

**2020**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STATEMENT**

**Response to Assembly Resolution of 31 July 2019 - Recycling and Waste Reduction**

**Presented by  
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Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction  
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First and foremost, I thank Minister Orr for her motion on 31 July 2019 on recycling and waste reduction in the ACT. As the Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction, this is of particular personal interest, and I welcome the opportunity to address the Assembly on this issue.

The Member for Yerrabi's motion resulted in an Assembly resolution that called for the ACT Government to report back on this matter by July 2020. The resolution asked the Government to consider innovative ways to grow the recycling and waste reduction industry in Canberra. To do so, we were asked to undertake a number of actions, including seeking advice from the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

I am pleased to make this report today, showing the Assembly and the community how the ACT Government is supporting a thriving, best-practice waste reduction and recycling industry. In doing so, we are collaborating with the Commissioner's Office to support the Territory's transition to a more circular economy. The circular economy concept has recently emerged as the optimal framework for driving valuable innovations in waste and recycling and because this shift is reflected in the Territory's work to reduce waste and enhance resource efficiency.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is a global thought leader in the circular economy and has articulated its basis in the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems<sup>1</sup>. According to the *Circularity Gap Reporting Initiative*, the world is currently only 8.6 per cent circular<sup>2</sup>, showing a clear need to improve.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Circularity Gap Reporting Initiative.

This said, at all levels of government and industry, rhetoric has shifted dramatically over the last few years. We now talk less about waste and more about resources. This rightly raises expectations that governments, business, industry and the community do more to embed circular economy principles in their work.

As a relatively small jurisdiction, the ACT exceed expectations through leading contributions to productive and meaningful waste and recycling initiatives delivered at the local, regional and national level. This is amplified by our unique circumstances. By combining both local and Territory-level government functions, we are in the fortuitous position of having our own waste management policies, legislation and resource recovery infrastructure.

In my response to the 2019 motion, I noted the global effects of China's 2018 National Sword policy and import controls on problematic waste streams. The policy triggered foundational, systems-wide reforms on how the world manages its waste and a significant rhetoric shift at all levels of government and industry – from a make-use-dispose model, to circularity.

Nationally, the ACT has been actively involved in development, endorsement and delivery of policies built on principles of the circular economy, such as:

- the National Waste Policy and corresponding Action Plan, focussed on a transition from waste to resources;
- the Council of Australian Governments waste export ban on paper and cardboard, glass, plastic and tyres that have not been processed into value-added materials;

- active engagement in national initiatives to establish metrics and baselines for Australia's transition to a circular economy;
- reducing single use plastics and supporting the National Packaging Target of 100 per cent of Australia's packaging be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

Regionally, we are working collaboratively with surrounding New South Wales councils as a key member of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation. Of note, we recently drafted, in partnership with the Joint Organisation, the *Regional Waste Prospectus 2020*, advocating for the needs of our entire region to the Commonwealth so that we can successfully implement the Council of Australian Governments, or COAG waste export ban.

While not explicitly written as such, circular economy principles have long been deeply embedded in the ACT Government's local strategic and operational policy and legislative frameworks for waste management.

The ACT *Waste Management Strategy 2011-25* focuses on outcomes, including generating less waste and driving towards 90% resource recovery.

Ways to achieve these outcomes is outlined in our *Waste Feasibility Study Roadmap and Recommendations*, and have implemented, or are in the process of implementing a number of these initiatives, including:

- implementation of the ACT Container Deposit Scheme
- the recently released *Waste-to-Energy Policy 2020-25*;
- the diversion of garden organics from landfill through our household green waste bin program;

- working to deliver a household food organics and garden organics collection service (FOGO) by 2023;
- providing a city-wide bulky waste collection service to all households;
- investigating ways to phase out unnecessary and problematic single-use plastics; and
- continuing to invest in our local waste reduction and recycling industry.

Last year, the Territory released Australia's most ambitious *Climate Change Strategy* –striving towards zero emissions by 2045. This strategy builds on the success of delivering 100 per cent renewable electricity to the territory towards legislated emissions reduction targets and our Zero Emissions Government Framework. It also encompasses circular economy principles such as waste avoidance and diverting recyclable materials from landfill.

The *Climate Change Strategy* also underpins our commitment to a FOGO service, which is critical to keeping valuable organic material out of landfill and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. FOGO produces a useful product for local projects, such as compost or mulch. We know how popular this can be, with our neighbours in Bega Valley Shire Council routinely selling out of the compost produced by their extremely successful FOGO service. The strategy also provides for the continuation of already successful Actsmart programs promoting waste reduction and recycling.

At a whole-of-Government level, the ACT's new Wellbeing Framework includes an Environment and Climate domain. Within this is the indicator for a "climate resilient environment and community". This indicator encompasses waste alongside other critical circular economy measures, such as greenhouse gas

emission reduction, exemplifying how waste reduction and recycling are woven into the fabric of broad Government priorities.

Engagement with the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has been undertaken in preparing this report back to the Assembly. I thank them for their valued contribution, and their continued support and advocacy for the circular economy in Canberra. I look forward to continuing regular and sustained communication and engagement with the Office. This will complement Government's existing initiatives, further developing enduring change and promoting long-term sustainability. In particular, we look forward to working with the Office on their recent State of the Environment Report action for Government to "develop strategies to move toward a circular economy to improve waste and recovery rates".

The Office considers the circular economy as essential to ensuring we manage our finite resources and maintain the health of the environment of the Territory. This in turn creates jobs and encourages innovation. Here, the focus goes beyond waste management and resource recovery to design and procurement as key enablers of a circular economy in the ACT. They have identified that the construction industry and Government could enjoy potentially significant benefits and are actively and collaboratively pursuing these to achieve circularity in local projects. I will outline this in more detail shortly.

I congratulate the Office on their recent *Circular #CBR* report, outlining pathways and potential for an ACT circular economy strategy and its proposal to publish a series of Office issues papers, and sponsor industry-led events to progress circular economy opportunities with industry leaders. These

initiatives will complement our ongoing transition further away from a single-use society.

I also take this opportunity to recognise other key stakeholders the ACT Government has engaged with in considering the issues of waste reduction, recycling and the circular economy, including the CSIRO, Australian National University, Canberra Institute of Technology, Canberra Innovation Network, and University of New South Wales.

In particular, I note that the CSIRO maintains a hub of global leaders in circular economy research here in the ACT. ACT government officers and CSIRO researchers have sought out opportunities to develop broader systems-thinking on the circular economy in the ACT – emphasising the need to influence infrastructure decisions with circular economy thinking from the design stage through to end of life. I look forward to seeing further development of these relationships moving forward.

In addition to being good for our environment, the circular economy creates new industries, markets, revenue and employment. These present opportunities for sustainable, secure jobs within our local production, recycling and waste reduction industries.

The ACT Government has maintained its collections of household waste and recycling during the current pandemic. These services have proven invaluable as Territorians reduce the risk of contamination in their homes. I thank our community for their continued efforts as some of the country's best recyclers.

While Canberrans do the right thing in recycling useful materials, the Government has a role to play by investing in infrastructure to sort and process the material and creating markets for this material to be used.

As I stated in 2019, recycling supports approximately 10 times more jobs than landfill activities in the ACT. It also supports 9.2 jobs per 10,000 tonnes than landfill, at 2.8 jobs per 10,000 tonnes.<sup>3</sup> While things may look a little different at the moment, prior to COVID-19 our local recycling and waste reduction industry directly and indirectly supported over a thousand jobs. We know that industry are doing their best to keep their people safely employed and will, wherever possible, continue to provide stable employment for Canberrans. Our recycling facility also supports regional jobs in by accepting and processing yellow bin collections from surrounding New South Wales councils.

We continue to invest in our local industry.

Across the ACT Government, I am proud that we also work closely with local businesses, artisans, craftspeople and not-for-profits to support the waste reduction and recycling industry. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight just a few ways that we do this.

For example, we contract reuse services at our Resource Management Centres. This ensures that Canberrans have an opportunity to drop off items of value which can then be sold and reused. This saves landfill space, keeps items in circulation, and funds jobs and donations to local charities. We also provide funding to GIVIT – an online warehousing service that matches those that have with those in need. Other examples of exciting ways that Government is supporting innovation in recycling and waste reduction include:

- Funding for the GreenCaffeen reusable coffee cup trial, which remains safely ongoing across approximately 60 Canberra cafes;

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<sup>3</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, [Employment in waste management and recycling](#).

- Sustainability programs run by Actsmart across schools, households, businesses and public events;
- The City Renewal Authority's community grants and use of recycled content in activations;
- Use of recycled content by the Suburban Land Agency in Canberra's newest suburbs; and
- ACT NoWaste's support for the 2019 Canberra Design Festival, such as innovation installations at The Canberra Centre using recycled materials.

We know our community and businesses are also innovating – with tool libraries, repair cafes, cleaning services, thingeries (a community owned lending library), and community groups such as the Buy Nothing movement and ShareWaste continuing to grow.

Earlier this year, ACT NoWaste joined the Canberra Institute of Technology and the Canberra Innovation Network, or CBRIN, to support and mentor the 2020 Trade Hack. This focussed on tackling waste in trades and helping to foster entrepreneurship around waste. We saw several innovative ideas for waste avoidance and material recovery including food waste, tiles and electrical conduit. We continue to engage with Trade Hack participants to support new and innovative waste reduction and recycling outcomes in the ACT, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this work in the future.

The Government has an extensive regime of public education and awareness programs and activities that support Canberrans with their efforts. In line with the waste hierarchy, these programs focus on reducing the amount of waste we produce in the first place, followed by options for reuse, recycling, recovery and – ultimately – disposal.

For example, Actsmart deliver household, school, business and public event sustainability programs.

ACT NoWaste:

- run the award winning Discovery Hub at our Materials Recovery Facility, educating community and school groups on how recycling and landfill works in the ACT;
- support the community to recycle through our highly popular A-Z Recyclopaedia;
- participate in the a regional Recycle Right campaign with our partners in surrounding councils to reduce contamination in our yellow bins;
- support the National Garage Sale Trail to encourage reuse. I am proud to say that in 2019 the ACT Government the Garage Sale Trail best metropolitan campaign award, with 611 garage sales and stalls – up 160% on 2018.

We are also continuing our efforts target food waste avoidance, which is even more important as we try to make less trips to our supermarkets and spend more time cooking.

And we are now only a few weeks away from Tuggeranong and Gungahlin residents being able to book their first bulky waste service. The ACT bulky waste collection service will operate with a two-pass collection system where reusable materials will be separated from materials that need to go to landfill. Having this process in place will improve the resource recovery rates of the Territory.

Minister Orr's resolution asked Government to report back on opportunities for specific waste streams, including plastic, textiles and building waste – and I am pleased to provide an update on opportunities identified for each.

We know that our community is particularly passionate about plastic waste and how we can reduce the use of plastic in the ACT. Last year we consulted with our community and business on phasing out single-use plastic. In over 3,300 responses to this consultation, our community told us they wanted problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic items phased out. The Government will legislate for the first tranche of phase outs including single-use plastic stirrers, cutlery and expanded polystyrene food and beverage containers such as cups and 'clamshell' takeaway containers.

The existing plastic shopping bag ban, has seen Canberrans reduce their use of plastic bags by over 1,132 tonnes between 2011 and 2018. In 2017-18 alone, we reduced our use by 199 tonnes – this is equal to around 55 million plastic bags. Imagine how much plastic waste we will reduce by phasing out other items.

While we intended to introduce this legislation in 2020, we recognise that now is not the time to be placing additional regulatory burden on our local businesses. We know they are just trying to keep their doors open and their staff employed. Through our Plastic Reduction Taskforce, we know that our members from key industry bodies across the environment, business, industry and disability advocacy sectors continue to support our phase out and its implementation at an appropriate time. We also know that many of our local businesses remain committed to reducing single-use plastic, as they continue to use alternatives such as cardboard and bamboo for their takeaway offerings. We acknowledge these efforts and are pleased to support these by

delivering a level playing field to further support those local businesses that are already minimising problematic plastic waste.

While the Government will wait for an appropriate time to progress this legislation, other actions can be taken in the meantime. The Actsmart team are supporting Events ACT and The Canberra Hospital to reduce single-use plastic in their operations. Expanded polystyrene food and beverage containers have already been phased out across our public events program, with other single-use plastic continuing to be phased out. Our hospital has also transitioned to recyclable cups and paper straws, and continues to look for other ways to reduce single-use plastic. It is important to note however that a small stock of plastic straws is maintained to ensure patients that need them still have access.

Plastic remains high on the national agenda as a major focus of the COAG waste export ban. As I mentioned earlier, to meet our obligations to recycle plastic that cannot be avoided under this ban, we are investing in our Materials Recovery Facility. New technology is planned to improve our plastic recycling so this resource can – wherever possible – be used locally and regionally. This will support our existing use of recycled plastic in local projects.

For example, plastic bags collected from our Container Deposit Scheme express drop off points are being combined with CDS glass bottles, recycled asphalt and printer toner for use in local roads, such as recent works in Gungahlin. Not only is this an innovative use of soft plastic, it also makes roads stronger and more resistant to heavy vehicle use.

The ACT Government also continues to work with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation and our colleagues across other jurisdictions towards

the National Packaging Targets. Here, plastic packaging remains a significant focus due to low recycling rates, particularly soft for plastic.

The ACT Government has also been investigating opportunities to reduce textile waste, including improved local textile reuse and recycling options.

Soft Landing, our mattress recycling facility, already recycles textiles from mattresses which are then made into products such as carpet underlay. Until recently, we also supported not-for-profits by providing public land for charity bins for clothing and other textiles donations. In April this year, we made the tough decision to remove all charity bins from public land due to a combination of continued issues with unacceptable illegal dumping and COVID-19 impacts on our providers.

We know that charity bins support employment for vulnerable Canberrans and keep reusable and recyclable resources out of our landfills. This said, Government and providers cannot continue to accept the burden of the irresponsible and dangerous illegal dumping that occurs at these sites. While it is sad that behaviour of a few has meant we had to take this action, we are using this as an opportunity. We are working with our not-for-profit sector on potential alternative arrangements and, importantly, improved models for charity bins and textile reuse and recycling in the ACT in the future. I look forward to providing you an update on this in due course.

With respect to building waste, in 2018-19 the ACT recovered 93% of its construction and demolition – or C&D – waste<sup>4</sup>. While this is a good recovery rate, there remains room for improvement. The Commissioner's Office and the CSIRO have in fact identified the C&D waste stream as a key area of focus.

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<sup>4</sup> Information source from ACT NoWaste business data

Indeed, the Commissioner's Office will be exploring this further in their *Circular #CBR* program, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of their work.

The ACT Government recently appointed an Industry Coordinator within NoWaste. This position is tasked with harnessing opportunities to incorporate more recycled content into local projects – several of which I have already mentioned. This will soon be supported by improved data on the Territory's waste movements, including C&D waste, through a new mobile application assisting waste transporters to meet their reporting requirements.

We are also working with tertiary and vocational education institutions on recycling, waste reduction and the circular economy. As I mentioned earlier, the recent CIT Trade Hack also resulted in several innovative ideas for waste avoidance and recovery of building materials such as tiles and electrical conduit. At the Australian National University, Fenner School Environmental Policy students are working with ACT NoWaste on circular economy projects, including recycling market analytics. I firmly believe we have brightest young minds looking at this concept here in the Territory, and the ACT Government is excited to see what solutions they find to these complex issues.

As we continue our economic stimulus of accelerated public infrastructure upgrades, we are looking for opportunities to avoid waste and use recycled content in these building projects. This supports our Jobs for Canberrans program, improves our public places, and has good outcomes for our environment by keeping local materials in circulation.

As well as the Commissioner's Office, the resolution asked us to work with the Canberra Innovation Network or CBRIN and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate – or CMTEDD – to develop a strategy and

recommendation on measures that may be taken by the ACT Government to support growth of the industry. This engagement is ongoing, and we look forward to continuing to work with CBRIN and CMTEDD into the future.

The resolution called to coordinate this report with the *Waste Infrastructure Study* commissioned by NoWaste. I am pleased to advise that NoWaste have now appointed a consultant to deliver the next stage of this study – the *Strategic Waste Infrastructure Plan*. This will initially focus on our future FOGO service, followed by other priority waste streams – some of which we have talked about today. Again, I look forward to providing you an update on progress against this as due course.

I once again thank Minister Orr for her motion in the Assembly last year, and the opportunity to provide this report on all the great ways the ACT Government is supporting the Territory's waste reduction and recycling industry. Now, more than ever, we need to harness opportunities for sustainable and secure local jobs.

COVID-19 has highlighted the necessity of waste management and resource recovery in allowing society to continue to function.

The pandemic has given us a chance to pause. While some restrictions have been lifted – due to an incredible effort by Canberrans to flatten the curve – it's given time to think about how we can better use what we have, while we are staying at home more.

More people are gardening, starting home composts, sewing, cooking and supporting local. We are falling back in love with spending time outdoors to take advantage of our beautiful bush capital – walking more, cycling more and staying off the road. By doing this, we are improving our health and reducing

our reliance on motor vehicle transport as one of the ACT's highest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. The need for local solutions to global problems has been thrown sharply into the spotlight, and we have seen innovation rise to meet that challenge. We are seeing Australia designing and 3D printing effective and low-cost face shields and ventilator parts. Before this, Canberra locals started Lids 4 Kids, rescuing the humble bottle top from landfills and turning them into 3D printer filament for prosthetic limbs and mobility aids for children.

Waste has moved from a largely invisible by-product of economic prosperity to a resource. But to capture this value, we all need to play a part in rethinking our consumption. I look forward to continued engagement with the Commissioner's Office and other valued stakeholders across and outside of Government to grow our waste reduction and recycling industry to support this transition.