

2022

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

Government Response - Assembly Resolution of 23 June 2021 – E-Waste

Recycling

**Presented by
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Introduction

I am pleased to be able to report back to the Assembly and the community today on the important issue of e-waste recycling, and inform you of the work undertaken since this issue was raised in the Assembly in June last year.

I would like to highlight just a few of the core services the ACT Government offers to help the community manage their waste and recycling:

- Green waste, recycling and waste to landfill bin collections
- Two resource management centres where Canberra's can dispose of items that don't belong in household wheelie bins
- Recycling Drop off centres, where co-mingled recycling, paper and cardboard can be dropped off for free
- ACT's Container Deposit Scheme, enabling the community to recycle drink containers and help the environment at the same time
- Education and engagement programs, including programs for schools and the wider community at the Recycling Discovery Hub
- A trial to reintroduce public charity bins to support jobs for people with disabilities and encourage the recycling of textiles.

We're also in the process of delivering a range of waste management and resource recovery projects currently, including:

- introducing a food organics and garden organics – or FOGO –collection pilot to approximately 5,000 ACT households in the suburbs of Belconnen, Bruce, Cook and Macquarie in November last year. Across the participating pilot households approximately 30 tonnes of organics waste is collected each week. The Government intends to see that the collection service is rolled out for all Canberra households in the future.

- The ACT Government has also banned single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers, and expanded polystyrene takeaway food and beverage containers. From 1 July this year, the ACT Government is proposing an additional ban on single-use plastic straws (with exemptions for those who need them), single-use plastic fruit and vegetable barrier bags, cotton buds with plastic sticks, and all oxo-degradable plastic products.
- We are planning significant investment in facilities for local materials recovery so that cleaner and higher quality products can be created . The project is co-funded by the ACT and Commonwealth governments through the National Partnership Agreement, under the Recycling Modernisation Fund.
- The free bulky waste collection service has now been rolled out across Canberra. Households can book a collection for up to two cubic metres of items such as old furniture and household appliances each year. As at 31 October 2021, an average recovery rate of 37.5 per cent was achieved, exceeding the 30 per cent minimum target set by government.

These and the other goals set in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Legislative Assembly, will form the basis of the government's priorities over this term of government.

Response to the Resolution

For the items identified in the Resolution – that is, general electrical appliances, solar PV panels and inverters, and large batteries used to power electric vehicles, buildings and grids – outlined below are some opportunities to minimise the volumes of these e-waste streams entering ACT landfills.

The number of these items continues to grow - by way of context, more than 10,600 solar panels were installed through the *Sustainable Household Scheme* last year.

Additionally, since its inception, over 1,900 household energy storage batteries have been installed through the ACT Government's *Next Generation Energy Storage Program*, a program that was created to encourage the rollout of ACT battery storage. It's anticipated that by 2023, approximately 3,000 more energy storage batteries will be installed in ACT households.

The number of electric vehicles registered in the ACT is also expected to rise in coming years – reaching between 25,000 to 42,000 in 2030, up from more than 1,500 in 2021.

This uptake of solar PV systems, and energy storage battery technology by Canberrans is essential in the shift to becoming a more sustainable Territory, but the increased abundance of these products presents an emerging waste management and resource recovery challenge for governments and industry. We all need to work swiftly to establish sustainable and effective product stewardship and recycling solutions as these products reach the end of their useful life.

Before I go into more detail about the items identified in the Resolution, I would like to note that given the small size of the ACT, participating in national stewardship arrangements are likely to provide the best outcomes for the Territory, because it allows for existing schemes and work of governments and industry to be leveraged, encourages economies of scale, and facilitates opportunities for harmonising approaches to product stewardship across jurisdictions.

The ACT Government has been actively participating in the management of e-waste since the Resolution was passed in the Assembly.

- In September 2021, the ACT Government co-hosted an industry and government roundtable together with the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, which held a series of industry and government roundtables in late 2021 to discuss the future of e-stewardship and e-waste management in Australia.
- Alongside the Environment Minister, Minister Vassarotti, I participate in the national Environment Minister's Meetings. Transport Canberra and City Services also participate in officer-level forums such as the Resource Recovery Reference Group, and the E-Product and Solar Stewardship State and Territory Working Group.
- I also wrote to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, the Hon Sussan Ley, in support of the Commonwealth Government's recent work on e-product stewardship, and to call for national, regulated recycling solutions for general electrical appliances, solar PV systems, and large batteries.

General electrical appliances

In terms of general electrical appliances, the co-regulatory *National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme* continues to operate in the Territory for electrical appliances. Canberrans can drop off their televisions, desktop computers and laptops, monitors, keyboards, mice, drives, printers, scanners, cables, and other computer-related peripherals at the Mitchell and Mugga Lane Resource Management Centres for processing. The ACT Government is

keen to see the expansion of the *National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme* to include other electrical and electronic equipment.

Some items which fall under the umbrella of general electrical appliances can also be dropped off at private collection points within the ACT, that are facilitated by national industry schemes. For instance, MobileMuster is the Commonwealth-accredited product stewardship program of the telecommunications industry, which is funded by all of the major handset manufacturers and network carriers to provide a free mobile phone recycling program in Australia, with several drop off points situated within the ACT.

Solar PV panels and inverters

Regarding solar PV panels and inverters, there is currently no product stewardship scheme in place in Australia. The Commonwealth Minister's 2021-22 Priority List for Product Stewardship identifies photovoltaic systems as a priority product considered to be in need of a product stewardship approach. The list sets out the Commonwealth Government's expectation that the PV industry design an industry-led, financially self-sustaining, nationwide scheme by June 2022, to be implemented by June 2023. The ACT Government will continue to monitor the progress of the scheme development and await the outcomes with interest. It is unlikely the ACT would be in a position to establish its own product stewardship scheme for solar PV ahead of the Commonwealth's current plans.

Here, in the ACT, as part of Neoen's contract with the ACT Government to deliver 100MW of wind energy, the organisation has committed to undertaking a solar PV recycling feasibility study. They will seek ACT Government's input into the study.

Large energy storage batteries

With regard to large energy storage batteries, the ACT Government has already ensured that best practice end-of-life arrangements are applied through our own programs. For example, retailers engaged through the ACT's *Next Generation Energy Storage Program* are required:

- to follow best practice end-of-life processing operations and give priority to onshore recycling facilities,
- to include a scheduled maintenance contract to meet manufacturers requirements, and
- to comply with current Clean Energy Council and Australian Battery Recycling Industry guidance to the responsible packaging, recycling, and transport of battery energy storage systems.

In addition, through the government's procurement process for large, grid-connected batteries under the Big Canberra Battery project, potential service providers must have a social and environmental sustainability plan that includes a battery end of life recycling plan.

Furthermore, the ACT Government will continue to monitor the progress of the Battery Stewardship Council's battery stewardship scheme, B-cycle, which is expected to be publicly launched in February this year. This national voluntary scheme will facilitate a national battery collection network for hand-held batteries. This includes button batteries like those found in watches, car keys and remotes, as well as batteries that can be replaced by consumers, including AA or AAA batteries. The scheme will operate through imposing a levy on imported batteries, and the levy will be used to fund rebates for scheme accredited collectors, processors and recyclers of used batteries.

I am pleased to hear that the Battery Stewardship Council, who are establishing the scheme, have started consultation to identify options for including electric vehicle and energy storage batteries in the scheme. I look forward to the progression of this work by the Council.

Circular economy

The Resolution also requested the Government consider banning e-waste from ACT Government landfill sites as part of the development of future circular economy legislation. I am pleased to advise that the ACT Government has commenced initial scoping work to create circular economy legislation and plans to, amongst other things, phase out single use plastics and require businesses to have a separate collection for co-mingled recycling and organic waste collection and a food waste reduction plan from 2023, consistent with our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement.

As part of this work, we are exploring options for a potential e-waste ban to landfill. This includes incorporating an e-waste ban as part of new circular economy legislation, using the landfill contract to ban specific items, or targeting separation rather than a direct e-waste ban to landfill.

Activities that support higher level waste hierarchy principles such as minimisation and prevention, support for right to repair, and growing industry capability may also be effective options for reducing e-waste to landfill in the ACT.

Conclusion

The proliferation of e-waste is a global issue, and we will continue to work with our interjurisdictional counterparts including the Commonwealth to ensure it is effectively managed. We will continue to share knowledge and learn from the experiences of others to assist us in addressing the issues presented by e-waste.

Managing e-waste is an important part of the move towards a circular economy in the ACT, noting that e-waste volumes will likely increase as we work to decarbonise the economy. The ACT Government will continue to look for opportunities to minimise the environmental impacts of e-waste, including through recycling, reusing or repairing materials where possible.

I look forward to keeping the Assembly up to date as our government continues to delivery new waste services to Canberrans and continues to ensure that the ACT maintains high resource recovery rates as we continue work to reduce emissions stemming from our landfill.

ENDS.