

I am writing this submission as a resident of the City of Melbourne, a professional and an individual with a deep concern for the future of our environment.

I believe it is the responsibility of the Victorian government to establish and maintain a coherent, efficient and environmentally responsible approach to solid waste management across the state, including assistance to local councils. I am aware of China's decision to refuse our recycling material which in my opinion was never a long-term solution for our recyclable products. Since this decision, I have read about the recycling crisis that Victoria has faced as a result of not setting up a recycling system of our own. It is my understanding that recycling plants are now overstocked and are resorting to dumping recyclable goods in landfill. Furthermore, I have read concerning reports detailing that only a very small proportion of the items in our recycle bins are actually recycled.

I am a migrant Australian and I am proud of my country and the way in which our governments strive to establish systems to benefit all Australians and their welfare. I have been disappointed recently though when I have learnt how unequipped we are to deal with the environmental crisis that is looming.

With reference to your enquiry into the current waste management and recycling system, I offer my humble opinions per below.

- I don't believe that Combustion or Thermal Waste to Energy technologies are a sustainable energy source. My concern with this technology stems from the huge carbon footprint and health concerns that arise from burning our waste. On the face of it, I can understand that it is a solution to both our waste problem and energy shortage however, I feel the benefits with this technology are hugely short-lived. I think the huge energy that is likely to be required to incinerate waste will only leave an equally huge carbon footprint. I also am concerned that these "waste to energy" technologies may threaten current and future recycling efforts as there will be a greater value placed on materials that can be burnt due to their energy output. I would not want there to be a situation where materials are diverted from recycling plants to incinerators purely because producing energy is seen to be a "better use of our waste".
- I am concerned as to why there is presently no container deposit scheme in Victoria. I have explored the impact of plastic beverage bottles on the environment and I believe a plastic container deposit scheme similar to the scheme run by South Australia would be hugely beneficial to Victorians. I believe it would reduce the number of plastic bottles that end up polluting beautiful landscapes such as the banks of the Yarra River and our beaches. I also think it would give Victorians an incentive to collect and correctly dispose of their plastic bottles which would contribute to a more efficient recycling process.
- I think there should be an emphasis on reducing waste. I often walk past my apartment rubbish bin and I am shocked to see people throwing out backpacks, lamps and other household items that could be fixed. I think we live in a society where it is often easier to buy a new item than fix an existing one which only results in more household goods ending up in landfill. I believe we can use any government sustainability fund to support repair initiatives including training programs for skill development and subsidising repairs to reduce landfill.
- One of the issues I face as a consumer myself is how difficult it can be to reduce my waste in my shopping. Most food and drink is often packaged in plastic and it requires me to shop at my bulk foods store or the farmers market in order to shop plastic free. These options are not accessible to everyone. I think the Victorian government could divert some of the sustainability funding into product stewardship research. I believe that there needs to be more encouragement for businesses to look into reusable packaging or locally sourced recycled products instead of relying on imported recycled resin for example. This would not only create a more circular waste economy but also encourage the use of outputs from local recycling efforts similar to the way the current REDCycle initiative creates equipment for schools and parks. A subsidisation system for businesses who use locally produced recycled materials could also be explored.

- Support local businesses, community groups, hospitals and individuals to compost better. I find this is particularly lacking in the hospitality industry where food waste is highest and I think the Victorian government could encourage composting in these industries. As a resident within an apartment block in Melbourne's CBD I find composting is not an easy practice due to lack of space/gardens. I feel more resources provided to raise awareness amongst communities about organic waste and composting would divert so much waste from landfill.
- Mandate that all business, schools, organisations etc. are required to have recycling and composting service. Sustainability funding should also support education and implementation of recycling infrastructure in these organisations.
- Some of the government sustainability fund should be used to develop and deliver education campaigns in communities or apartment blocks focused on informing waste-wise decisions, reducing waste, reusing, re-purposing, repairing and correct recycling.

I thank you for reading my submission.

Regards,

Kirthika Kannan