



WASTE CONTRACTORS &
RECYCLERS ASSOCIATION
OF N.S.W

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1st June 2021

Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC
Committee Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment
Committees | Legislative Council | Parliament of New South Wales

Parliamentary inquiry to examine bill to reduce plastic waste in New South Wales
Speaking notes – 1st June 2021

Dear Ms Faehrmann

- The Association has 208 Members many of whom will have an interest in the issue of plastic waste and the recycling options for this material.
- Our Members are involved in the collection of plastic waste mainly via kerbside dry recycling collection contracts and from commercial facilities. Some Members also operate materials recovery facilities.
- In recent years, our industry has also had to deal with a ban on the import of recyclables into China, along with recent Federal Government bans on the export of unprocessed plastic materials.
- The introduction of the CDS Return & Earn scheme has also affected revenue streams & volumes on domestic collection contracts and at MRFs.
- We would also like to state that we continue to patiently wait for the NSW 20-Year Waste Strategy.
- In our view, the current NSW structure where we have a Minister for the Environment, who is also the Minister for Energy is negatively affecting the waste management sector. For the last two years, we have repeatedly been advised that dealing with the Energy issues is a greater priority than dealing with the issues of the waste management sector.
- The NSW waste management sector is the largest of all the states and territories and we need a dedicated, standalone NSW Minister for the Environment.
- As detailed in our letter dated 28th April 2021, rather than making a detailed submission, we are pleased to attend a Q&A session with you and your Committee Members.

MRFs, plastics & recycling

- MRFs are not able to cope with plastic bags, toys, hoses, plastic wrappers, straws, coffee cups/lids, etc.
- All of these plastic items plus any other plastic items that are smaller than a credit card, are very likely to end up as residual waste.
- Some MRFs report that up to 50% of their residual waste is plastic waste
- Small plastic items are variable in size and plastic composition that it is not economical to sort these products.
- In the future, it is very likely that these MRF waste residues (which have a high calorific value) will be inputs at energy-from-waste facilities

Polystyrene & kerbside recycling

- Polystyrene in kerbside recycling creates major cross-contamination issues.

Plastic waste & the threat to the environment (litter)

- We have litter because human beings are thoughtless in their irresponsible actions.

Microplastics & microfibres (48D c)

- Is Sydney Water upgrading its filtering capabilities at its sewage treatment plants?

By the end of 2024 all packaging used in NSW will be recyclable, compostable or reusable (48D d)

- Who will regulate & how? What will be the penalties for non-compliance?

Recycled content (48D e)

- Please support our local waste management sector & specify Australian recycled content.

Division 4 Plastics Reduction Commission

- The waste management & recycling sector needs to be given a strong say into who our industry representative will be on this Commission
- The issues relating to waste management, waste avoidance, product design for better recycling outcomes & sustainability will require the input of experienced industry personnel.
- On behalf of our 208 Members, WCRA would like to be represented on this Commission

48H & washing machines

- NSW is one of 6 states & 2 territories. In terms of population, we are quite a small nation & we need national consistency in the manufacture & importation of washing machines

48 K

- *The regulations may create offences.* This wording is not strong enough. For the best investment outcomes, industry needs certainty, and we need regulators to regulate & enforce regulations.

The community doesn't understand plastic recycling

- There is frustration with the complexity of plastic formats and people often feel angry if they find out items they've diligently separated end up in landfill, or are shipped offshore to unknown markets. Confusion about what can be recycled hinders people's ability to be confident, and a lack of confidence hinders their motivation to recycle.

Information sources are deficient in accessibility and quality

- Most plastic recycling education is very generalist, and/or often inclusive of industry jargon, to the point of being misleading for the community in some instances. Over-use of the plastic resin identification code in educational literature has resulted in the code being viewed as a recycling symbol. It is argued by many that this symbol is an automatic signal that an item can be recycled, and this has become entrenched in typical recycling behaviour, resulting in many plastic items (non-packaging or soft plastic) ending up in the kerbside recycling system.

Greater transparency is needed, particularly post China Sword and the negative media coverage

- The community is questioning where all the plastics are ending up and whether they are being recycled, and whether recycled locally. There is a desire by the majority for greater transparency and honesty. The system has been masked in secrecy and mystery. There is little evidence to defend the news stories that are surfacing about the recycling system. There is a need to re-establish trust and faith within the system because habits are currently based on a 'blind faith' which holds little power when challenged. This may mean appearing to regress before moving forward, but this transparency will breed confidence and conviction.

The definition of 'recyclable' is broad and doesn't reflect the value of end-markets

- There isn't enough emphasis in transitioning to simplified and higher-value plastic formats. The recycling industry knows the value of end-markets. However, the complexity of plastic formats is often driven by marketing departments, not necessarily related to functional requirements. This is resulting in more variety in colours, tints and formats entering the market with no consideration of the value of the end market, or even if there is a market. Simplification of plastic streams should be encouraged when there is no functional purpose for alternatives that have limited markets, i.e. clear versus tinted PET or plastics 3-7 when a 1 or 2 would do. More transparency in end-markets could also support the community to make more informed purchasing decisions to be part of the solution.

Yours faithfully

Tony Khoury
Executive Director

Attach – Simple tips for good, sustainable kerbside recycling outcomes

Simple tips for good, sustainable kerbside recycling outcomes

Only recycle

- Hard plastic bottles and containers
- Glass bottles and jars
- Steel and aluminium cans
- Paper and cardboard

Keep out soft plastics

- Soft plastics, including bags, plastic wrapping, chip packets & bread bags
- No degradable or biodegradable plastic bags. These belong in the bin with the red lid
- No polystyrene

Keep out small items

Don't place anything smaller than a credit card into the kerbside recycling bin. This includes:

- Drink & milk bottle lids
- Bread tags
- Bottle tops
- Shredded paper

The safety of transport & MRF workers

Keep it safe for MRF workers and recycling machines. This means nothing hazardous or dangerous that can harm workers or anything that can damage the machines.

Keep out strapping line, hose, netting, wires, building materials, broken glass, chemicals and other hazardous materials.

Keep it clean

Keep it clean by rinsing or wiping out containers of any excess food, drink, etc.

- NO food scraps
- NO nappies
- NO soiled paper or soiled cardboard
- NO general waste
- NO liquid wastes

Keep it loose

Place recyclables loose into the recycling bin.

Don't bag or box recyclables.

**For the best recycling results, follow the above advice.
And if in doubt, keep it out.**