Paul Lamble - Smart Water Consulting

Dr Paul Lamble has over 15 years experience in the water efficiency industry. This experience encompasses local, and state government as well as private consulting work. Previously he was Senior Sustainable Living Officer (Water Programs) with Lake Macquarie City Council, which involved "environmental sustainability, water efficiency and water management".

Dr Lamble's work has seen the completion of many projects and ongoing management of sports grounds and landscapes that required the use of recycled organics, soil/compost blends and different strategies used to rehabilitate or simply maintain soil and increase water efficiency.

When asked of the importance recycled organics play in these roles his answer is simple and straightforward, "it is critical… Australian soils are typically old, nutrient poor soils that are low in organic matter. Unless amended, they have a low capacity to retain nutrients and water". To move forward, "recycled organics need to play a bigger role in landscape and soil management projects".

Dr Lamble would argue that when people do not understand something, then it often produces a fight or flight response. This manifests itself from outright opposition "it won't work" or "it will kill the grass" through to a reluctance to explore with a range of seemingly rational responses, such as "too risky", "not a priority", "outside the scope", "costs too much", "unproven". Soil science and the role of organics in healthy soils and resilient, healthy turf is complicated and not easy to understand, so overcoming the unknown is a fact of life for the industry.

This is why "we see so few project specifications with any organic matter requirements". The landscape and sports turf industry still doesn't truly understand the benefits of using recycled organics, particularly when the benefits only become truly obvious well after the initial construction is completed. The trouble is that when things get tight on projects, as they inevitably do, then the less well understood items, and the long-term goals disappear.

However, the question still remains, "what outcomes is this project trying to achieve and how can organics help achieve them? The drivers and the priorities are usually not focused on the benefits of healthy, resilient soils and turf. Those involved in setting project parameters seem to prioritise items such as irrigation, slit drainage and other infrastructure above soils and ongoing turf health and resilience".

A common theme and thought put forward to AORA is that a lack of education and misinformation is driving decisions away from the use of recycled organics. "Product quality is crucial" Dr Lamble continues, "it only takes one cowboy or one unfortunate incident" for a tidal wave of anti-organic attitude to flood consumers' thoughts and alter their actions. And, there must be project or site-specific information available to help people understand that there are "different types and applications of compost that are specific to the site and the project."

Dr Lamble would like to see more involvement from industry and government bodies at the educational levels, such as in schools, TAFE and Universities. There are "plenty of opportunities where they could get involved in helping a school, for example, to fix their sports ground. This would help expand the knowledge base through a practical project that students could analyse, create and implement". This type of involvement coupled with more relevant and accessible factual information would help improve the lack of understanding and knowledge that is currently stifling longevity and productivity of our green spaces.

This type of involvement would also help drive future generations to understand that it is not just about what is on top of the ground, but just as important to understand what is going on underneath. A "little more research, analysis and strategy" can really save Councils and businesses a lot of money and time if they can go into a project with a holistic understanding of the site and its long-term requirements.

Dr Lamble runs Smart Water Consulting, who are "fully committed to the provision of professional services of the highest quality and we are constantly aware of the need to use water efficiently and effectively" and he acknowledges there will always be "issues to consider and a client's risk to

manage and minimise”. Education, knowledge and consumer confidence are once again key criteria to the Australian organics recycling industry’s continued growth.