A REVIEW OF ISSUES RELATING TO THE DISPOSAL OF URBAN WASTE IN
SYDNEY MELBOURNE AND ADELAIDE
An Environmental History

by

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ABSTRACT

Since human beings began to live in settled communities the effective disposal of waste has been an issue central to their amenity, if not their survival. The larger and denser a settled population, the greater the volume of waste generated, and the less the available space for its disposal close to source.

Urbanisation began in Australia with European settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales in 1788. Prior to that time the inhabitants were relatively small groups of widely dispersed, nomadic, hunter gatherers. The majority of the new settlers lived in fixed habitations within defined geographical areas and were in many respects the antithesis of the aboriginal inhabitants.

This thesis takes an overview of urban waste disposal practices in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide since the time of their respective settlement by Europeans through to the year 2000. The narrative identifies how such factors as the growth of representative government, the emergence of a bureaucracy, the visitation of bubonic plague, changed perceptions of risk, and the rise of the environmental movement, have directly influenced urban waste disposal outcomes. Recent events in each of the cities under review illustrate how levels of community opposition to the siting of landfills have taken centre stage in the urban waste disposal debate.

In conclusion, the factors that have influenced urban waste disposal are enumerated. Finally, it is proposed that urban waste disposal in the cities under review falls into four distinctly defined Epochs delineated with reference to specific events which have determined how, by whom, where and for what reasons, waste has been disposed of.