

To the State Government of Victoria,

RE: Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management of the State of Victoria

As a concerned community member, I am writing to you with my concerns about the current state of Victoria (and Australia's) recycling and waste management.

I believe we have a strong culture of recycling in good faith in Victoria and are a state with many waste conscious people, with more people becoming more conscious about waste in light of recent events like the China National Sword Policy debacle, climate change marches and the unthinkable vast rate of worldwide pollution. It is because of this that I am writing to you, so that the voices of concerned individuals can shape the larger political decisions that will have a far greater impact to shape waste management than the efforts of any one person alone, no matter how strong our resolve to stop pollution and prevent more carbon emitting waste.

Please find enclosed responses to the points to be addressed by this inquiry:

1. 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. This responsibility would include overseeing council policies to ensure there is homogeneity or at least a baseline standard in what can and can't be recycled and that there are adequate facilities built with enough capacity to process this recycling waste in its various forms. Oversight of every council in Victoria is needed to ensure circular waste management and that there is no need to export waste overseas. Whilst it may be much easier to export our recycling waste, the failed China National Sword Policy and dumping in Malaysia has only shown Victorians that we cannot offload our waste management responsibilities to those overseas and pollute their land. It is despicable but also only contributes to the pollution that we are trying to avoid by putting our recycling in our recycling bins anyway. I am sure many many Victorians would very much appreciate money being allocated to set up closed circuit recycling management facilities where recycling waste can be made into new products and then sold within Victoria by mandating certain amounts of these products to be sold by stores like Bunnings or used by government industries so that the future use of these recycled goods may be ensured somehow.
2. From the opinions of the public, the China National Sword policy was not anticipated nor responded to properly. If it was anticipated then Australia and Victoria would have had the capacity and infrastructure to manage our own recycling, or at the very least, had a comprehensive plan in place which involved building the infrastructure to have it finished in the next 2-5 years, to phase out exporting our recycling to China. There has been no such plan because if there was, we would not be shipping our recycling to other countries as a backup for China. The need for this inquiry to address the current crisis of recycling in Victoria is a testament to the fact that the China National Sword Policy was not anticipated by Federal or State governments. This is why this inquiry is so important and additionally why it is so important that what emerges from this inquiry is Victoria rapidly moving towards a concrete plan for closed loop management of our recycling.

- 3 Identifying short and long-term solutions to the recycling and waste management system crisis, taking into account:
 - a) the need to avoid dangerous stockpiling and ensure recyclable waste is actually being recycled
 - b) the cleaning and sorting capabilities and the processing capabilities in Victoria and the potential to expand the local recycling industry
 - c) how to better enable the use of recycled materials in local manufacturing;
 - d) the existing business model and economic challenges facing the existing industry;
 - e) the quantifiable benefits, including job creation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, of pursuing elements of a circular economy in Victoria;

There is a very large amount of work that needs to be done to plan enough recycling facilities, buy land, build these facilities and operate them to sort and process each type of recyclable waste. This is because we do not currently have this infrastructure to manage the vast amount of waste produced by Victoria, leading to stockpiling and the closure of the recycling plants that we do have. This is a recycling crisis. There are some recycling facilities around Victoria to sort the waste and there are privatised companies that deal with turning waste into usable and valuable industry products, like the company Paper Forests which was highlighted in the recent 60 Minutes expose. But we need many many many more recycling plants to be built to manage this waste and built fast so that stockpiling does not occur and waste management speed can meet the rate of waste supply.

The industry will need to expand considerably and also employ many more people from workers to engineers, scientists and project managers to execute a state wide system, starting by trialling certain councils that are the easiest to set up with a grand plan to expand to the whole of Victoria in the next 5 years. If there are no solutions for certain products to be recycled, collaboration should be sought with privatised companies worldwide with innovative solutions for products made out of plastic waste. Victoria could also seek guidance from other places around the world like San Francisco, which has managed to execute recycling on a larger scale in quite a large industrial city. The culture exists within the community and will grow and adapt with initiatives put in place by government- if more compartmentalisation of waste is needed when put into bins by consumers, this change can occur as we have a high consciousness for waste, especially right now.

The solution is NOT to burn our recycling like some countries have done through waste-to-energy projects. This is not acceptable to the health of Victorians or the environment and the fact that these works are going ahead on the Marysville waste-to-energy project is a travesty due to its toxic long- and short-term effects. The recycling problem has to be approached from a perspective of reducing emissions instead of prioritising faster and cheaper methods with little regards to health effects and long-term consequences.

Expanding and reworking our entire recycling infrastructure will require an ongoing commitment to the closed loop goal which should not waver between political tenures but be a common goal among all parties as a long-term investment in the longevity of Victoria and the planet, which is essential to human survival and the homeostasis of natural ecosystems. This ongoing commitment will require a large sum of funding, which is why it is fantastic to hear that there is a \$400 million dollar Sustainability Fund to potentially allocate money to closed-loop recycling management.

- 4 Strategies to reduce waste generation and better manage all waste such as soft plastics, compostable paper and pulp, and commercial waste, including, but not limited to:
 - a) product stewardship;
 - b) container deposit schemes;
 - c) banning single-use plastics;
 - d) government procurement policies

There should definitely be a container deposit scheme in Victoria like in South Australia. It incentivises recycling which will have a positive effect on creating a stronger culture of recycling.

Moreover, internationally there are increasing numbers of states, cities, retailers and organisations such as schools that are saying no to single use plastics- it has become a worldwide movement as a global acknowledgement of the dangerous impact that overconsumption of plastic is having on our delicate marine and other ecosystems, our wildlife and most pressingly, our climate. There is no reason that Victoria should not follow suit and ban single use plastics from all retailers. Obviously, this is a very big thing to co-ordinate and achieve. As a Melbournian, I witness the extreme scale of single-use plastic use everyday. However, as someone who also works rurally, I have seen the collective community change of big corporations like Coles and Woolworths banning single-use plastics- people have adapted very well in both city and country areas from my experience. The Victorian government should set a standard for all businesses and organisations to follow- and that is to not create disposable plastic waste- to stop offering plastic packaging, disposable food containers, plastic straws and free things wrapped in plastic and overpackaged goods. There are companies dedicated to finding more sustainable solutions for products that are traditionally single use plastics, like compostable cutlery and plates instead of plastic and Styrofoam ones. Where an established plastic free alternative exists (ie. a product that has the infrastructure to be degraded or recycled in Victoria), it should be offered to businesses as a replacement. As more innovation occurs and more sustainable alternatives come onto the market, different single use plastic items should be banned in waves, so that the impact on retailers having to change how things are packaged is somewhat minimised. In addition, fines for non-compliance should be mandated to incentivise compliance to these new standards which may be harder for some businesses to adopt. The seeds for a systemic shift in plastic use culture are there, if the resources are put in place to implement a plastic wide ban then this culture of not expecting single use plastics will grow.

Money from the sustainability fund needs to be diverted into household education and education of taxpaying consumers. This is vital as the recycling problem lies in part with waste production of consumers who may not be aware of the resources it takes to recycle waste. I feel as though many consumers view the recycling bin as a pathway for waste that helps the environment, without being aware of the resources and environmental impact of using these products in the first place. Consumers need to be made aware of the extent of their use and the strain this is putting on recycling infrastructure to address the issue upstream so that Victoria's recycling supply is more manageable for our infrastructure to meet. Programs like ABCs War on Waste has helped but there needs to be TV campaigns and billboards and workplace campaigns for communal kitchens that bring awareness to the extent of recycling waste and in some sense a guilt to buying so much.

When I was in Primary school 10 years ago, I clearly recall national campaigns to turn off your lights when not in use and initiatives like earth hour and having a 3 minute showers using little plastic timers that stuck to the shower wall and racing my siblings to have shorter showers. I remember my parents

buying the thick green reusable bags from coles and leaving them in the car boot and buying bulk conditioner and shampoo from our local shopping centre, because this was an available option then. I remember my Year 5 teacher educating us passionately about climate change and recycling and encouraging us to care about these issues. I remember this community environmental attitude as a cultural change that was phased out somehow, but now this kind of a cultural change is back and with stronger messages like a ban on plastic bags from Coles and the increasing interest in reducing individual waste, and so this cultural shift should be extended to parts of the community that have not heard about it. People who were not educated on these topics in the last ten years, have not been confronted with or had to give thought to the waste they produce at any point in their lives, and people who produce the most waste need to have government campaign messages about waste reduction reach them. There are large demographics of Victorians across all age groups that need to be introduced to why reducing plastic waste is a necessity, the effect it is having on our ecosystems and climate and what will happen if we don't cut our consumption now. I am not sure why all the environmental campaigns disappeared from my TV, billboards and thus our wider culture 10 years ago but I strongly urge the government to allocate funds to education so these messages are reiterated strongly to all parts of the Victorian community.

The focus needs to be on each household having an awareness of the amount of waste it produces and then having resources to help households reduce their waste. One initiative I would love to see is a composting program, either resources and how to videos and a website to help Victorians manage their food waste, with centres you can bring your compost to if you don't have a big enough garden or programs where households that wish to participate are given a composting kit to get started. There also needs to be a more up to date carbon footprint calculator than the one currently provided by the Victorian Government as it is very outdated- <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/AGC/home.html>.

- 5 Relevant reviews, inquiries and reports into the waste and recycling industry in other Australian jurisdictions and internationally;

There should be publically released statistics on the amount of waste produced per council, by person per council and in Victoria per person compared to other states so that the government can track the progress of Victoria as a whole and address problem areas.

Ideally, there should be statistics publically released by as to waste produced by large corporations and businesses, as they will have a much bigger impact by reducing their consumption. I am unsure if this is feasible given that these are private companies- the huge issue of corporation and business waste management will need different solutions. One incentive that definitely should be introduced to organisations and businesses is to mandate every business has and uses their recycling bins- it is appalling that such large producers of waste can avoid responsibility of this problem. Convenience and the pace of business is no excuse- businesses must learn to accommodate recycling infrastructure as they are a huge part of the problem and integral to resolving Australia's waste crisis. We need Victorian law mandating that businesses must recycle their recyclable waste.

Thank-you for reading this submission.

Kind Regards,

Sasha Hall