



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products

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I would like to acknowledge the Dhurag people who are the traditional custodians of the land from where I sit today. I pay my respects to the Elders, both past and present, for they hold the memories, the tradition, the cultures, and the hopes of Aboriginal Australia.

Thank you for inviting us today.

My name is Jacqueline Mata and I am here with my co-founder Megan Connor. We are from Tackle Lab which is an Australian sustainability social enterprise that is committed to finding localised solutions to divert nappy and wipe waste from landfill.

We work on projects with social purpose and impact. We believe in doing better for our environment and humankind. That's why we're continually searching for areas of improvement in our environment and everyday lives.

We are working on accelerating the transition to a circular economy. And our vision is to help Childcare Centers & Aged Care facilities who are some of the biggest users of nappies and absorbent hygiene products.

Currently, to follow policies childcare centres will change a child's nappy 4-5 times a day even if the nappy is not soiled, creating huge volumes of waste.

The existing model for disposable nappies and absorbent hygiene products is linear: taking non-renewable resources; making disposable products; and creating waste. Shifting to a circular economy solution helps solve this problem.

There are currently two circular approaches for nappies; the first is reusable nappies whereby cloth nappies are washed and reused. We have learnt after discussions with childcare educators that the challenges of using cloth nappies at scale are around - storing large quantities soiled nappies securely, the weight of handling the collection bins, the extra steps involved in preparing, and the unhygienic methods of cleaning by scrapping soiled cloth nappies down sinks. But most importantly educators are taken out of ratio spending less time with children to perform these extra duties.

The second circular approach for nappies is the introduction of compostable nappies. This involves redesigning the nappy by replacing oil-based plastics with bio-based materials, and by building an effective collection infrastructure. The nappy can be composted and used to regenerate the natural systems.

The collection of used compostable nappies is the first critical step in setting up the process needed for large-scale nappy composting. Next year, with the support of the City of Sydney, we will be trialing a circular disposable nappy solution in one childcare centre called the NOGO bin system. This trial will help motivate childcare operators to establish a circular process and a pathway to eliminate problematic nappy waste from their bins.

It is important to note that making a change to a circular nappy system in our childcare centers will be instrumental in driving social proof. It will influence parents who use disposable nappies on their children and help with outputs of advocacy.

Finally, absorbent hygiene waste is hidden. Once disposed of in the red bin, consumers no longer need to think about their waste - it is out of sight, out of mind. In the past we have seen industries such as the motor vehicle industry have major product overhauls when the pollution and smog became visible to our citizens across cityscapes. It is now time to start asking those profiting from single use absorbent hygiene products to invest in redesigning their products and start implementing product stewardship to account for their products end of life.

Thank you