

This submission seeks to address items 3 & 4 of the terms of reference.

Item 3: Recycling and Waste Management

Collection

Current collection methods for co-mingled recycling creates issues where there are high levels of contamination and the resulting recyclable commodities are of little or no value. This means it is not economically viable to recycle the product on-shore and we risk our recyclables being sent to landfill or sold overseas where labour costs are cheaper and regulations less stringent. Contamination occurs because:

- consumers are not sure what to put in the bin; each council has different guidelines which change every time they change to a different waste collection contractor,
- packaging is difficult to separate into it's various constituents (eg. Plastic bottles have labels and lids made of different types of plastic, cardboard boxes have clear plastic windows and tetra paks have many multiple layers of plastic, foil and card making it very difficult to recover all layers),
- the co-mingled bin and collection service means recyclables are crushed together making them more difficult to separate (eg. crushed glass is mixed with small pieces of paper and plastic),
- small items fall through and are not easy for our sorting facilities to separate; and
- items are not washed or are heavily contaminated with food products.

To mitigate some of these issues we can go back to the older methods of collection which were in place before we sent much of our recyclables overseas. Separate bins for separate commodities as opposed to co-mingled bins. Paper/card, hard plastic, metal and glass.

- A Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) will be a simple and effective way to collect glass, plastic and aluminium beverage containers of which make up a large component of our current marine litter. An added benefit of a CDS is it will generate a small income for local community groups or unemployed people who collect and deposit and generate a mechanism to encourage people to pick up litter.
- Separate crates for glass colours (brown, green, clear) will allow glass to be recycled into new glass jars and bottles for food. When glass is collected in its separate colours it can be recycled infinitely as opposed to downcycled into products like road base.
- Requiring every council to implement a Food Organic and Garden Organics (FOGO) collection (which can easily be collected alongside existing green waste) will generate valuable compost that can either be sold or used to replenish soil in community gardens and other spaces and help combat the global soil crisis. "Generating three centimeters of top soil takes 1,000 years, and if current rates of degradation continue all of the world's top soil could be gone within 60 years, a senior UN official said".¹
- Support the textiles industry with creating more accessible textiles recycling collections.
- Support the fisheries industry to recapture discarded fishing gear by a deposit scheme rather than leave it drifting in our oceans harming our sea life and structures like coral reefs.
- Require fast food outlets to have fully recyclable or compostable packaging and both recycling and compost collections in store to collect.
- Fund the creation of industrial compost facilities which can handle compostable products.

¹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/only-60-years-of-farming-left-if-soil-degradation-continues/>

By collecting commodities separately resulting products will be cleaner, cheaper and easier to recycle and can be used for a greater number of applications.

Local Recycling Industry

We must support and develop our local recycling industries to build infrastructure to recycle locally and not just be sorters and on sellers to overseas recyclers (many of which who operate illegally) in developing overseas nations who do not have the facilities in place to recycle the product without risking ill effect to the health of the local populations and environment. This is the exact reason China implemented the National Sword program; because processing our contaminated recycling was killing their people and environment.

The recycling industry has been quite vocal about what it would take to make this happen and

The Australian Council of Recycling [ACOR] and the Waste Management Association of Australia [WMAA] have called on the Federal and State Governments to implement their \$150 million plan to 're-boot' the local recycling industry and spurn the creation of a circular economy."² We should push for funding of this plan and back our existing waste industry with their plan.

By creating a local economy:

- we shelter ourselves from the price fluctuations of external commodities markets which currently leads to dangerous stockpiling and fire risks;
- create local employment;
- take responsibility for our own waste which the global community is calling us to do; and
- we will have access to high quality recycled content with which to use in Australian made products.

Where practical the state government should mandate local governments procure locally produced recycled goods to help generate demand for such products. State government should also consider subsidising and supporting the construction industry to use low grade recycled commodities eg. Those that use Replas products or recycled glass and textiles etc. to help generate a market for recycled goods.

State and Federal government should support research into innovative ways to process and reuse low value commodities like soft plastics in more meaningful ways other than waste to energy and utilise food waste to create packaging.

We are increasingly seeing the availability of packaging which is commercially compostable but nowhere for consumers to reasonably deposit such material. It either contaminates the recycling stream or ends up in landfill where it does not break down as intended. The Victorian Government should help fund the development of industrial composting facilities and appropriate collections to ensure such products end up there (eg. via FOGO collection). Creating industrial composting facilities will also ensure efficient processing and recovery of nutrients for our soils.

Item 4: Waste Reduction Measures

Product stewardship

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-04/waste-industry-calls-for-circular-economy-and-action-plan/9618204>

Currently consumers have limited choice when it comes to zero waste or recycling friendly options. Much of what is packed and presented to them on supermarket shelves is packaged in difficult to recycle composite packaging (eg. Tetra Paks, produce with plastic sleeves or hard plastic trays or multiple layers of plastic wrapping).

To improve this, we must push for legislation banning gratuitous and difficult to recycle packaging products as mandate product stewardship and better packaging design.

- A "Recycled in Australia" logo will raise public awareness and generate demand for content recycled in Australia.
- Require major brands partner the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) to design packaging with a lower impact that support a circular economy. Ideally focus on designs where packaging can be recycled to generate packaging of similar quality. Eg plastic bottles recycled to create new plastic bottles. We do not want to merely support downcycling of plastics into low grade products like road base or use in waste to energy plants. This is not truly recycling.
- Support research into better packaging design and materials which are home compostable and can be produced by using local resources such as food waste or weed crops.
- Provide economic support to help establish businesses which opt for zero-waste models such a bulk food stores and those who offer foodstuffs in re-useable packaging such as glass bottle refills for milk.
- Follow the EU and other countries to ban single use plastic products eg. Plastic bags, straws (supplies to kept available for the disabled and sold at pharmacies on the PBS), cutlery, take away tubs and coffee cups.
- Lobby the Federal government to make multinational companies take accountability for the life cycle of their packaging. Eg. Contribute to the CDS and put in place a tax on using virgin plastic or recycled plastic sourced outside of Australia.
- Support businesses to accept customers BYO containers in lieu of single use packaging. Eg. Butchers, delis, take away venues. This can be done by making a clear statement that the Victoria supports such practices and working with regulators like Primesafe, Dairysafe and local councils to develop codes of conduct for safely accepting customers BYO Containers.
- Lobby Federal government to completely ban plastic microbeads in all personal care products.
- Encourage councils to reward those who reduce their waste. Ie. Those who opt for a smaller landfill bin or have it collected less frequently receive discounts on their rates or other local rewards.
- Mandate councils partially rebate the purchase or waste abating items such as cloth nappies, reusable sanitary products, reusable produce bags, reusable straws, keep cups or lobby the Federal government to make them tax exempt.
- Publicly support reusable take away containers/schemes like Retub/Returnr.

Education

The current recycling system is complex and confusing. We can simplify this by having uniform collection practices across the state and eventually nationally. Once uniform practices are established, roll out an education campaign to help residents not only recycle better but also understand why certain items contaminate recycling streams and most importantly offer people practical advice for how they can reduce their waste and recycling volume in the first place.

- Make clearer recycling labels which support customers to appropriately direct their waste resources: mandate that packaging must not only state whether an item is recyclable but where and how to recycle each component.
- Consider a targeted campaign which looks at how to reach the bulk of consumers including in schools, the family home and consumers at place of purchase. Note, according to CSIRO research on marine debris “The two strongest predictors of debris at a site were economic wealth and social disadvantage in the population near the site, providing insight for targeted education and awareness campaigns”³.
- Collect metrics on how much waste is sent to landfill, recycling, compost and publicise this widely (eg. in major newspapers/on radio). Regularly reporting metrics to the community on how they are performing at reducing waste will help engage them in reducing waste, give confidence that the government is supporting waste reduction measures and generate community pride. The effect would be similar to metrics on dam levels which were published during droughts and saw people reduce their water consumption dramatically.
- Partner with organisations like BehaviourWorks Australia to research the best ways to target and enable consumers to improve their waste awareness and change wasteful habits.

³ file:///D:/Downloads/CSIRO_APC_Factsheet.pdf