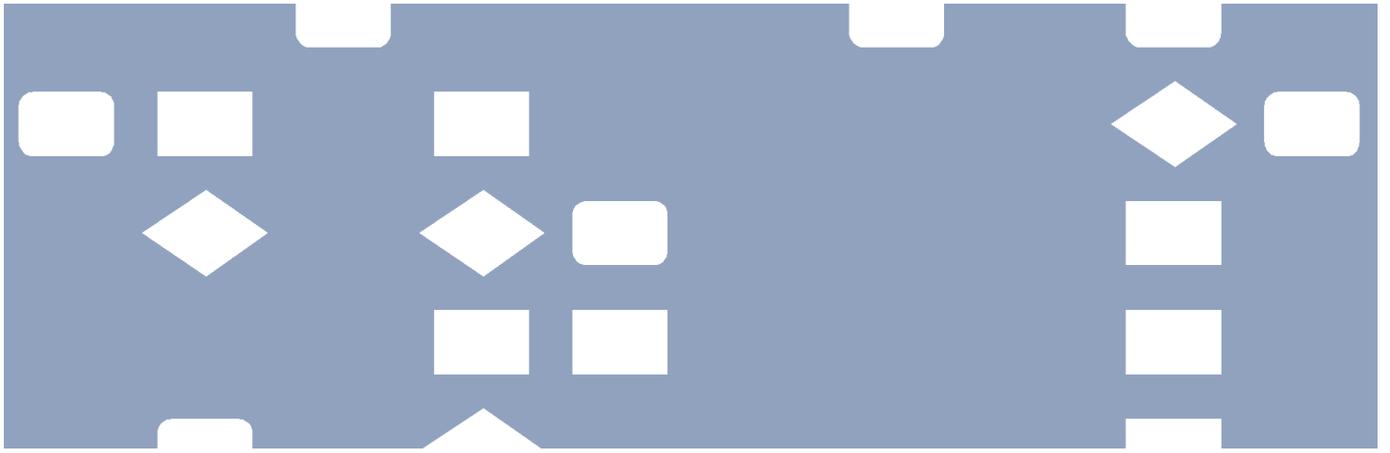
Most importantly conclusions and lessons for the future are also identified.

We welcome this opportunity to reflect upon and learn from this experience. The Environment Council is committed to using the findings contained in this report as a means of improving participative decision making processes, which is a key objective in our recently published strategic plan.

Please send any comments regarding the National Waste Dialogue or this evaluation process specifically to [eloisef@envcouncil.org.uk](mailto:eloisef@envcouncil.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,

  
**Mike King**



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May 2004

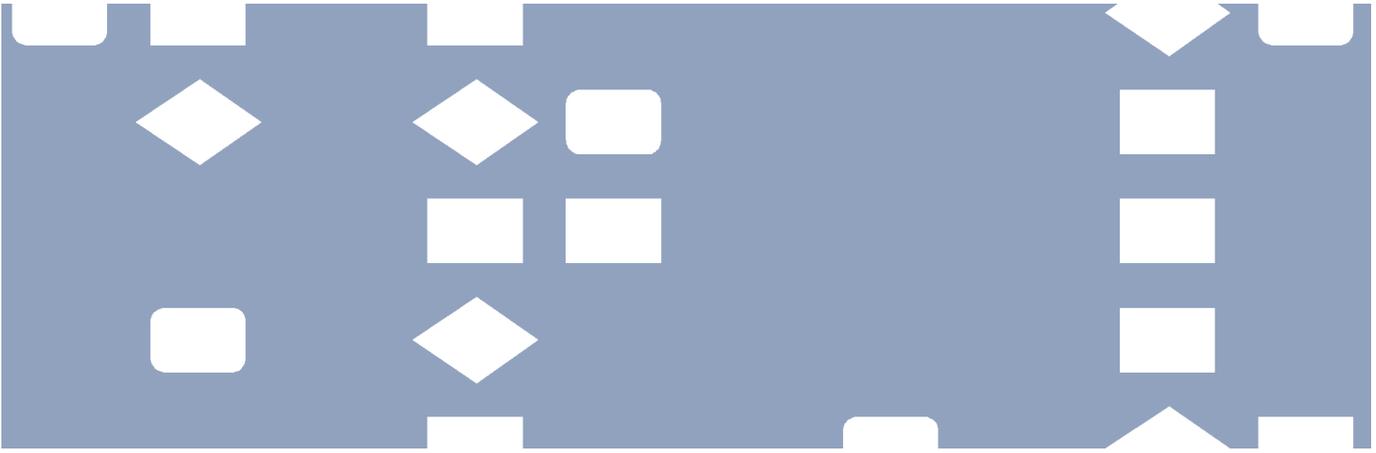
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## About the Author

Diane Warburton (BA Hons, FRSA) was commissioned by The Environment Council to lead the evaluation team and produce the Summary Final Report and Final Report, to ensure the independence of the evaluation process for the National Waste Dialogue. Diane is a co-founder and senior partner of Shared Practice, and Honorary Fellow and visiting lecturer at the University of Brighton. She specialises in evaluating participatory processes within her main area of work which is around participation and community engagement in sustainable development programmes.  
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Shared Practice was established in 2002 to undertake experimental research and creative development to address the complex modern issues which do not have easy or conventional solutions. It therefore works in a variety of ways which involve rigorous research, individual creativity and building collective understanding through interactive projects, usually working in partnership with clients and colleagues. For more information on Shared Practice, see [www.sharedpractice.org.uk](http://www.sharedpractice.org.uk).

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Between 1999 and 2002, The Environment Council (TEC) ran a series of stakeholder dialogue processes on sustainable waste management under the umbrella title of the National Waste Dialogue (NWD). The NWD was an experimental approach to stakeholder dialogue in that it was the first time TEC had led the process.

The definition of stakeholder dialogue that TEC used for the NWD was as follows:

Stakeholder dialogue brings together interested parties (stakeholders) to collectively identify key issues to address. Participants agree actions and recommendations that can be supported by all.

Stakeholders were defined as all those with an interest in the issue. The broad issue of sustainable waste management has a very wide spectrum of stakeholders from all sectors. However, as the NWD focused on national strategic policy issues, it was decided during the design phase not to include the public in this particular process.

The NWD operated in two phases with separate objectives, as follows:

## **Phase 1: Building Effective Solutions for Sustainable Waste Management (1999-2001)**

- To identify the key issues affecting progress towards sustainable waste management
- To identify ways to address barriers to progress

Three national stakeholder workshops were held, and three working groups which focused on cultural change, markets development, and infrastructure and planning.

## **Phase 2: Enabling Sustainable Waste Management (2001-2002)**

- To tackle the complex and contentious issues surrounding the planning and decision-making process for new waste facilities
- To make recommendations on how these issues can be addressed
- To build relationships and understanding among stakeholders engaged in and affected by waste related decision-making.

Three national stakeholder workshops were held, and three working groups which focused on waste strategies, public engagement, and data and information.

In 2003, TEC commissioned an evaluation of the NWD in order to distil learning about the participatory processes used, particularly in relation to tackling sustainable waste management in the UK, and to contribute to TEC's aim of being a learning organisation. The evaluation began by identifying two underlying assumptions which underpinned the design of the NWD, which were:

- That stakeholder dialogue was an appropriate model for addressing the issues of sustainable waste management.
- That TEC (as an independent, facilitating organisation) could provide appropriate neutral leadership for these processes.

The evaluation has been carried out by a study team led by Diane Warburton, Shared Practice, with research support from Sam Gardner (PhD student at University College London working on evaluating participatory processes) and Geeta Kulshrestha (PhD student at the London School of Economics working on waste management) The researchers were supported by a TEC team comprised of Anthony Perret, Richard Wilson, Eloise Frawley and Faye Scott. The team met regularly throughout the course of the study.

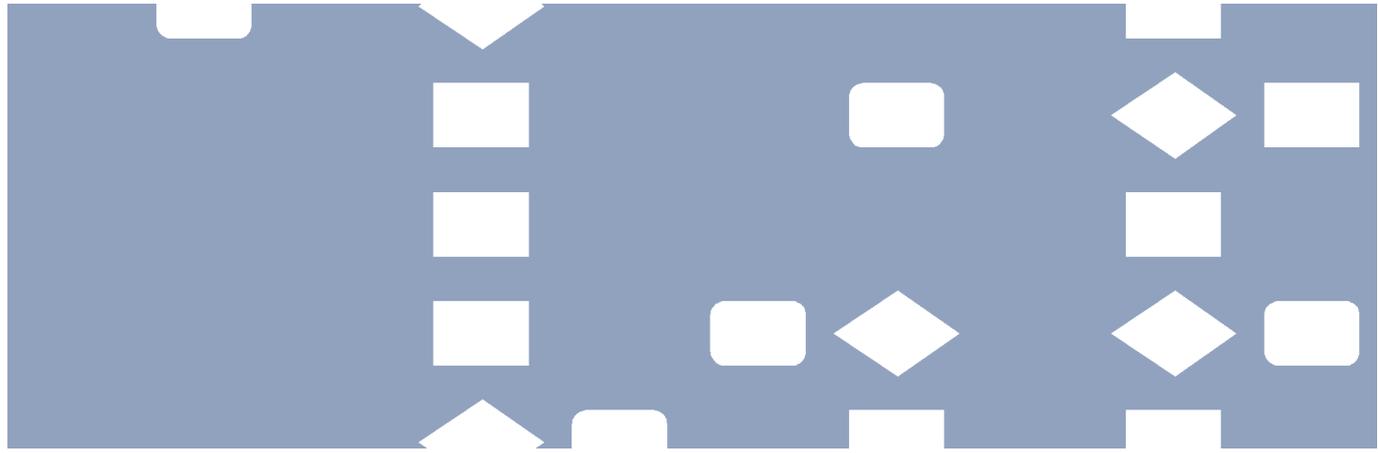
An Advisory Group was set up to support the work of the research team by helping to identify the initial key issues and themes, review the findings, and to help safeguard the independence, integrity and quality of the evaluation process. The Advisory Group was chaired by Professor Judith Petts and was comprised of Ray Georgeson, WRAP; Richard Harris, independent facilitator; Barbara Herridge, Waste Watch; Simon Hewitt, Defra; Peter Jones, Biffa; and Bob Lisney, Hampshire County Council.

The evaluation has involved considerable consultation with the participants in the dialogue, the organisers and the facilitators, through interviews, a detailed questionnaire, an interactive workshop to consider preliminary findings and an electronic review process to invite comments on the final summary report, conclusions and recommendations. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the evaluation process, especially the members of the Advisory Group, for all their extremely valuable inputs.

This summary report presents a brief outline of the main findings of the evaluation research in relation to the six key themes identified by the study team, TEC and the Advisory Group:

- The wider context
- The specific waste management issues debated
- The quality and effectiveness of the dialogue process itself
- The stakeholders involved
- The role of TEC in the NWD
- The outputs and outcomes of the NWD.

The full report, published separately, contains more detail on the theoretical background and the methodology used for the evaluation, the processes used in the two phases of the NWD and a more detailed analysis of the findings. Both reports are available on the TEC website, [www.the-environment-council.org.uk](http://www.the-environment-council.org.uk).



## 2. CONTEXT FOR THE NWD

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The NWD took place at a time (1999-2002) of feverish activity on waste management. There were numerous UK Government and other policy and legislative initiatives, notably the Government *Waste Strategy for England and Wales* in 2000. In 2001, the Waste Summit was organised by the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Cabinet Office report on *Resource Productivity. Making More with Less* was published, and WRAP (the Government's Waste and Resources Action Programme) began operations. The Cabinet Office *Waste Not, Want Not* report was published in 2002, reviewing the problem of waste in the UK, and the Government response to that report emerged in 2003.

The landfill tax credit scheme, the aggregates levy fund, funding for local authority recycling and beacon councils for waste were all introduced during the time of the NWD. Regional Technical Advisory Boards for waste management were set up to feed into regional waste strategies and practice. In the private sector, there was enormous change as local authorities and companies let major waste contracts, competition grew and the sector changed as a result of new companies entering the market, corporate buy-outs and the like.

A further major contextual theme relevant to the NWD was the growing tide of European environmental legislation on the treatment and (especially producer) responsibility for specific waste streams (e.g. Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment and End of Life Vehicles) and on reducing the wastes that can go into landfill. The emerging concepts of zero waste are being considered alongside predictions from the OECD and EU of a 43% increase in domestic waste by 2010 because of population increase, the growth in single households and current lifestyles, prompting a focus on specific areas where waste can be reduced (e.g. food).

More generally, the field of waste management continued to be characterised by divisions in statutory responsibility for waste management (between local authorities and other agencies, and at different spatial levels from local through regional to national and international), involving a wide range of interests from all sectors and at all levels (e.g. industry, the public, community groups, politicians, waste contractors, local and central government, national environmental organisations etc). The need for implementation of policy and legislative initiatives on waste continued to grow.

The NWD was only one of many initiatives at the time to engage stakeholders in discussions about waste management policy and practice: 78% of evaluation questionnaire respondents were involved in other initiatives on waste management at the same time, resulting in a sense of "dialogue overload".

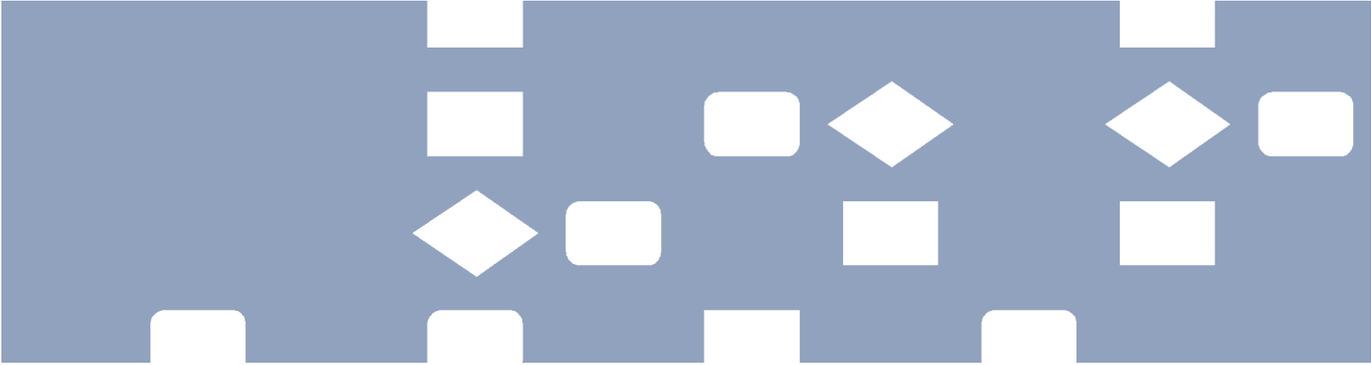
Although informal links between the NWD and other concurrent initiatives were strong (same people involved), there were few formal links, and the NWD itself was not seen to be central to the wider realm of waste management policy and practice at the time. For many evaluation respondents, the timing of the NWD was therefore a problem in two ways:

- The NWD focused on national strategic policy at a time when national policy statements were already being issued by Government and others, so it was too late to feed into the development of those. There could have been input to debates about implementation, but that was not the focus of the NWD.
- The NWD process lacked any sense of dynamism or urgency, and was simply too slow and drawn out to be able to respond rapidly or effectively to the fast-changing policy context.

The lack of effective links between the NWD and wider policy processes and its slow pace, resulted in the NWD being perceived by around half the evaluation respondents as marginal or simply one of many debates on the issues at the time.

Since the NWD finished its formal meetings in February 2002, the complexity of the overall context remained, and there were numerous further developments, including a significant broadening of the debate to consider wider patterns of consumption and production and the broader issue of the use of natural resources (e.g. the Cabinet Office report on Resource Productivity in 2001 and the Defra/DTI framework for sustainable consumption and production in 2003).

The contextual changes outlined here point to a significant shift in the way waste management is considered i.e. within a larger context of resource use alongside increasing environmental protection legislation. Waste will still be produced, but the ways in which the problem is understood may change, affecting the nature of the processing facilities required. The changing planning framework, with a growing focus on regional waste strategies based on the national policy agenda, with statutory status in land use planning terms, will also be key to the development of future infrastructure. At local level, community strategies now require formal statements of community involvement, a clear indication of the growing importance of public participation across planning activities at local (and regional) levels. The role of Local Strategic Partnerships in agreeing community strategies will, similarly, focus attention on local partnership working.



## 3. WASTE MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN THE NWD

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The overall focus of the NWD on national issues and on strategic policy was seen to be correct by over 90% of evaluation questionnaire respondents. However, the NWD was not seen to have succeeded in acting strategically because of its lack of formal links to other concurrent initiatives, nor was it seen to have responded sufficiently rapidly to new policy issues as they emerged.

There were also concerns raised about the exclusion from the NWD of what were seen as the most contentious issues (e.g. new waste facilities). The issues discussed in the NWD were decided by consensus among participants, which resulted in the prioritisation of less contentious issues for detailed work (despite efforts by the facilitators to focus on contentious issues). Two explanations have been offered by evaluation respondents for the participants' decision to exclude contentious issues:

- That participants wanted to focus on achieving real practical outputs from the process (and felt they should therefore focus on common ground in order to make progress), and
- That the specific contentious issues identified were local issues which were not appropriate to a national dialogue (e.g. siting waste facilities), and these issues were therefore not prioritised.

There were different views about this among respondents. Some saw it as a strength of the NWD that it focused on finding common ground rather than on areas of potential disagreement. Others saw the avoidance of contentious issues as a real weakness of the NWD as these were the main problems facing waste management. By avoiding what were to some the key topics which needed to be addressed, it was seen as increasing the risk that the NWD could be perceived as a smokescreen, constraining open debate and not helping to fill the policy vacuum in these areas.

### Priority issues for future dialogue on waste management

The future priority issues for stakeholder dialogue on waste management identified from the evaluation research fall into the following seven categories:

- The broader agenda of **resource productivity**, especially management of natural resources and seeing waste as a resource/opportunity, alongside issues of changing patterns of consumption and production. The electronic consultation on the draft summary report identified similar issues of **waste reduction, reducing consumption** and **integrated resource management** as priority issues for the future.
- The impending implementation (starting in 2004) of **European Directives** relevant to waste management (e.g. on WEEE, ELVs, landfill, biodegradable wastes, hazardous chemicals, agricultural wastes, renewable fuel sources) will require attention.

- **Planning and infrastructure** issues will continue to be critical, covering strategic issues (at local, regional and national levels) as well as specific sites for waste facilities. Dialogues may be needed at local and regional levels to cover issues such as the health impacts of different options for processing/disposal (health is a material consideration in planning terms).
- The **economics** and financing of waste management needs further attention, including incentives, taxes and charges and a recognition that finance drives technological development.
- There could be greater benefits if stakeholders worked together to develop **visions** of where waste management needs to get to (in, say, 20 to 50 years), rather than focusing on current problems. Any such process will need to recognise the context of an uncertain world (e.g. inconsistent planning processes, uncertainty about technology or financing) and the need to develop a shared view and responsibility for action across and within sectors (e.g. NGOs, government, industry), regions and technologies, and the importance of pro-active initiatives (rather than responding to proposals which are already formed).
- Further work is needed with the **waste industry**, and other industry players, where there is growing interest in how to work with stakeholders both in terms of governance issues (e.g. stakeholder boards and reporting) and the development of specific sites and services.
- **Monitoring policy and practice development** could be a focus for future processes, to identify weaknesses, gaps and opportunities. Such an approach was seen to require good quality information and research to be fed into the process.

Whichever issues were identified, respondents stressed that any further stakeholder dialogues would need to identify a clear purpose and proposed outcomes from the start, and to involve those who would be making the final decisions or implementing change (often Government).

The electronic review process on the draft summary report specifically asked respondents about the appropriate level and leadership for future dialogue processes. There was a slight majority for further national dialogue, but also support for regional dialogues (with less support for local). There was also a majority in favour of central government (and its agencies) leading any future dialogues, local authorities if local, and academics and NGOs were also suggested as potentially taking a lead (the role of The Environment Council was dealt with separately).



## 4. QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

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There was strong agreement that tackling waste management requires bringing all parties together to improve knowledge and understanding of each others' positions and views, and to agree recommendations about what is required.

Most respondents felt that the individual stakeholder events in the NWD were well-facilitated, which ensured discussions were non-confrontational, different views were listened to, and outcomes were recorded. Participants liked working in small groups, the focus on finding common ground, and being involved in a continuing process rather than a one-off event. However, there were also some serious criticisms of the NWD process overall, as outlined below.

### 4.1 The model of facilitation

The model of facilitation used in the NWD was seen to have five major problems in these particular circumstances:

- **Lack of subject knowledge**

The facilitation model used includes a principle of using independent professional facilitators who have no vested interest in the final outcome. Over time, this principle has tended to be interpreted as not only that facilitators should be neutral (not a stakeholder) and independent (not allied with any particular stakeholder viewpoint), but also that facilitators need not have any detailed knowledge of the subject of the process they are managing: the 'content-free' model of facilitation. In the NWD, respondents felt this caused the following problems:

- Insufficient prioritisation of issues during the design phase, leading to insufficiently focused planning and preparation.
- Inability to make qualitative judgements about whether input from participants was central or was peripheral (or even what was accurate or not). As a result, all comments made in meetings were treated as of equal value, regardless of "relevance or utility" as one respondent said.
- Inability to pull discussions together and create a coherent overall picture (during and between meetings) that participants could respond to. As a result, the NWD ended up with "a pile of plums rather than jam" as one respondent said - i.e. a lot of individual points but no coherent overall statements.

- **Equality and inclusivity**

Two other principles of the stakeholder dialogue model used were that all participants attend as equals, in order to create a level playing field for dialogue, and that all interest groups with a concern in the outcome should be involved. The second principle was not fully implemented in the NWD as one key stakeholder (the public) was excluded from the start, by agreement with NWD participants themselves. More specifically, evidence to the evaluation suggests that trying to adhere to these principles resulted in those participants who knew least and attended least frequently setting the level of debate, so issues were often over-simplified ("dumbing down"). As a result, some of

the more experienced and senior stakeholders grew frustrated and dropped out in the early stages.

- **Lack of ambition**

It was suggested that, at its best, stakeholder dialogue can enable participants to go beyond what they already know and tackle complex and cross-cutting problems in new ways. The model used in the NWD was seen to have squandered the enormous knowledge and experience in the room in the early stages. The discussions fell back into areas where people were comfortable with their knowledge and complex issues were not tackled.

- **Visible and transparent planning and reporting**

The facilitation model used requires that stakeholders have control over the content and accuracy of the reporting, and are closely involved in setting agendas and agreeing procedures. Planning is usually done behind the scenes and proposals tested with participants at the beginning of each main stakeholder event. Reporting tends to mean that facilitators record all comments and decisions made in meetings on flip charts which can be seen by all participants, and reporting usually takes the form of a photo report or an exact transcription of the flip charts. In the NWD, this raised particular problems:

- Although there were various planning and steering groups during the NWD process, their role was unclear in relation to decisions made openly in the main stakeholder meetings. The existence of these groups created a loss of a sense of ownership among those not on these smaller groups. In addition, the lack of a clear role for these steering groups, agreed with the larger group, meant that little progress was seen to be made between meetings.
- Photo reports were useful as an aide-memoire immediately after meetings, but were of no long term value as they became unintelligible very quickly as memory fades.
- There were no briefing reports to enable participants to prepare for meetings, no final information on what happened to the recommendations after the final meeting, and no overall final report to record the entire process and its achievements. Lack of reporting during and after the process made it difficult for some stakeholders to use the outcomes back in their own organisation, and to justify their continued involvement.
- There was little or no communication between working groups, between working groups and the main stakeholder meetings, or between meetings. Lack of communications throughout the process created a sense that each meeting started from scratch, there was little feeling of progress or dynamism, and essentially the whole NWD process was seen by many respondents as a series of events rather than a coherent process that built into a substantial initiative.

- **Seeking common ground**

The stakeholder dialogue model used in the NWD focuses on identifying and building on common ground. The impact of this approach in excluding contentious issues from the NWD has already been mentioned above, as a result of seeking common ground but also of the importance in the facilitation model of participants taking responsibility for the agenda and process.

## 4.2 Lack of shared purpose

The formal objectives of the NWD were agreed at the beginning of the process, but the evaluation research found that these objectives did not fully reflect the implicit motivations and expectations of the participants and organisers of the NWD. There were two quite different views on what the NWD was trying to achieve:

- For some, the NWD was a high level process about influencing policy change, with the key target for recommendations being Government.
- For others, it was all about change among the participants themselves, with the focus on action by those involved in the process.

In theory, stakeholder dialogue can deliver both these outcomes but, in the NWD, it was not clear whether the overall purpose was one, other or both of these. As a result, frustrations grew as individual participants experienced a lack of progress towards their perceived goal.

## 4.3 Lack of understanding of stakeholder dialogue

Although the majority of respondents (64%) had been involved in stakeholder dialogue before, it became clear from the research that participants lacked much detailed knowledge of what stakeholder dialogue is about and how it works, particularly about the roles stakeholders were expected to take in this type of process.

One particular impact of this lack of understanding of roles related to whether people were attending as 'delegates' from their organisation (with a clear mandate about what they could or could not agree or commit to), or simply as 'representatives' of an organisation or sector, participating as an individual but drawing on their personal knowledge and to some extent 'embodying' the values and concerns of their organisation or sector. This is a well-defined issue in voluntary sector literature, but the NWD evaluation workshop suggested that this remains an area where more clarity is needed in stakeholder dialogue.

The evaluation workshop made some suggestions for future development:

- Development of a pre-participation pack providing guidance on expected roles in dialogue events and afterwards, and on the value of preparatory briefings in participants' own organisations before and after attendance.
- Explicit discussion in stakeholder dialogue events about mandates so that all participants are clear about what needs to go back to participating organisations.

## 4.4 Lack of a problem holder

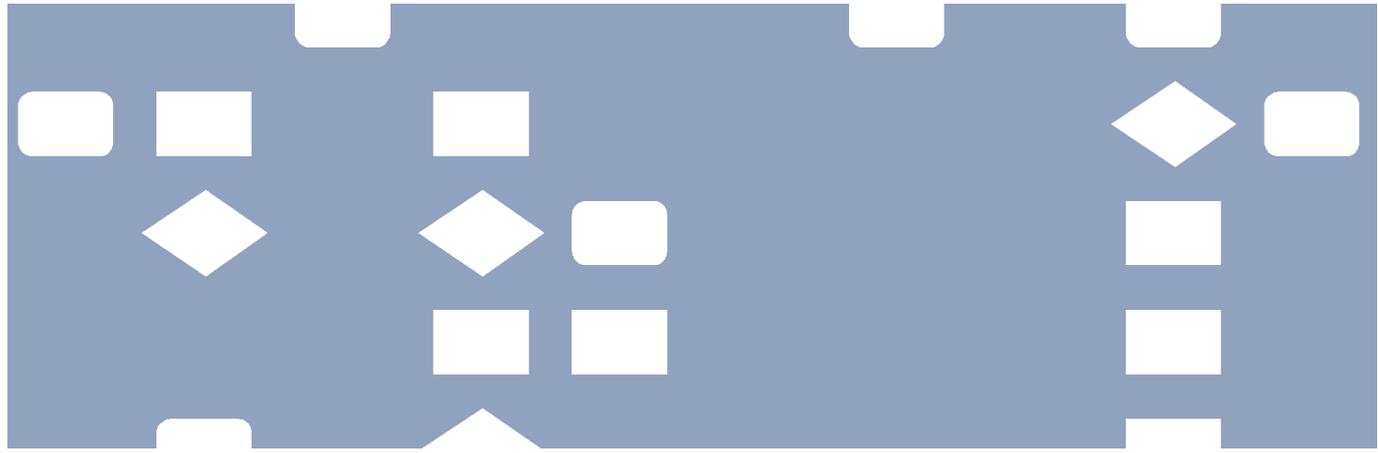
The NWD was a departure from TEC's usual stakeholder dialogue model in which they, as the facilitating organisation, work with an external 'problem holder' who identifies the problem to be addressed, commissions the dialogue and commits to action on the outputs. In the NWD there was no external problem holder: TEC took that leadership role for the first time.

The lack of a problem holder was seen by several respondents as having contributed significantly to the problems of lack of leadership and direction experienced in the NWD. However, it became clear that the real issue was the lack of a problem holder in a process designed around having one. There is no obvious reason why a different model of stakeholder dialogue could not be designed which works perfectly well without an external problem holder.

## 4.5 Need for changes to the dialogue model

The evaluation findings point to some major problems with the model of stakeholder dialogue as it was used in the NVD. It is therefore suggested that the model is reviewed, with particular reference to:

- The need to develop a clear **vision and purpose** for any dialogue process and to ensure that all participants understand and are committed to the general direction and purpose, as well as to specific objectives.
- The need for effective **leadership and direction**, greater dynamism, focus, planning and preparation in the dialogue process and the importance of translating ideas and recommendations into action (either by participants themselves or an external target).
- The need for greater **understanding** of the benefits and limitations of stakeholder dialogue among participants, so that there is greater clarity about roles and responsibilities.
- The need for facilitators and organisers to have sufficient **knowledge of the subject** to design, plan and manage processes which are relevant to the key issues / problems of the subject area being tackled by the dialogue.
- The need to recognise **potential conflicts between principles of equality and diversity, and effective productive processes**. Participants in stakeholder dialogue are not always equal in terms of knowledge and understanding of the topic - a level playing field does not preclude inequality among players.
- The need for much better **planning, communications and reporting** between stakeholders and to wider audiences, including the production of reports and briefing papers (including briefing on participants' potential roles), before, during and after the process, and the development of steering groups with clear roles, as a recognised part of the design. Steering group roles may include:
  - Leadership and direction: taking responsibility for leading and progressing the dialogue (including identifying stakeholders, setting aims and terms of reference and agreeing the appropriate model of engagement), setting priorities, supporting the project management and clarifying this role and activities with the participants at each stage of the process.
  - Acting as ambassadors: raising the profile of the process and making links to other relevant initiatives.
  - Clarifying responsibility for outputs from the process, and ensuring delivery.
  - Ensuring good communications across all layers of the dialogue process.
  - Ensuring stakeholder commitment to the agreements and outputs of the process (including possibly through a formal 'sign up' process).
  - Clarifying other roles and responsibilities (e.g. the role of the facilitator, 'problem holder', funder, project manager and stakeholders).
- The need to see stakeholder dialogue as a **creative process** in which stakeholders are encouraged to go beyond their 'comfort zone' of existing knowledge, look to the future rather than focus on existing problems, and find new ways of thinking about complex modern problems rather than simply seeking common ground and avoiding contentious issues and disagreements.
- The need to develop **new models for stakeholder dialogue** for use in different circumstances, rather than attempting to use the same model in all cases.



## 5. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

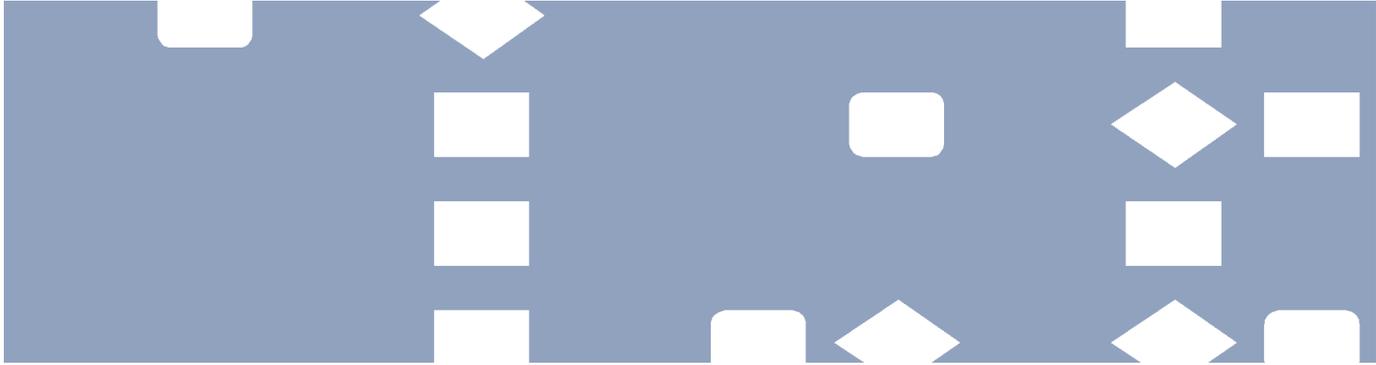
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Most respondents felt there was a fairly good mix of participants involved in the NWD and that overall there was reasonable representation of stakeholders from the field of waste management (including recycling), the NGO sector, academics and professional bodies. Government (central and local) and industry (e.g. manufacturers) were present to a lesser degree. The decision not to involve the general public in this process was strongly supported (by 82% of evaluation questionnaire respondents).

It was seen as very positive that a senior official from Defra was involved throughout Phase 2. However, numerous respondents suggested that broader representation from Government was needed (especially from the Treasury).

There were some problems with the stakeholder involvement in the NWD:

- There needed to be more senior people, especially decision-makers and influencers: some of those that attended were not senior enough to be able to commit their organisations to ways forward agreed in the meetings.
- There was inconsistency in attendance: different people attended different events.
- The process was to some extent 'preaching to the converted'; many of those who attended already knew each other.
- Certain key interests were missing from much of the process: politicians (local and national), Government (see above), green groups which operate locally, and industry, were mentioned several times.
- There were difficulties with the types of stakeholder involved as well, in two ways:
  - Quite a few of the participants were technical, scientific or regulatory people, or from industry, often acknowledged as experts in their fields, and so found the facilitation process too "soft" and "liberal" (i.e. focus on equality and inclusivity rather than pace and direction), compared to their normal working practices.
  - The stakeholders were primarily from organised official and other groupings, and many of them tended to approach the dialogue with quite specific agendas, limits to what they were willing to discuss, and limits to what they were prepared to change in their own organisations.



## 6. ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

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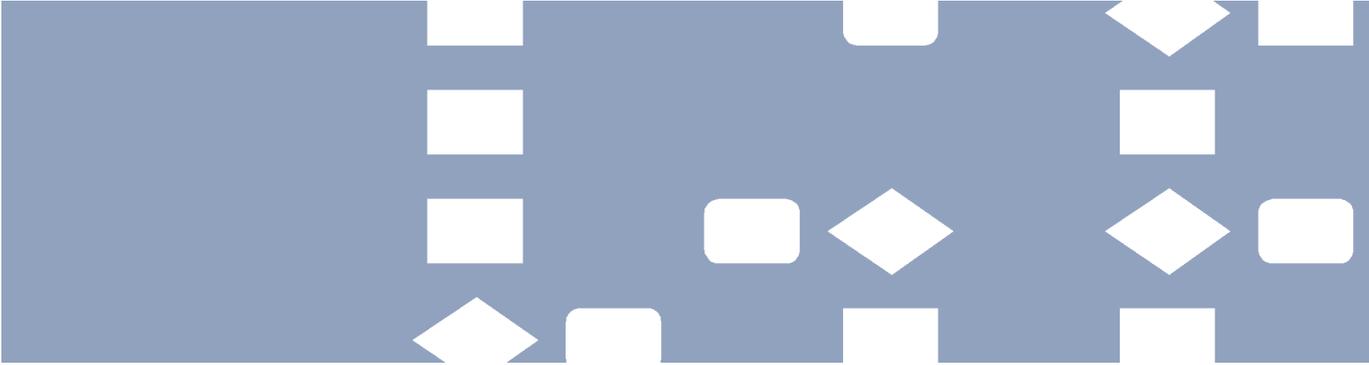
NWD was an experimental approach to stakeholder dialogue in that it was the first time TEC had taken the lead in the process, rather than working with an external 'problem holder'. TEC's role as an independent facilitating organisation was well understood and respected by evaluation respondents, and it clearly had a reputation for well-organised and well-run dialogue processes, especially in terms of quality of facilitation, experience, independence, openness and transparency, and being well-connected to the right people.

Almost all respondents realised that TEC was leading the NWD, but the change in the nature of TEC's role in this instance made very little difference. Where it did make a difference, the strengths were that the process was run by an independent facilitating organisation (rather than one with a vested interest); the weaknesses were seen to be lack of leadership and direction in the NWD, and poor management and support for the process (including several changes to key personnel during the process).

Other issues raised about TEC's role included:

- Lack of clarity about the relationship between TEC and the facilitators, with the facilitators being seen as independent of TEC.
- A sense that the NWD was driven by availability of funding rather than an organisational commitment to solving problems of waste management which, together with the frenetic level of activity on waste management at the time, contributed to a sense that the NWD was not necessarily what was needed at the time.

Despite some relatively minor problems with the role TEC played in the NWD, TEC was seen as well-placed to lead stakeholder dialogue processes of this sort, having an almost unique strategic position and long experience.



# 7. KEY OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE NWD

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Participatory processes are usually assessed in terms of their outputs (products such as meetings or documents) and outcomes (the results of the processes over time, such as policy change, personal learning, networking and relationship-building). This section summarises the outputs of the NWD, and then analyses the outcomes in terms of:

- The extent to which the process met its stated objectives
- Impacts on policy and practice
- Developing social capital (e.g. networking, building trust and relationships and capacity building).

## 7.1 Outputs of the NWD

The outputs of the NWD were essentially the following:

- Six national stakeholder meetings (covering both phases), attracting 150 major stakeholders (81 in Phase 1 and 69 in Phase 2), leading to agreement on numerous recommendations for action.
- Six working groups undertaking detailed work on cultural change, markets development, infrastructure and planning, waste strategies, public engagement, and data and information. There were specific products from the working groups including:
  - A literature review commissioned by the Markets Development working group (and produced by SWAP), which was passed on to WRAP, and provided useful initial data. The review was published on the TEC website ([www.the-environment-council.org.uk](http://www.the-environment-council.org.uk)).
  - A brief initial literature review on public engagement in waste produced by the Public Engagement working group which was published as part of the final summary report of Phase 2 (TEC 2002).
  - Good practice guidance produced by the Data and Information working group which was also published as part of the final summary report of Phase 2 (TEC 2002).
  - Research commissioned by the Cultural Change working group on the effectiveness of public education, awareness raising and action campaigns (the research was undertaken by AEA Technology) which was published in June 2003, and is available on the TEC website ([www.the-environment-council.org.uk](http://www.the-environment-council.org.uk)).
  - The best practice guidance on public engagement in waste issues (suggested by a working group) has been produced by TEC (as a separate project), and parts of the work of the Cultural Change working group are being taken forward by TEC's new National Resource and Waste Forum.
- The recommendations from the NWD were presented to Government, alongside the involvement of Defra, DTI and the Cabinet Office during Phase 2 of the NWD:
  - Links were made to the Cabinet Office during the dialogue to input into their study of waste management (published as Waste Not Want Not). TEC were then invited to facilitate a large Waste Minimisation workshop for the Cabinet Office during this time.

- Presentations of the final agreed recommendations were made to HM Treasury by TEC and WWF UK (representing the wider stakeholders in the NWD).
- A summary report was published at the end of each phase.

## 7.2 Meeting the agreed objectives

The objectives of the two phases of the NWD have already been outlined. The evidence to this evaluation suggests that the NWD did in fact meet all its objectives as formally stated. It identified issues affecting progress towards sustainable waste management, and identified ways to address barriers to progress (Phase 1). It also tackled the issues around planning and decision-making processes for new waste facilities, made recommendations on how these issues could be addressed, and built relationships and understanding among stakeholders.

However, the stated objectives did not fully reflect the wide range of expectations and assumptions of the participants, and the extent to which these implicit objectives were met was more mixed:

- Expectations were most fully met in terms of networking and meeting people, and learning about the views of others.
- Expectations were least fully met in terms of influencing or changing policy, or improving practice in the field.

Much of the frustration of some participants was thus a result of unfulfilled expectations, rather than a failure of the NWD to meet its stated objectives. However, this perception of failure is an important indicator of the success of the NWD overall, and it is a key lesson for future dialogue processes both to ensure that more time is spent initially clarifying and agreeing the overall purpose and objectives to prevent the development of expectations which will remain unmet, and also to clarify who is expected to take the agreed actions.

## 7.3 Impacts on policy and practice

Although impacts on policy and practice were not among the stated objectives of the NWD, there was an expectation that such impacts would be an outcome of the process. Evidence to the evaluation suggests that the NWD had little or no **direct** impact on policy or practice, nor did it change the priorities of the participants' organisations, beyond raising awareness of the issues. Particular reasons identified for this lack of impact included the separation between the NWD and mainstream decision-making processes, and the timing of the NWD (taking place at the wrong point in the policy process and being too slow to respond to specific policy developments as they emerged).

There were two ways, however, in which the NWD was seen to contribute to **policy development**:

- Contributing to a greater understanding of others' viewpoints and thus creating a greater **convergence of views** on sustainable waste management. Some participants found the dialogue informed their own internal organisational priorities and actions (not necessarily changing them but possibly reinforcing existing directions which had the support of other stakeholders).
- Contributing to **better policy development processes** by extending understanding of stakeholder dialogue and encouraging policy makers to involve a wider range of stakeholders in policy processes. Specific examples were quoted of events run subsequently by the Cabinet Office, Defra and the Environment Agency as a result of the NWD.

Suggestions for how the NWD could have had more influence over policy and action included:

- Decision-makers taking the ideas from the NWD and using them to develop policy and programmes
- Participants taking greater responsibility for taking action themselves as a result
- Greater emphasis in the design of the process on outputs and use of outputs including representations to government and others
- Earlier commitment from government to act on outcomes
- Greater media publicity.

## 7.4 Developing social capital

The development of social capital, and capacity building for individuals, is increasingly recognised by Government (especially the Cabinet Office, ONS and the Department of Health) as essential to sustainable development. The UK Government has formally adopted the OECD definition of social capital as: “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups”.

Given the importance attributed to effective joint working on problems of waste management, it is useful to assess the impacts that the NWD has had on the levels of social capital that exist among the participants, and the extent to which the NWD built the capacity of participants to engage effectively on sustainable waste management issues in future.

The evaluation found strong evidence that the NWD had strengthened networks and created new contacts, contributed to learning (about the views of others, strategic waste management issues, and about stakeholder dialogue), and developed trust, relationships and understanding among those involved. As one respondent pointed out: “decisions in contentious issues like waste management are always difficult, and the transparency of the decision-making process is very important, but this does not necessarily mean agreement among all parties - establishing common understanding, rather than consensus, is the crucial step”.

The evaluation also found strong evidence that the NWD contributed significantly to the levels of social capital (through building and strengthening networks, relationships and trust), and to the capacity of individuals (through learning), both of which will make a contribution to future collective work on waste management issues. Although less tangible than immediate changes to policy and practice, these achievements are likely to have beneficial long term effects.

## 7.5 Comment on outputs and outcomes

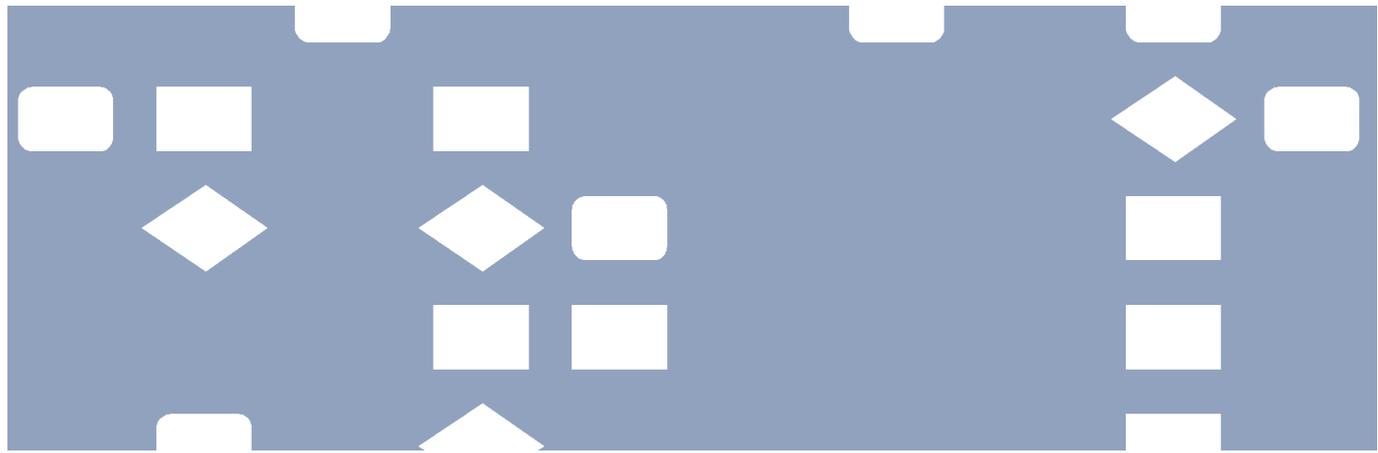
Overall, the benefits and impacts identified from the NWD have tended to be much more around the development of social capital and capacity building rather than around policy and practice change, and there seems a strong correlation between these outcomes and the model of stakeholder dialogue used.

The lack of appreciation by some respondents of these benefits may be due to three factors:

- The gap between individuals’ experience of the process and the production and use (to their knowledge) of the products/outputs, leading to dissociation between the two
- Lack of clarity about who should take those outputs forward into real action, and
- Simply the different values ascribed to different outcomes (i.e. respondents putting a higher value on policy and practice impacts than social capital outcomes).

It has not been possible within this evaluation to assess the extent to which the benefits of these specific but more intangible impacts (e.g. social capital) may change policy and practice over time, but these could be significant (e.g. networks to share practice and develop thinking).

In the meantime, the majority of questionnaire respondents (64%) and most interviewees said they would get involved in stakeholder dialogue processes on waste again. Many respondents did have reservations, and exactly the same proportion said that lessons from the NWD needed to be learned and the design of the process changed before they would get involved in such a process again (64%).



## 8. CONCLUSIONS

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The National Waste Dialogue (NWD) was an experimental approach to stakeholder dialogue in that it was the first time The Environment Council (TEC) had taken the lead in this way. This evaluation was commissioned to examine the NWD in some detail, but focused on testing the two assumptions on which the design of the NWD was based:

- That stakeholder dialogue was an appropriate model for addressing the issues of sustainable waste management.
- That TEC (as an independent, facilitating organisation) could provide appropriate neutral leadership for these processes.

From the evidence presented in this report (drawing on questionnaire responses, interviews, a workshop to test initial findings and an electronic consultation on a draft of this report), we can conclude the following in response to these two issues.

### 8.1 Stakeholder dialogue as an appropriate model for addressing sustainable waste management

Stakeholder dialogue is a vital element in addressing the issues of sustainable waste management. It can bring together the enormously diverse range of interests involved in waste management to increase understanding and build social capital, within a context in which there remain complex divisions in statutory responsibilities for waste management. All sectors are involved (public, private and voluntary) and there is a mix of measures and legislation that require leadership from outside Government. Within this context, all the evidence to this evaluation suggests that legislation will be needed in some areas but also that long term solutions will only be found through greater understanding of the issues among the key stakeholders, leading to a convergence of views on what needs to be done and better relationships among those responsible.

This evaluation shows that the NWD did contribute to greater understanding and convergence of views among participants, as well as to the trust, networks and relationships (social capital), which strengthen common understanding and willingness to take jointly agreed actions.

The NWD had very specific objectives and was operating at a national strategic level. It therefore targeted specific stakeholders relevant to these objectives (e.g. excluding the public). While it was seen as entirely appropriate by the stakeholders involved that the public should not be included in the NWD process, there were concerns that the stakeholders involved were not sufficiently senior, were not involved consistently enough, and had varying views on what they should contribute to the NWD and what they should do as a result. The type and role of stakeholders involved clearly impacted on the nature of the process, and therefore the process and the results of this evaluation

need to be seen in that light, and not taken to be indicative of the results of all stakeholder dialogue processes.

However, there was a strong consensus that any future stakeholder dialogue on sustainable waste management needs to build on the lessons from the NWD, and the design of processes may need to change significantly. There were problems with the model of dialogue process used, especially in terms of lack of clarity over purpose and direction, but there were also important outputs (useful meetings, new research and a consensus on clear recommendations on a range of issues), and valuable outcomes, especially around developing levels of social capital (as above) and capacity building (learning about the views and priorities of others, as well as the technical issues around sustainable waste management).

Poor stakeholder dialogue can lead to frustration among participants, reinforce stereotypes among stakeholders and take up valuable time from already over-stretched public, private and voluntary bodies. However, high quality dialogue, carefully designed and well-delivered to achieve its specific purpose in a specific context can be very valuable. The response from 64% of questionnaire respondents that they would be willing to get involved in stakeholder dialogue processes in waste again, as long as the lessons from the NWD are learned, indicates the value that these individuals place on the process.

The evaluation has also shown that participants in the NWD valued impacts on policy and practice more highly than impacts on relationships, networks and learning. Any future stakeholder dialogue on waste issues will need to consider the potential for impacting on policy and practice in order to attract similar stakeholders, make the benefits and limitations of stakeholder dialogue generally much clearer, and change the model of stakeholder dialogue if the impacts on policy and practice that are desired by these stakeholders are to be achieved, alongside the benefits for social capital and capacity building.

## 8.2 The role of the TEC in leading these processes

The Environment Council (TEC) could provide appropriate leadership for these processes. TEC's role as an independent facilitating organisation is understood and respected among the participants in the evaluation, and it is seen as being one of the few organisations which could undertake such a strategic role.

There are some questions around the issue of 'neutrality'. There was a lot of input from evaluation participants about the problems of the 'content-free' approach to stakeholder dialogue, and the facilitation model that 'neutrality' seems to imply. This feedback suggests that lack of subject knowledge is a drawback rather than a strength if TEC is to take a leadership role. If TEC works simply as a technical facilitating organisation for an external client (the 'problem holder') there are fewer difficulties.

If TEC does wish to take more of a leadership role, as it did in the NWD, the stakeholder dialogue model will need to be revised to bring in mechanisms which would meet the need for detailed subject knowledge, accountability of the process (e.g. through more effective and explicit steering group arrangements), follow up of outputs (such as recommendations made), and monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

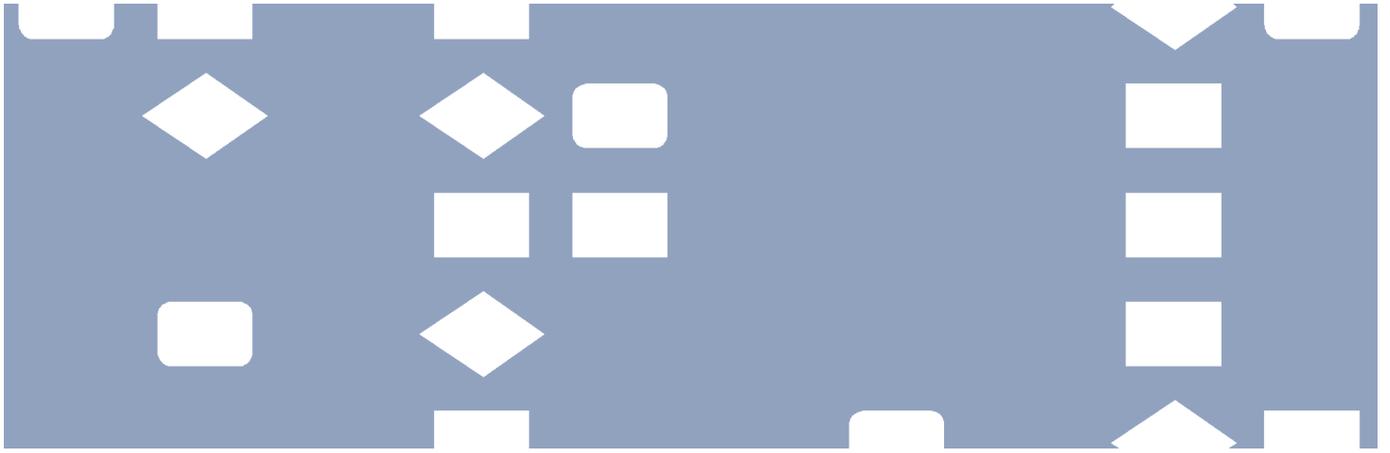
If neutrality and independence are taken to mean a professional stance rather than a 'content free' model of facilitation, which implies lack of knowledge about the subject, that would meet the expressed views of those who contributed to this evaluation. It is TEC's independence from specific interest groups, alongside its experience and commitment to stakeholder dialogue processes and outcomes, which are particular strengths.

## 8.3 Lessons for the future

The high quality of responses from NWD participants and others to the research for this evaluation has generated valuable lessons for the design of future stakeholder dialogue processes on sustainable waste management and other issues, as contained throughout this report. Overall, these can be summarised as the need for:

- Clarity of purpose and desired outcomes for any stakeholder dialogue process.
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities for the inputs, outputs and outcomes before, during and after stakeholder dialogue processes, including clear lines of communication and accountability. An enhanced role for multi-stakeholder steering groups, and the development of briefing materials on stakeholder dialogue could be particularly valuable here.
- Demonstration of the value of stakeholder dialogue processes in different subject areas, by identifying and promoting the impacts of such processes (over and above how they are done).
- The use of different models of stakeholder engagement for different purposes, working out what is right for the desired purpose, outcomes and context rather than imposing one particular model. There are now numerous other well-tested models of engagement on which to draw.
- Sufficient understanding of the current priority issues on any subject identified for stakeholder dialogue in order to provide adequate leadership and direction, including understanding of the wider context to ensure appropriate links to other relevant initiatives and policy opportunities.
- Recognition of the scale of the task, and the need for appropriate resources and management support needed to deliver.
- New approaches to ensuring expert and research input to stakeholder dialogue in ways that do not undermine the integrity of the process and fit within the control and management systems which have been agreed.

Stakeholder dialogue cannot solve all problems but, if well-designed and well-managed, it does have some very important strengths that can help contemporary society overcome some currently intractable problems. In the overall history of policy development stakeholder dialogue is relatively new, but there is now sufficient experience and knowledge to enter a new phase of development and refinement, which could move stakeholder dialogue into a much more central position in the development of sustainable policies and practices.

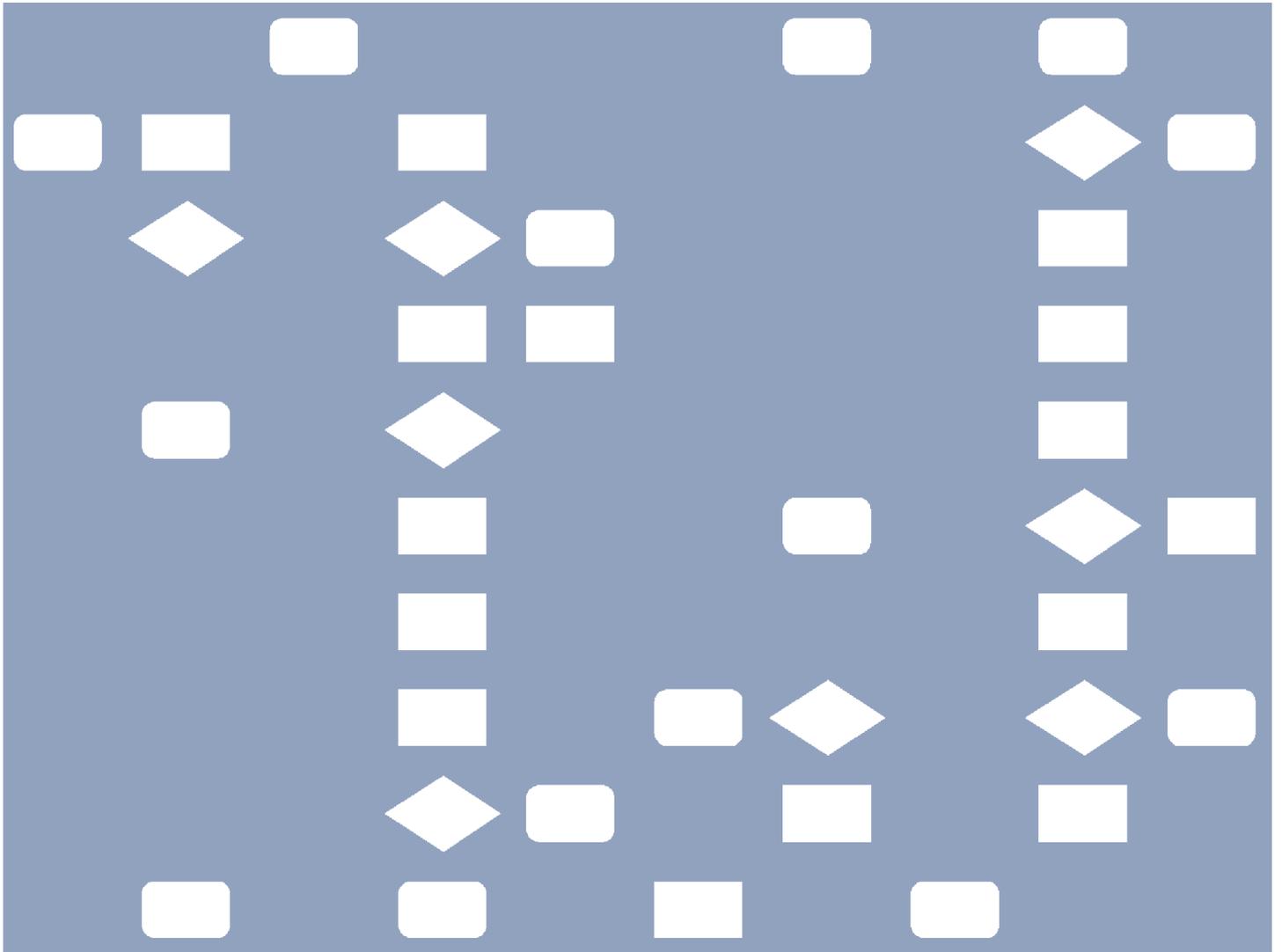


## 9. NEXT STEPS

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Evaluations are designed to identify lessons rather than issue prescriptive recommendations: detailed recommendations need to be developed through discussions with those wishing to take further action, including further information about future organisational and policy priorities. We therefore propose only that:

- This report is circulated to all participants in the NWD, as the final product of the process.
- That TEC accept this report and act on the lessons identified (both the broad lessons above and the detailed points throughout the report) to improve the design and delivery of the stakeholder dialogue processes it manages, and reports on those changes to its own stakeholders (including those involved in this evaluation).
- That other stakeholders accept the report as a contribution to knowledge and understanding in the field of stakeholder dialogue.
- That a further, brief, review of the impacts of the NWD is undertaken in a year's time, including a review of actions taken as a result of this evaluation (as recommended by the evaluation workshop).



RMC Environment Fund

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