



WASTE REDUCTION

Marine plastics and recycling

Cleaning up our oceans and capturing material value

Plastic pollution is devastating marine ecosystems. A Marine Plastics CRC would make Australia a world leader on tackling this issue. Australia's recycling efforts also need to be 'rebooted' starting with a national container deposit scheme and product stewardship schemes for e-waste and tyres.

Waste pollutes our environment in ways that are both unsightly and harmful. Litter is blight on our landscape. Old landfills are toxic time bombs. And billions of pieces of discarded plastic threaten to take over our waterways and oceans.

Solid waste is also a climate change issue. When something is thrown into landfill, all of the energy and water that goes into extracting, harvesting and refining raw materials, and then making them into products is wasted. This includes the greenhouse gases that are 'embodied' into the things we buy through the production process. Throwing away materials that could be recycled is a form of greenhouse pollution.

Recycling rates have plateaued in recent years as kerbside recycling reaches its limit. This is coupled with a downturn in commodity prices that is hitting recyclers hard. Yet in the face of this, the Liberal Government has done next to nothing on solid waste and seems comfortable leaving it to the market and the states. The Greens believe that the federal government should be a strong regulator. The federal government should take carrot and stick approach, providing better incentives for consumers to recycle, and setting enforceable targets for industry.

> MARINE PLASTICS CRC

One of the most insidious forms of solid waste pollution is marine plastics. A recent report by the World Economic Forum warned that, on current trends, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050.¹

The impact of plastic pollution on the marine environment is horrendous. Dolphins, seals, turtles and other large marine animals are killed and maimed when they become entangled in waste plastic. Birds die after ingesting chunks of plastic—albatrosses have been discovered with whole toothbrushes in their intestines. Plastic is breaking down into minute pieces—microplastics—that are so small they are actually being absorbed into the body of marine organisms.

¹ World Economic Forum, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*, January 2016.

Marine plastic pollution is a global problem that needs global solutions. Australia needs to be active through regional and international forums seeking cooperative action on marine plastics.

But Australia should be active locally too. A recent senate inquiry into marine plastics also recommended that the government support research to establish the extent of the threat posed by marine plastics.

The Greens would establish a Marine Plastics Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) to lead Australia's research efforts. Federal funding of \$5 million per annum would be provided. The CRC would attract further investment from industry and academic partners to examine the threat that marine plastics pose to environmental and human health; the effectiveness of current policies aimed at reducing the harm of marine plastics; and the opportunities for industry and new technologies to mitigate the impact of marine plastics. The Marine Plastics CRC would be based in Hobart to leverage off the hub of internationally renowned marine scientists.

The Greens would also develop a comprehensive threat abatement plan on the back of the work of the CRC. The threat abatement plan would detail measures to be undertaken by the federal government to prevent and mitigate the impact of marine plastics and other debris on marine life.

> BAN MICROBEADS & PLASTIC BAGS

The Greens support action that can reduce the amount of marine plastic pollution immediately. The Greens support the federal government's plan to ban the use of microbeads if a voluntary phase-out is not effective.

The Greens also support a national ban on single-use plastic bags by all states. 180 million plastic bags are entering the ocean each year.² South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and the ACT have already banned plastic bags. The other states need to lift their game and help stop the carnage that plastic bags are causing in our oceans.

² <http://www.boomerangalliance.org.au/banplasticbags>

> NATIONAL CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME

A national container deposit scheme (CDS) is another ‘no-brainer’. It is self-funding, it has widespread public support, and it is good for the environment. CDS increases material recovery and reduces litter and marine plastic pollution. In South Australia, where CDS has been in place for decades, the recycling rate for beverage containers is close to 80%. Yet in the rest of the country it is less than 40%.³

CDS also improves the quality of the material that remains in kerbside recycling: taking glass out of kerbside recycling reduces the contamination, particularly to paper and cardboard. In turn, the price paid for recycled material is much greater. Glass collected in South Australia can fetch more than three times the value of that collected in the rest of the state.⁴

And CDS would create jobs. Industry estimates are that a national CDS could create around 3,000 direct jobs.⁵

The beverage and packaging industry has opposed CDS for years, and governments have usually been too weak to stand up to them. But things are changing. NSW has recently announced that it will start CDS in July 2017. Queensland looks like announcing CDS soon. The Greens applaud these states for taking action. But the federal government must stand ready to intervene if the states fail to act.

> MANDATORY PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP

The principle of container deposit schemes and other product stewardship schemes is that it provides a monetary incentive for people to recycle. By putting a refundable deposit into the purchase price, the product or packaging retains some value when it’s finished with it. In effect, the cost of recycling is built into the cost of the product.

The previous Labor government introduced framework legislation for product stewardship schemes. These schemes have been largely voluntary to date and have failed to be as successful as they should have been. The Greens would introduce mandatory product stewardship schemes for a range of problematic waste streams, including:

- E-waste, including televisions, computers, mobile phones, fluorescent lights and batteries: E-waste contains toxic materials that should not be put into landfill where they risk polluting soil, air and water.
- Tyres: Currently, many tyres are being illegally stockpiled, creating an enormous health risk if they catch fire. Other tyres are being illegally exported.
- Mattresses: Mattresses are bulky, are difficult to dispose of in landfill and are often dumped illegally. They also require a lot of care when dismantling them to ensure workers are not exposed to parasites and contagions.

³ COAG Standing Council on Environment and Water, *Packaging Impacts Decision Regulation Impact Statement*, March 2014

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://www.revive-recycling.com.au/Revive%20Media%20Release%209-4-13.pdf>

These schemes would be entirely self-funding. Recycling targets would be set for industry. Producers would then put a refundable levy on to the price of a product that consumers would get back at the end of the product’s life.

Product stewardship schemes also help buffer recyclers against fluctuating commodity prices. By effectively paying for the collection and separation of materials, product stewardship schemes reduce the costs to recyclers and help insulate them from risks in the market.

These waste streams need to be addressed through product stewardship as they are not able to be collected through kerbside recycling. In doing so, CDS and other product stewardship schemes would create local collection hubs for other ‘awkward’ materials. Recycling of polystyrene, fluorescent lights, mattresses and other bulky household items would all be able to ‘piggy back’ off the creation of recycling hubs for CDS and other product stewardship schemes.

Again, this all creates jobs. The rule of thumb is that for every one job in landfilling waste, six jobs can be created recycling that waste.⁶

> NATIONAL WASTE POLICY

This federal government has failed to commit to leading the development and implementation of a National Waste Policy. A National Waste Policy is important in setting benchmarks for the states and providing an overarching policy framework.

The Green would recommit the federal government to developing a National Waste Policy in consultation with the states, including binding national targets to achieve:

- 90% recovery of municipal waste by 2030;
- 75% recycling of packaging waste by 2030;
- a maximum of 10% landfilling of waste by 2030;
- mandated gas capture at large landfill sites; and
- a prohibition on incineration of waste.

This would be based on the adoption of the Circular Economy approach developed by the European Union.

A National Waste Policy would provide for the harmonisation of data collection and calculation methods for waste and recycling across the states.

A National Waste Policy would also outline how all tiers of government should give concessions to recycled content during the evaluation process for procurement.

⁶ Environment Victoria, *Victoria - the Green Jobs State: Seizing the opportunities*, 2009.