NSW
GOVERNMENT

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Cleaning up our act

Redirecting the future of plastic in NSW

Discussion Paper Consultation Report

June 2021

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Acknowledgement of country

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artwork by Nikita Ridgeway

Contents

Executive summary

The NSW Government is committed to effective and responsible action on plastics. The government has developed a comprehensive plan to deliver system-wide changes to how NSW manages plastic. The NSW Plastics Action Plan forms part of the broader NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041 as a whole-of-lifecycle plan for plastics in our state.

To support the development of the NSW Plastics Plan, the NSW Government undertook extensive consultation with members of the public, community groups, business and industry, and local government.

On 8 March 2020, a discussion paper, Cleaning Up Our Act: Redirecting the Future of Plastic in NSW, was released for public consultation. Over 16,000 submissions were received from the public and key stakeholders including retailers, peak bodies, councils and community groups.

The discussion paper outlined four key outcomes for each stage of the lifecycle of plastic, supported by proposed targets and priority directions. A summary of key findings for each outcome area is below:

Outcome 1: Reduce plastic waste generation

There is strong support for the NSW Government to reduce key single-use plastics in NSW. Community groups were supportive of the development of design standards for certain plastics products. Industry representatives, including producers, displayed a mixed response to design standards. We need to consider existing frameworks and regulatory requirements, and alternative policy options.

There was strong support for the phase-out of key single-use plastic items. Action on plastic stirrers, straws and lightweight plastics bags was considered necessary, in the short term. Stakeholders flagged a lack of viable alternatives for some single-use items. The needs of people with disabilities and medical conditions must also be considered, to ensure safety and accessibility requirements are met.

Outcome 2: Make the most of our plastic resources

There was broad support for extended producer responsibility schemes (EPRs), although some industry representatives (particularly retailers and producers) felt that the responsibility for managing waste and litter could be better shared by government and the community. The need for national consistency and issues regarding the suitability of EPRs for some products was raised.

While there was in-principle support for mandating a minimum amount of recycled content in plastic packaging, industry representatives raised several challenges. This

included constraints on the availability of recycled plastic, particularly food- and medical-grade recycled plastic. State and local government are also considered to have a key role in driving demand for recycled material, through sustainable procurement activities. Government could also provide funding to increase industry capacity.

Stakeholders supported an increase in the proportion of plastic recycled in NSW. However, this would require a detailed implementation plan, investment in on-shore recycling and processing, and targeted programs for problematic plastics.

Outcome 3: **Reduce plastic waste leakage**

There was strong support from a range of stakeholders for more aggressive litter reduction targets. Many stakeholders also expressed the need to eliminate litter at the source. Some stakeholders considered the elimination or reduction of plastic, through bans on specific items or stronger design requirements, to be a better use of funding than litter reduction measures. As noted above, while industry was broadly supportive of EPR to reduce litter, in principle, responsibility should be shared with consumers and government. Community groups strongly supported the 'producer pays' principle to managing litter.

Outcome 4: **Improve our understanding of the future of plastics**

Survey respondents strongly supported the establishment of a plastic research network. Other stakeholders flagged the importance of ensuring adequate representation on this network, while others felt that efforts would be better placed in leveraging and connecting existing networks. The consultation process identified several key research areas to enable better management of plastic.

The NSW Government could also support commercialisation of plastics solutions through funding opportunities. The application of this funding should be flexible and should focus on research and development, and consumer education. The costs of full-scale commercialisation were considered by some stakeholders to be better left to industry and the private sector.

Purpose of this report

This report outlines the key findings from public consultation on the NSW Plastics Plan discussion paper, *Cleaning Up Our Act: Redirecting the Future of Plastic in NSW*. It describes the consultation process, analysis of the public submissions and the feedback received from all stakeholder groups.

The findings of this report have informed the development of the NSW Plastics Action Plan.

The consultation process

Public consultation

The NSW Government undertook extensive consultation to ensure that members of the public, community groups, business and industry, and local government had their say on how NSW manages plastic into the future.

The discussion paper was open for public consultation and submissions from 8 March 2020 to 8 May 2020, and written submissions were accepted by email until 31 May 2020. The government invited feedback via a short online survey, a detailed online survey, and directly by email to Plastics.Plan@environment.nsw.gov.au.

A range of platforms were used to promote the discussion paper. This ensured a diverse mix of NSW residents and industry representatives participated in the consultation process. The discussion paper was promoted and accessible through:

- a media launch event and release of the discussion paper presented by the Premier and the Minister for Energy and the Environment

- the NSW Government website and Facebook page

- NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) website and social media pages (Twitter and LinkedIn)

- departmental website and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn)

- departmental Return and Earn Facebook and Instagram pages, Community Recycling Centre (CRC) Facebook page and Love Food Hate Waste Facebook page

- Minister's and Premier's Twitter pages

- NSW Government Have Your Say portal.

We monitored social media channels for feedback and encouraged users to participate in the surveys.

The discussion paper was available in both a short overview and a more detailed paper. Both versions included analysis of the issues and a series of questions on key outcome areas, priority directions and proposed targets.

Questions in the short and detailed surveys were designed to elicit responses to key issues that align with the priority directions in the discussion paper. The short survey had 10 questions (Appendix A) and the detailed survey had 40 questions (Appendix B). Respondents to online surveys were also asked to provide demographic information, including age, place of residence and whether they were representing an organisation or group.

Targeted consultation

The department contacted key stakeholders from local government, research groups, environmental organisations, waste and recycling industry, manufacturing, and retail industries. This ensured these key stakeholders had an opportunity to respond to the discussion paper. Many of these stakeholders also met with representatives from the NSW Government to discuss their positions (Appendix C). Where relevant, issues raised by these stakeholders are reflected in this consultation report.

The response

Social media

The social media campaign reached more than 100,000 people through Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Of these, more than 6,000 people engaged with the post by either clicking on, sharing, commenting or liking the content.

Table 1. Summary of social media reach

Social media activity	EPA Twitter	EPA[1] LinkedIn	CRC[2] Facebook	NSW Gov Facebook	DPIE[3] Facebook	DPIE Twitter	DPIE LinkedIn
Replies/Comments	13	4	46	429	10	-	1
Likes/Reactions	105	180	56	917	-	-	-
Retweets/Shares	60	19	40	245	57	7	5
Engagements	717	N/A	598	5,573	98	14	28
Impressions/ People reached	35,758	14,193	12,963	43,307	11,523	4,939	3,043

1. NSW Environment Protection Authority
2. Community Recycling Centre
3. NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Submissions

There was an overwhelming response to the discussion paper. This included strong response rates from key industry and environmental bodies, local and state government, research and advocacy organisations.

A total of 16,142 submissions were received through all channels:

- 13,901 short survey responses
- 361 detailed survey responses
- 1,880 email submissions.

The emails included 61 from individuals, 69 from key stakeholder groups (retailers, community groups, councils and peak bodies) and 1,750 campaign submissions from individuals making a formal submission based on content provided by an organisation.

Where multiple responses were received from the same email address, we removed duplicate responses from the analysis.

Individuals

We received a total of 15,717 submissions from individuals, making up the majority of submissions. This highlights the strong community engagement with the public consultation. Table 2 details the number of submissions received through each channel.

Table 2. The number of submissions from individuals from each channel

Short survey	Detailed survey	Emails	Campaign emails
13,582	324	61	1,750

Organisations

There were 202 survey respondents who identified as an organisation. Small businesses and community groups made up the majority of these submissions, with the waste and recycling industry, state government agencies, local government and plastic producers also provided input via this channel. The numbers of responses from each organisation type is shown in Figure 2.

We received written submissions via email from 69 key stakeholder groups. These email submissions tended to be more detailed and more thoroughly considered the impacts, risks, issues and possible solutions. Organisations that provided a written submission by email are listed at Appendix D. Figure 3 shows the number of email submissions received from key stakeholder groups

Demographics

Data on age and residence demographics was collected through the short and detailed surveys. This information was not collected for submissions made by email.
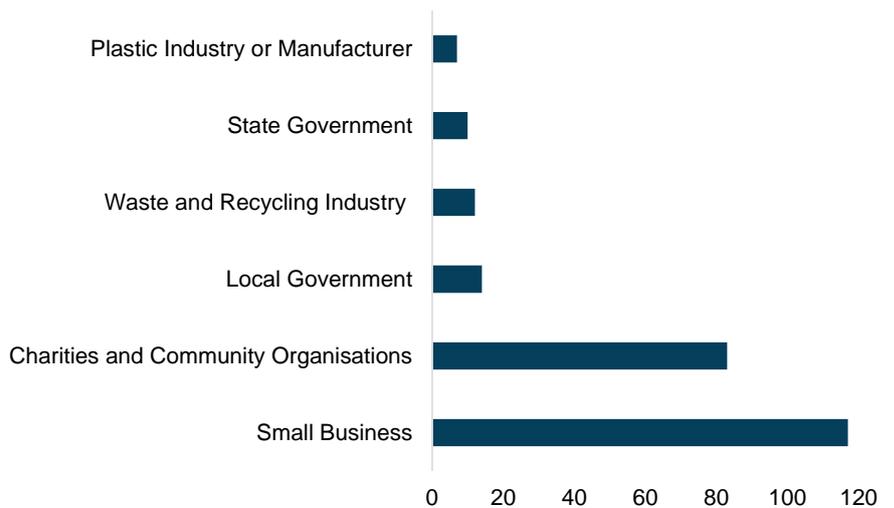
Place of residence

We asked respondents to the surveys to identify if they were a resident of NSW and in which postcode area they resided. Postcodes were identified as either metropolitan or regional NSW. We categorised postcodes in Newcastle and Wollongong regions as metropolitan. Most of the respondents were from metropolitan areas, as shown in Figure 4.

Age

We asked survey respondents to identify their age bracket. Figure 5 shows the ages of the survey respondents, demonstrating a large response from all ages, particularly those between 25 and 64.

Figure 2. The number of survey responses from each organisation type (total of short and detailed surveys)

Figure 3. The number of email submissions from key stakeholders by organisation type
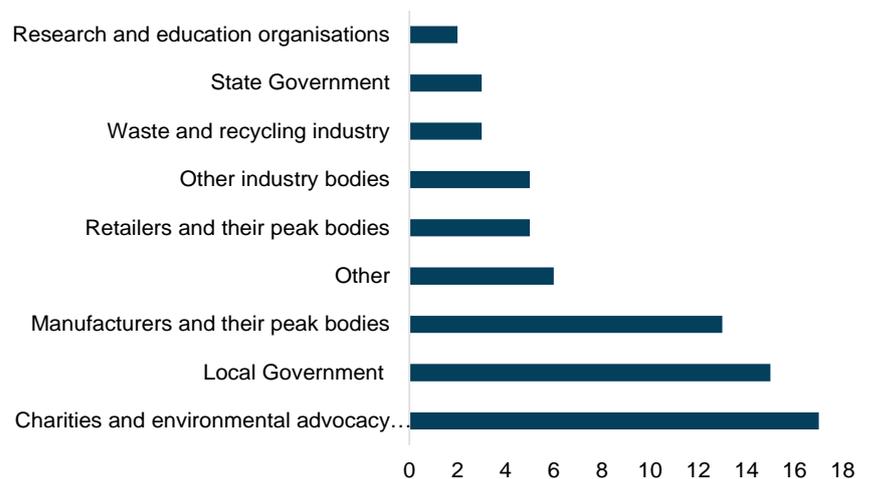
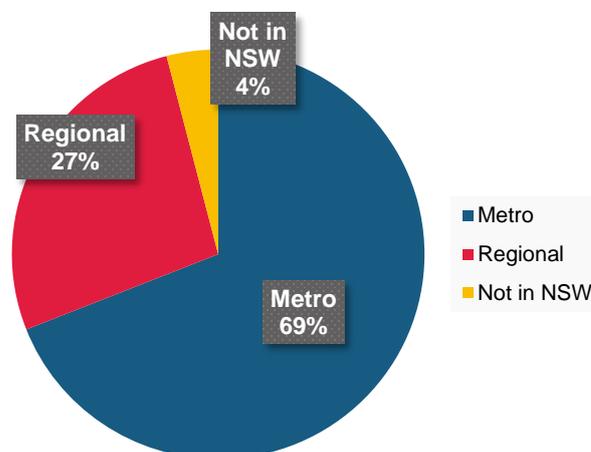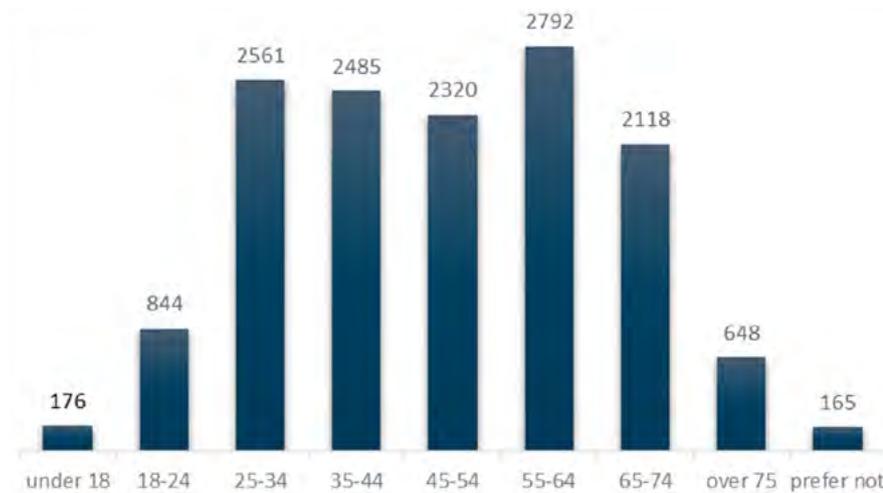**Figure 4. The place of residence for survey respondents (total of short and detailed surveys)**

Figure 5. Age of survey respondents (total of short and detailed surveys)

Submissions analysis

Submissions data was available in both qualitative and quantitative formats. The short and detailed survey responses were a combination of structured responses to closed (multiple choice) questions and free text, open-ended questions. While the discussion paper posed questions to encourage readers to consider pertinent issues, email submissions did not generally answer these questions specifically. These submissions were only available as qualitative, unstructured responses.

Coding

We analysed all submissions for key themes, issues and risks. Qualitative responses were coded using keywords representing emerging themes to generate meaningful quantitative data and insights.

All free text survey responses were considered individually and assigned a primary keyword that identified the issue of most concern to the respondent. We considered the context and commonalities of the responses when developing keywords, which was a dynamic and iterative process. Once the initial coding was complete, the data was analysed to consider whether any of the keywords represented similar themes and could be consolidated. On average, 6 to10 key themes emerged for each question.

Email submissions did not follow the same structure as the survey responses. As a result, we coded submissions based on whether the respondent supported or did not support each priority direction. We used keywords to code the key themes that responses raised for each priority direction. This provided meaningful quantitative data to inform policy direction.

We used the outcomes of the coding process, including the development of keywords and themes, to generate the statistical outputs, which we have provided under each outcome in the subsequent sections.