

**INQUIRY INTO WASTE AVOIDANCE AND RESOURCE
RECOVERY AMENDMENT (PLASTICS REDUCTION)
BILL 2021**

Organisation: MRA Consulting Group
Date Received: 3 May 2021

5 May 2021

The Director,
Portfolio Committee 7,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

RE: Parliamentary inquiry to examine bill to reduce plastics waste in New South Wales

We welcome the bill to reduce plastics waste in NSW, and support action to move on this issue in NSW. NSW is lagging behind other states in addressing the environmental issues associated with single use plastics.

MRA Consulting Group believes that it is important we deal with single use plastics for two reasons – their contribution to litter, pollution and resource depletion, and because they are an iconic waste stream that generates community engagement.

From MRA's perspective the environmental issues associated with single use plastics are:

- the propensity for these items to be littered, polluting land, and entering our waterways.
- the depletion of resources (including energy and water) used in the production of these items and lost to the economy if they are unable to be captured for recycling.

Plastic was only invented 100 years ago and now is ubiquitous in our economies and lifestyles. It is also ubiquitous in our pollution. About 8 million tonnes of plastic enter the world's oceans every year. It is estimated that there is currently one tonne of plastic in the ocean for every five tonnes of fish and if no action is taken, plastic in the oceans will outweigh fish by 2050.

Our company has been analysing the economics of recycling for over 10 years and we have found that the solution for single use plastics is not an industry-wide collection and recycling program. Collecting these items for recycling is ridiculously expensive and a waste of money relative to other material streams. One trial by the Packaging Industry found that collecting and recycling plastic bags through supermarkets, cost \$4,572/t. That compares to an average cost of \$40/t for kerbside recycling.

The simplest solution is to limit their use in the economy in the first place, and thus we welcome a Bill that seeks to do this. A ban is often more effective than trying to collect and then recycle widely distributed, light plastics.

We encourage the the Inquiry to further investigate banning other items that compromise our recycling system and those that are highly uneconomic or technically difficult to recycle, for example mixed plastic packaging, mixed paper/plastic packaging. We can see a role for the

proposed Plastics Reduction Commission and the three-yearly threat abatement plans in overseeing the work of bringing practical attention to the management of the entire end of life plastics supply chain. Plastics management is complicated, with diffuse pollution points spread throughout the community, and technical materials science and manufacturing expertise required to enable recycling solutions. Where a ban is not feasible, then an organisation charged with oversight of the issue, in consultation with community, business and government will improve the chance the intended outcomes will be delivered.

The other benefit of this bill is that we can put the political discussion of this issue to rest and shift focus to other areas of resource recovery that will have more impact. From a recycling or waste management perspective, single use plastics are almost insignificant. Take for instance, plastic bags, they constitute just 20,000 tonnes of waste or 0.09% of Australia's landfill waste stream. This is less than the waste generated by a typical small rural town in one year.

The highest priority for waste management in NSW should be organic waste going to landfill. Organic waste includes food, garden waste, timber, pallets, paper and cardboard etc. and represents over 50% of all waste we landfill, or 10 million tonnes. It is 500 times more significant (by weight) than plastic bags and is the single largest stream going to landfill. Organic waste in landfill is not inert. It breaks down (anaerobically) to generate methane which unless captured leaks into the environment. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas (25 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide) and accounts for 11 million tonnes of Australian greenhouse gas emissions.

Yours Sincerely,

Karinne Taylor,
Principal Environmental Consultant, Circular Economy