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Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

1. Adopt a container deposit scheme

Both major parties have voted three times against a container deposit scheme for Victoria and in my opinion have not adequately explained their reasons for doing so to a [public overwhelmingly in favour of such a scheme](#).

Container deposit and return measures have been shown to keep bottles, cans and cartons out of landfill, provide a valuable source of clean recyclable material and drastically reduce litter. If the experience of SA (which began its scheme in 1975!) is any guide, it will be rare for Victorians to see discarded bottles and cans on the streets, in our parks and waterways, once our own scheme is commenced and matures. In the first eleven months of its operation, the relatively recent NSW scheme has resulted in the [return of 900 million containers](#)

Every other state, apart from Tasmania, has a scheme in place or is planning one in the near future. I think the Victorian government would agree that the issues of waste, recycling and litter are much the same across the country. For historical reasons, the Commonwealth does not have direct legislative power over the environment. It is up to the states then to ensure, individually and together, that there is uniform, or as uniform as possible, legislation to deal with these national problems.

Victoria should join the rest of mainland Australia in introducing a container deposit scheme.

2. Ban single use plastics

[Victoria will ban lightweight, single-use plastic bags](#) from the end of 2019. This measure could go further. To keep more non-recyclable plastics out of the environment and landfill, other products should be withdrawn from the market. These include plastic cutlery, straws, hot food containers and lids, sauce sachets, sandwich wedges and lids on takeaway cups and plastic lined containers and cups. [Hobart City Council have recently passed a by-law](#) to disallow these types of packaging.

3. Rethink waste to energy plans

Incinerating waste to produce energy seems like a good solution to a difficult and growing problem but comes at a cost.

While the disposal of hazardous materials by incineration is often the best treatment option, more general application of the technology can lessen the incentive to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. After all, if waste can be destroyed by being burnt and in the process there is a net energy gain, where is the obvious benefit in reducing the amount produced?

Waste often contains valuable resources, which if not filtered out (i.e. recycled) before incineration, are destroyed. The return on the embedded energy in materials - e.g. plastics - is also poor.

The community is justifiably worried about emissions from incinerators. These can be very toxic and include dangerous organic pollutants such as dioxins, acid gases, heavy metals and particulate matter. A [National Toxics Network document](#) claims that waste incinerators produce “far more carbon dioxide per unit of energy than coal, oil or gas fired power stations”. Gasification and combustion also produce toxic residues, the waste from waste, creating another disposal challenge.

4. Provide the opportunity to pay more for a better outcome

Many sensible proposals to reduce and process waste have been made in submissions to this and other inquiries. Doubtless if the measures were so straightforward and easy to implement then they would be in place by now. That they are not suggests obstacles. If one consideration weighing on regulators' minds is the costs to the public then I hope the government provides an opportunity to say we are prepared to pay.

A container deposit scheme will likely increase the price of beverages (as the industry has consistently claimed). A ban on single-use plastics is also likely to have a price impact, particularly on takeaway food and drink. Please consult with the public and allow us to show our willingness to accept the increases for the benefits of less litter and the re-use of plastic, paper and aluminium.

Similarly, one expects that more recycling of construction waste will add to the cost of housing and other building. Don't give up on the idea of getting industry to play its part,

without first determining whether the public is prepared to support such a scheme by paying more.

5. Encourage cultural change to reduce consumption and waste

All the expert opinion I have read claims that it will be impossible to achieve an effective circular economy without an absolute reduction in waste. In its [Transitioning to a Circular Economy action plan](#), the state has urged more repair and reuse of products. In effect, it is encouraging less consumption. This is a promising development, as, in general, governments seem very adverse to suggesting we purchase less. Our whole market-driven economic model depends on growth and *increasing* consumption. According to the economists' mantra, a drop in consumer demand means less business activity and fewer jobs potentially culminating in recession and high unemployment.

I hope that, in the context of the inquiry, this paradox is not glossed over and hidden away from scrutiny. The public need to be made aware that we cannot continue to pursue high consumption, materialistic lifestyles and expect adequate solutions to recycling, waste and litter. The market is ultimately incapable of solving these problems. If we want a more sustainable society, there needs to be a fundamental change in values not only price signals and regulation. Government can foster this change by supporting sharing schemes at the local community level. It can also continue to invest in libraries, public spaces, parks and community events and festivals, encouraging less spending on products for entertainment and recreation.