Cleaning up our act

The future for waste and resource recovery in NSW

Issues paper consultation outcomes report

June 2021
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Cleaning up our act - The future of waste and resource recovery in NSW
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Executive Summary

The future for waste and resource recovery

The NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041 was part of a comprehensive process to look at how NSW can better value resources and reduce waste. The NSW Government’s objective is to make waste and resource recovery sustainable, reliable and affordable for remote, regional and metropolitan communities. The goal is to collectively transition to a circular economy by:

- using innovation to improve integration and connectivity of the value chain
- focusing on upstream levers that design out waste, increase recoverability and up-value materials
- engaging broadly with regional and metropolitan households and businesses to influence day-to-day decision making.

The Cleaning Up Our Act: The Future for Waste and Resource Recovery in NSW Issues Paper (Issues Paper) was produced to help inform development of the strategy.

It outlines a number of options for NSW to support transformative long-term change and make NSW a leader in delivering a circular economy.

The Issues Paper was developed by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), incorporating 109 submissions received in response to a call for feedback by the Minister of Energy and Environment, the Hon. Matt Kean MP, in August 2019.

Consultation activities

The consultation process kicked off with a public webinar and Q&A session hosted by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) on 26 March 2020.

This was followed by 10 online forums, which were topic-focused and encouraged targeted feedback on specific issues as well as across the Issues Paper more generally. A separate briefing and presentation were provided to Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association Australia (WMRR).

Online forums were designed to:

- Engage stakeholders to undertake an in-depth review of options canvassed in the Issues Paper, including consideration of:
  - potential connectivity and trade-offs between options
  - market viability and workability, including cost effectiveness of potential actions
  - short (up to five years) and long term (20 years) pathways.

- Develop a shared understanding of key challenges and opportunities for the strategy.

- Encourage participants to provide a submission on the Issues Paper.
All forums were held online due to public health measures in place at the time. Stream leads and the strategy Director took part in the forums, providing an informal format to discuss new ideas and opportunities.

Who participated?

Over 130 people took part in the public webinar; 110 stakeholders attended the online forums; and around 90 people attended the WMRR presentation.

Participants included a wide spectrum of the community including, representatives of metropolitan, regional and remote councils, regional council organisations, waste and resource recovery peak bodies, waste and resource recovery industry representatives, academics and researchers, businesses, not for profit organisations and state government agencies.

Figure 2: strategy forum participation

- Local Government: 34%
- WARR Industry: 17%
- Aboriginal Land Councils: 1%
- ACT Government: 1%
- Finance Sector: 1%
- NSW Government: 3%
- Packaging Sector: 3%
- Consultant: 5%
- Not for profit: 6%
- Academics: 6%
- Regional Waste Organisations: 6%
- Joint Organisations and Regional Organisations of Councils: 8%
Forum participants had ambitious aspirations for the strategy. In all forums, a shared vision and plan for waste and resource recovery was keenly supported. Tying the directions in the Issues Paper to the circular economy was also strongly supported by participants:

- the long-term vision for the strategy should support the interconnectedness of the system across all processes and sectors
- circular economy principles should inform the strategy and be clearly defined.

Participants from regional and remote localities highlighted the importance of local and shared circular economy solutions to make local services more affordable and sustainable, and create employment. They emphasised the importance of infrastructure support to address specific regional resource recovery priorities.

Higher order elements of the waste hierarchy were viewed as a critical focus for a future circular economy, with waste avoidance, designing out waste and product stewardship the priorities.

Participants noted the value of collective action and NSW Government leadership to address the challenges identified in the Issues Paper. When viewed in context of the four core directions, feedback provided was as follows:
Foster collaboration and innovation

- More collaboration and innovation in technology advancements and infrastructure
- A circular economy cannot just be achieved in NSW alone, we work in a national and global environment
- Mechanisms to share risk for innovations, testing and trials
- Improve WARR data collection, analysis and reporting

“Ensure there are regulatory systems in place to keep resources in the system”

(Participant, Forum 1)

Transitioning to a circular economy

- Greater focus on waste avoidance and upstream innovations
- State Government leadership and a national whole-of-government approach
- Design and collection are critical. Closed-loop recycling is an important transitional strategy, but not the end point for circular economy
- Transitioning requires a paradigm shift - focus on consumption based on access and association, rather than ownership

“Part of the circular economy is keeping the waste out of the managed waste stream in the first place”

(Participant, Forum 9)

Work towards consistent standards, targets and processes

- State and local governments to drive procurement of recovered materials through mandated standards and targets
- Consistency in kerbside collections
- Community engagement to help increase source separation
- Clear directions for stakeholders to provide clarity, e.g. ‘no organics to landfill by 2030’

“The economy trades on standards. If producers know they need to meet a product design standard, they will design to suit and maximise the value.”

(Participant, Forum 1)

Improve focus on waste infrastructure and resources

- Increase waste levy funding to help address waste avoidance, enhance resource recovery education and support infrastructure priorities
- Improve regulatory certainty to increase investment in waste innovation and infrastructure
- Identify waste as an essential service to improve planning and delivery outcomes
- NSW Government to identify and protect land
- Consider opportunities to create or enhance regional resource recovery infrastructure hubs to address technology access, transport and logistical issues for waste infrastructure