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ACT Greens submission to ACT Government's *SINGLE-USE PLASTICS DISCUSSION PAPER*

Contents

Introduction	4
ACT Government leadership	4
ACT waste reduction targets	4
Strategic and accountability indicators	5
ACT Waste Management Hierarchy:	6
What is plastic?	7
Environmental impacts	8
Single-use plastics	9
Action on plastic	10
Regulatory Approaches	12
<i>Legislate to ban products</i>	12
Takeaway containers	12
Plastic cups, plates, cutlery and straws	13
Disposable coffee cups	14
Polystyrene	14
Mini shampoo and conditioner bottles	15
Plastic water bottles	16
Barrier bags	17
Unnecessary pre-packaged fruit and vegetables	18
Plastic wrappers around newspapers	19
Plastic toy giveaways in supermarkets	19
Balloons	19
Other types of regulation	19
Plastic bags – online shopping	19
Procurement	20

Recycled plastic furniture and hardware	21
Recycled stationery	21
Supermarket ‘packaging-free’ or ‘plastic-free’ aisles	21
Improved waste collection and management	22
Public place recycling	22
Container deposit scheme	23
Information provision of recycling services available	23
Lids 4 kids	24
Bread bag tags	24
Reducing and cleaning up litter	25
Cigarette butts:	25
Education, awareness and behavioural change – enhancing the work of ACTsmart	26
Community grants scheme for waste reduction and increased recycling	27
Sustainability giveaway products	28
Bags for supermarkets	29
Plastic containers for delicatessen items at supermarkets	29
Promoting no or low-waste supermarkets	29
Repairing plastic products	30
Events	31
Nappies	31
Information and workshops	31
Information through ACT Government agencies	32
Cloth nappy information kits	32
Cloth nappy services at early learning centres	33
Menstrual products	33
Continence products	34
ACT Government agency activities	34
Canberra hospitals and health services	34
Other ACT Government facilities	35
Soft plastics collection	35
Recycling at ACT Property Group sites	36
National approaches	36
Recycled content labelling	36
Recycled content – minimum levels	37

Plastic or polymer tax, or no-recycled content tax.....	37
Separable components	38
Lifetime product stewardship.....	38
Right to Repair	38
Cigarette filters	39
Biodegradable crockery alternatives	39
Opportunities.....	40
Recycling industries	40
Regional coordination.....	41
Conclusion.....	41
Summary of recommendations:	42

Introduction

The ACT Greens welcome the Government's interest in Phasing Out Single-Use Plastics, and appreciate the opportunity to contribute our ideas on the reduction of plastic waste.

Reducing unnecessary waste has been a core focus of the ACT Greens since our founding in 1992, and we are pleased to see it is increasingly becoming a mainstream issue, especially with a focus on plastics.

The Greens believe that waste management should be based on the hierarchy of avoiding consumption, and reusing and recycling residual waste into beneficial products. We also believe that management of waste and resources is important for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and conserving scarce resources.¹

Plastics are a problematic material for a range of reasons:

- they are derived from oil, a fossil fuel, use lots of energy to produce, and thus have harmful climate impacts,
- they have become a significant international waste management problem,
- they are a significant litter issue, including impacting on our oceans and waterways, and
- there are so many types of plastic that recycling the materials is complicated,

The Greens are ambitious in our vision for how the growing problem of waste, and in particular plastics, can be handled. We are also aware of the magnitude of the challenges involved in transitioning away from single-use plastics, and the need to develop a broad range of alternatives and support for the community through this transition.

We appreciate that the Government's discussion paper focuses on single-use plastics, however also note the many other single-use products that are comprised of multiple materials, rendering them non-recyclable.

ACT Government leadership

ACT waste reduction targets

The ACT Greens would like to see less waste production overall, and a renewed and genuine focus on the waste hierarchy and targets outlined in the ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011 – 2025². There is an urgent need to speed up implementation of the many actions outlined in the Waste Feasibility Study Roadmap and Recommendations³.

¹ https://greens.org.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/Community_First_-_Our_Platform.pdf

² https://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/576916/ACT-Waste-Strategy-Policy_access.pdf

³ https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.act-yoursay.files/8615/2575/8129/WFS_roadmap.pdf

The Strategy has a goal of diverting 90 percent of waste from landfill by 2025, with interim targets of over 80% resource recovery by 2015, and over 85% diverted from landfill by 2020. Given not only the environmental impacts, but the financial cost in constructing new landfill cells, reaching these targets is vital.

The Greens would like to see the ACT to become a leader in waste reduction and resource recovery, and internationally showcase its strategies to reduce consumption and proliferation of single-use plastics and the amount of waste that enters landfill, like we do with our climate targets and policies. This looks unlikely in the short-term, as this would need a vast shift in waste policies and programs from what we have at present. However, we do believe that with a clear strategy and commitment from government, industry and the community, this is achievable. The ACT was the first government to set a goal of no waste to landfill, setting a waste target of *No waste by 2010* in 1996, which was world-leading at the time. Unfortunately we have gone backwards over this period, and now our recycling efforts have plateaued and we need to step up our waste reduction activities.

We note that although plastics are only a portion of the ACT's waste streams, plastics are the largest inorganic single component going to landfill⁴, and it needs urgent attention. The Federal Government and COAG's recent announcement to stop waste exports, including that of plastic for recycling will require a radical rethink of Australia's and the ACT's 'waste' streams. There will clearly need to be some urgent and focused work to support existing, nurture fledging and create new recycling industries within Australia. This international crisis should be seen as a critical opportunity to change the way Australia and the ACT deal with 'waste'.

RECOMMENDATION 1: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT SET WORLD LEADING WASTE TARGETS AND POLICIES, INCLUDING IN RELATION TO PLASTICS

Strategic and accountability indicators

ACT Government annual reporting should show a breakdown of the key waste streams, such as percentages of organic material, paper and cardboard, plastics, glass, metal, etc.

RECOMMENDATION 2: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET TARGETS FOR REDUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL WASTE STREAMS IN ANNUAL REPORTS AND BUDGET PAPERS, WITH REDUCTION TARGETS INCREASING EACH YEAR

⁴ P.11 [ibid](#)

ACT Waste Management Hierarchy:

- REDUCE waste generation
- REUSE good and materials
- RECYCLE material into new products
- RECOVER energy from suitable sorted materials
- LANDFILL residual waste to protect human health and the environment

This paper focuses on solutions that contribute to the first 3 parts of the hierarchy.

Waste is something that cannot be reused or recycled. Therefore the Greens believe that the most effective action we could take nationally is reducing our consumption, and shifting production of goods into using materials that can readily be reused or recycled.

We know that the amount of energy used to create plastic items in the first place is very high, and recycling plastic requires up to 88% less energy and less fossil fuel consumption than producing virgin plastic from scratch⁵. For many items, it can take up to 500 years for those items to decompose in landfills if not recycled, and some plastics never decompose at all. Around 50% of the plastic produced worldwide is single-use, and accounts for 5% of the total waste generated⁶, and about 91% of the plastic we produce is not recycled⁷ instead becoming landfilled or litter in our environment.

We would like to see more focus on reducing the need for many single-use products being created and consumed in the first case. Plastic packaging and single-use product use is sadly proliferating, not diminishing, in volume despite all the known impacts. Anecdotally, we're seeing things like shrink-wrap covered Styrofoam trays of pre-peeled garlic cloves, products that are already packaged in glass or plastic jars being further wrapped in a layer of plastic, and supermarket product reps giving out hundreds of tiny samples of new food products in small plastic cups that are used for literally a few seconds before they go into the bin, headed for landfill.

It is vital that plastic is seen as a valuable resource, not waste, and we work towards establishing a circular economy in relation to plastic.

The Greens would like to see the elimination of hazardous and retractable wastes. Any historic stockpiles or existing sources need to be dealt with using the most internationally advanced technology, and we also want environmental degradation resulting from poor waste management to be reversed through clean-up, restoration and rehabilitation

⁵ <https://www.metropolitantransferstation.com.au/blog/recycled-plastic-vs-new-plastic>

⁶ <https://www.ecowatch.com/22-facts-about-plastic-pollution-and-10-things-we-can-do-about-it-1881885971.html>

⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/07/plastic-produced-recycling-waste-ocean-trash-debris-environment/>

programs. We believe that in the future we will likely need to add to the waste hierarchy the need to mine landfill for resource extraction.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT WORK TOWARDS CREATING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN RELATION TO PLASTICS

What is plastic?

It is important to note that ‘plastics’ can actually mean a number of things, and overall, plastics have generally been sorted into 7 main types, seen as numbers in triangle recycling symbols on most packaging⁸ (despite some of them not actually being recyclable).

Recycling (Resin ID) code	Type	What kinds of products	Are they recyclable?
1	PET – Polyethylene Terephthalate	plastic bottles and containers	Yes, in yellow bin
2	HDPE – High density Polyethylene	thicker bottles and containers, eg juice bottles, shampoo bottles, thicker grocery bags	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rigid containers in yellow bin soft plastics in REDcycle
3	PVC – Polyvinyl Chloride	some cordial and juice bottles, cling and bubble wrap, plumbing pipes	Some items, if right systems in place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rigid containers in yellow bin soft plastics in REDcycle
4	LDPE – Low density Polyethylene	Plastic bags, soft packaging plastics, including plastic lining of cartons and coffee cups	Yes, via REDcycle scheme in supermarkets
5	PP - Polypropylene	Yogurt, dip and ice cream containers, bottle caps, straws, plant pots, takeaway containers	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rigid containers in yellow bin fibres can be turned into clothes
6	PS - Polystyrene	Foam cups, meat trays, moulded packaging, packing ‘peanuts’	No, cannot be easily recycled
7	Other – all kinds of things, can include bisphenol, polyurethane	CDs, water cooler bottles, glasses lenses, baby milk bottles	Generally no. Although some kinds of lenses and bottle can be recycled in yellow bin. But no clear guidance available.

⁸ <https://www.eastwaste.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Plastic-codes-and-recycling.pdf>

Given this plethora of types of plastic, it will be important to focus on:

- working towards phasing out of plastics that cannot be readily recycled,
- ensuring products are made to be readily recyclable,
- reducing their overall use also, and
- ensuring that the community is able to easily understand these various plastic-types and what to do with them.

Unfortunately, with many items, an asymmetry exists between these questions and some of the more prolific waste items will be difficult to phase out.

While this paper largely focuses on the environmental impacts of plastic items, it is worth noting that there are also known health risks with the use of plastics. Plastics are known to leave behind chemicals detrimental to human health such as the neurotoxin BPA (Bisphenol A)⁹, as well as other chemicals that have been linked to cancer.¹⁰

The Australasian Recycling Label¹¹ is being phased in to help people understand which items are recyclable, and how.

RECOMMENDATION 4: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD HELP PROMOTE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE AUSTRALASIAN RECYCLING LABEL.

Environmental impacts

There are many long-term environmental impacts being created by our disposable lifestyles across the world, and plastics creation and proliferation is a key part of this. The Guardian reported that in the 1950s that about 2m tonnes of plastic is produced globally each year, in 2018 it was 33m tonnes pa, and it is set to treble again by 2050 at current rates.¹² It is estimated that about six billion tons of plastics have been made and spread around the planet since the invention of plastic.¹³

Scientists now argue that we are living in the 'plastic age' within the Anthropocene, given that plastics do not occur naturally, and the wide variety of synthetic polymers would not exist without human creation. Along with the first nuclear detonations in 1945, plastics are one of the most significant changes that humans have made to the Earth's makeup.¹⁴

⁹ <https://journalistsresource.org/studies/environment/pollution-environment/plastics-environmental-health-literature-review/>

¹⁰ <https://ecologycenter.org/factsheets/adverse-health-effects-of-plastics/>

¹¹ <https://recyclingnearyou.com.au/ar1/>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/28/plastic-crisis-urgent-recycling-bottles-no-fix>

¹³ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/are-we-living-plastic-age-180957817/>

¹⁴ *ibid*

Plastic waste impacts in our oceans and on our marine and bird wildlife are now well-known and publicised. However, less well known is that hydrogeologists say that there are no longer any fresh waterways in the world that do not have microplastics spread throughout, and now microplastics are being found in groundwater too¹⁵. Scientists are now also finding microplastics in snow falling in the arctic¹⁶, and within ice cores¹⁷.

Given these serious environmental impacts, we are pleased to note that there are already a number of jurisdictions that have taken strident steps to reduce their plastic use.

- Costa Rica, which has the ambition of becoming the first “decarbonised” nation in the world by 2050 and carbon-free by 2021, committed in 2017 to be plastic-free by 2021¹⁸, with non petroleum-based biodegradable alternatives to be used instead.
- South Australia has announced a ban on single-use plastic items like straws and stirrers, and will legislate later in 2019¹⁹.
- Hobart City Council has brought in a by-law banning single use plastic for food take-away containers²⁰.

Single-use plastics

The discussion paper lists a range of items on p.21, including plastic straws and stirrers, plastic cutlery, disposable plastic plates and cups, disposable plastic-lined coffee cups and lids, polystyrene containers and cups and supermarket barrier bags. We agree that action on these items is a valuable start. There are of course many other specific plastic packaging or disposable items that deserve attention include coffee pods, plastic tubes for toothpaste, sunscreen and cosmetics, corflute signs, plastic strapping for boxes, credit cards and similar (e.g. store loyalty cards, membership cards), plastic toothbrushes, as well as obsolete video or audio cassettes, video games, etc. These items and more will need to be evaluated in coming years.

At the national level the Australian Greens waste policy calls for a national ban on problematic single-use plastic items by 2025, including straws, stirrers, cutlery, utensils, plates, bowls, and polystyrene containers and cups, and some other items to be banned by

¹⁵ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/01/190125112312.htm>

¹⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-15/microplastic-snow-ice-cores-arctic-pollution-travel-research/11416188>

¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-environment-arctic-plastic/punch-in-the-gut-as-scientists-find-micro-plastic-in-arctic-ice-idUSKCN1V41V2>

¹⁸ <https://educateinspirechange.org/nature/costa-rica-plans-to-be-the-first-plastic-free-and-carbon-free-country-in-the-world-by-2021/>

¹⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-06/south-australia-plan-to-ban-single-use-plastic-items/11284916>

²⁰ <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Business/Food-and-beverage-businesses/Single-Use-Plastics-By-Law-Information>

2021. We also note that a 2018 Australian Senate Inquiry recommended phasing out petroleum-based single-use plastics by 2023²¹.

However, the ACT Greens believe that we could take stronger steps in the ACT before this date, especially noting a) the national move to stop exporting recyclable content, and b) that the ACT-wide kerbside waste collection contract is due to be renewed by 2023.

We note that Costa Rica has committed to phasing out the use of plastic products by 2021. All products will need to be recyclable or biodegradable, and cannot be petroleum-based. We also note that the United Nations Development Program is supporting them to achieve this aim.

This submission outlines more details about which types of plastic products should be banned. We will discuss these items in more detail below.

RECOMMENDATION 5: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD COMMIT TO BANNING A RANGE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BY 2022, BEFORE THE NEXT KERBSIDE COLLECTION CONTRACT IS SIGNED

Action on plastic

In view of the different considerations around each type of plastic and its use, in order to reduce the production and consumption of the broad variety of plastic products available to consumers the ACT Greens see the need for the Government to take an imaginative and wide-ranging mix of policy, program and regulatory steps such as:

- education programs and community awareness initiatives
- improved waste collection and management
- incentives, disincentives and support schemes
- procurement policies and decisions
- bans – ACT and federal
- taxes

Some of these can be put in place now, and some will need further exploration.

To assess and balance which of these actions are best for specific items, two distinct questions need to be addressed when considering the reduction of a single-use plastic item:

- How **important** is it to deal with this category of waste? (quantity, toxicity)
- How **easy or difficult** is the category of waste to deal with? (public support or understanding, regulatory ease)

²¹ Recommendation 8.24, https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/WasteandRecycling/Report/b02

Noting that the next ACT kerbside waste collection contract is due to be renewed in 2023, it would be wise to address a number of the issues in this area before 2022 when contract negotiations begin, so the ACT is not locked into a contract that prevents us from further waste reduction initiatives.

We note that there needs to be cultural shift so that use of non-recyclable and single-use plastics is inherently frowned upon and companies move away from creating or selling these products in the first place. With public momentum building, especially after the ABC's War on Waste bringing the issue to national attention, we believe that the time is right to instigate greater behavioural change within the ACT.

Behavioural change across our community is key to achieving significant environmental gains, rather than simply replacing disposable plastic items with disposable items made of other materials. This should go hand in hand with government regulations that support these changes.

Hobart City Council neatly notes: "Compostable packaging is not considered to be a complete solution to litter. Only some of the compostable takeaway packaging currently on the market breaks down quickly in the environment. Solutions to litter lie in effective campaigns that lead to behavioural change which emphasise an overall reduction in packaging distribution and consumption, increased use of reusable packaging and as a final choice, utilising certified compostable packaging".²²

We also note the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's "Unfantastic Plastic" report reviewing the ACT plastic bag ban. It found that whilst the ban had significantly reduced the number of single-use plastic shopping bags of under 35 microns going to landfill over the past 8 years, plastic bag use is gradually rising towards pre-ban levels, indicating that as well as population growth, the ACT still has more work to do to change consumer behaviours to reduce plastic shopping bag use.²³

Many people are concerned about some of the potential health impacts of stopping the use of disposable and single-use plastic items. It will be important to address people's negative perceptions to better support the behavioural change we need to see in coming years.

²² <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Business/Food-and-beverage-businesses/Single-Use-Plastics-By-Law-Information>

²³ https://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1250754/CSE-Unfantastic-Plastic-Aug2018_FINAL.pdf#CSE%20Plastic%20report

Regulatory Approaches

There are many products that the ACT Greens believe the ACT Government should ban from use in the ACT, including those listed in the discussion paper, but also others as outlined below. The Greens would like to see further action on other non-recyclable products, particularly those made from plastic, but also more broadly.

It will be important to evaluate the impacts on consumers for changes to individual items; assess any specific needs – such as for people with different disabilities; and then move towards a swift but orderly transition on a path towards low or no single-use packaging or plastic products.

We also note that larger supermarket chains have greater purchasing power and larger economies of scale, often allowing them to more seamlessly introduce new measures. Thus legislative provisions could be introduced to ensure that smaller businesses are not unfairly disadvantaged by regulatory approaches, such as setting target dates with sufficient phase-in periods.

Legislate to ban products

It is worth noting that given that there is currently no national agreement to ban many of these plastic items, environmental exemptions to mutual obligation laws may need to be used.

Takeaway containers

In 1998 Greens MLA Kerrie Tucker introduced legislation which required takeaway food from restaurants and food halls to be provided with reusable crockery and cutlery that should be washed, or in recyclable containers²⁴. Unfortunately the recycling technologies weren't as advanced as they are now, as well as concerns being raised about potential health issues, and thus the proposal was rejected.

But two decades later many jurisdictions around the world are now moving towards banning the use of takeaway food containers altogether. Times have changed, and the fact the plastic containers can now be recycled does not actually address the amount of waste we're producing.

It seems the health issues have been largely addressed - Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) confirms that none of the food safety laws in Australia prevent retailers from letting customers use their own containers. FSANZ spokesperson Aimee Griffith says

²⁴ https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/View/b/db_13602/19981028-15483/PDF/db_13602.PDF

"it is up to the retailer to determine the measures they put in place to ensure food is safe and suitable." Individual state and territory agencies are responsible for interpretation and enforcement of the code so slightly different guidelines may apply.²⁵

We note that Hobart City Council has voted in March this year for a by-law to ban a range of plastic items used for takeaway foods, including plastic cutlery, sauce sachets, hot food containers, plastic straws, plastic lined noodle boxes, plastic lined coffee cups and plastic lids and plastic sandwich wedges.²⁶

Retailers are still allowed to use non-plastic takeaway containers (cardboard or compostable bioplastic), paper and cardboard options, long-life plastic containers (presumably brought from home or charged for), as well as still being able to sell pre-bottled beverages and pre-packaged items such as chocolates and chips.

We note that there are a range of biodegradable options available, such as cardboard containers, or bamboo plates. However, if increased use of these is to occur, a commercial scale composting system needs to be in place to enable this not to produce further perverse environmental impacts. There will also need to be clear labelling of 'biodegradable' so people know what it is and how to recycle it. A further concern about the use of such biodegradable products is the recently discovered use of PFAS and associated fluorine-based chemicals which leave highly toxic residue on the plate or bowl.²⁷

There are also excellent options for takeaway purchased in food halls, restaurants and cafes, such as using porcelain (or washable) plates and washable cutlery. The Canberra Centre's food hall used to have a system for all outlets to use these dishes, where they were centrally collected, washed and distributed.

RECOMMENDATION 6: BAN USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC TAKEAWAY CONTAINERS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Plastic cups, plates, cutlery and straws

Although these items can be washed and re-used, they are almost always used once and discarded, often in situations (e.g. at public events) where the option to recycle is not provided. These items are sold in their billions worldwide each year, and light enough in weight to be easily blown or washed long distances, even when intended for landfill. As well

²⁵ <https://www.choice.com.au/shopping/everyday-shopping/supermarkets/articles/reducing-waste-at-the-supermarket-with-byo-containers>

²⁶ <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Business/Food-and-beverage-businesses/Single-Use-Plastics-By-Law-Information> – the fact sheet pdf is very useful

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/16/is-your-takeout-lunch-bowl-covered-in-toxic-forever-chemicals>

as the waste production, they frequently escape into the wider environment where they can endanger wildlife as they break down into ever tinier pieces.

As above, if biodegradable alternatives, such as bamboo plates, are to be used, then there needs to be a reliable and effective organic waste recycling scheme in place.

Although we propose starting a ban only with take away food outlets, over time it is envisaged that national sales of the products would cease, likely through a national ban.

RECOMMENDATION 7: BAN USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CUPS, CROCKERY, CUTLERY, STRAWS AND STIRRERS FROM TAKEAWAY OUTLETS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Disposable coffee cups

Even when made from paper or cardboard, these have a plastic coating to make them waterproof, making them a challenge to recycle due to the difficulty of separating the non-degradable plastic layer from the compostable paper/cardboard. It is estimated that Australians use and discard a billion disposable coffee cups each year.²⁸

Her Canberra has a handy summary of many of the places that give discounts to people that bring their own reusable cup: <https://hercanberra.com.au/cpfood/reuseable-cup-discounts-canberra/>.

Some places have mug libraries, so you can borrow a mug if you forget yours, such as at Canberra Museum and Gallery. Plastic Free Bondi also promote such schemes. Some cafes have invested in hundreds of reusable coffee cups so that they can loan them to regular customers who bring them back the next day.

We note that Closed Loop also has a coffee cup upcycling program already offered at some places in Canberra, called Simply Cups²⁹, which would benefit from more retail participants.

RECOMMENDATION 8: BAN USE OF DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUPS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Polystyrene

Polystyrene (also known as styrofoam, or EPF - expanded polystyrene foam) is especially problematic for disposal. Its high volume to weight ratio makes it unattractive economically to recycle, there is no market for reused EPF, and as it is light weight and has a tendency to flake or separate into tiny pieces it is readily blown across landscapes and floats easily down

²⁸ sustainablecampus.unimelb.edu.au/a-z/c/coffee-cups

²⁹ <https://closedloop.com.au/simply-cups-australia/>, <https://www.simplycups.com.au/>

streams. Further, it easily absorbs harmful chemicals, which can be ingested by fish and other wildlife, as small pieces of EPF are easily mistaken for food³⁰.

While it would be difficult for the ACT - being a small jurisdiction - to ban polystyrene in some forms, such as protective packaging for electronic goods, the Greens believe that banning retail sale or use of polystyrene is easily achievable in the ACT, since economic and readily available alternatives already exist.

Overseas jurisdictions that have already banned or are about to ban these forms of polystyrene include New York City, the US state of Maryland, and the country of Costa Rica.

- Maryland's ban covers foam food packaging for products packaged in-state, including restaurants, cafes, food trucks, and grocery stores³¹
- New York's covers take out containers, food trays, cups, bowls plates and loose fill packaging nuts³²
- Costa Rica will ban both the import and sale of polystyrene from 2021³³

RECOMMENDATION 9: BAN ALL SINGLE-USE POLYSTYRENE PRODUCTS IN THE ACT, INCLUDING COFFEE CUPS, PLATES, BOWLS, TAKEAWAY FOOD CONTAINERS, PACKAGING "PEANUTS" AND FOOD TRAYS USED IN SUPERMARKETS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Mini shampoo and conditioner bottles

We propose that the ACT Government legislates that hotels and motels ban the use of mini bottles for shampoo and conditioner. There are already good options of refillable dispensers available for shampoo, conditioner and liquid soap which some hotel or motel chains already use.

In 2019, California passed a ban on tiny single-use plastic shampoo bottles at hotels and other hospitality establishments. Internationally, hotels are moving towards reducing plastic waste, which is a behaviour and attitude that we would like to see transferred to local hotels.

Various international establishments, including the Marriott and Intercontinental chains, and parts of the Sheraton and Hilton chains, are already using wall-mounted dispenser systems for such items, proving that this can be successful for business and popular with

³⁰ <https://www.ecobin.com.au/expanded-polystyrene-foam-banned/>

³¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/04/maryland-styrofoam-food-packaging-ban/>

³² <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/01/business/new-york-styrofoam-ban-trnd/index.html>

³³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/costa-rica-polystyrene-styrofoam-ban-environment-microplastic-law-a9011531.html>

patrons too. Marriott officials said they expected to save an average of 23,000 plastic bottles per annum for each 140-room hotel that stopped stocking rooms with mini shampoos and conditioners, indicating that such bans can have a significant impact on reducing unnecessary waste. Given that the industry is already moving in this direction, such a legislative ban would be a low-hanging fruit, allowing broader conversations about plastics in our culture to unfold.

Costs for refillable dispensers and installation in hotel rooms would be minimal and should remain the responsibility of the hotel. This could present as financial investment as purchasing bulk toiletries is likely to be cheaper long-term. Lead in time would be needed to consider usage of stock order and contracts hotels have with toiletry suppliers.

We recognise some hotels may be concerned about complaints or issues from guests, however, Intercontinental Hotels Chief Executive Keith Barr said “I’m happy to get those complaints, because I know we’re doing the right thing for the environment”, which is exactly the thinking and responsibility necessary from businesses and service industries in order to tackle the waste challenge and reduce plastic consumption.

Importantly, dispenser systems may not be appropriate for some individuals with disabilities. Therefore, certain provisions would be needed in such legislation to address the needs of guests with additional needs.

RECOMMENDATION 10: BAN PROVISION OF MINI BOTTLES FOR SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER IN HOTEL AND MOTEL ACCOMMODATION IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Plastic water bottles

The ACT Greens have been raising concerns about the use of disposable plastic bottled water for a decade, as a significant waste issue as well as a litter issue. Plastic drink bottles are one of the biggest litter problems, and the fact that they float means that they travel across waterways and pollute hard to clean up areas.

Bundanoon in NSW was the first place in the world to ban bottled water, in 2009, and the whole town worked together as a community to ensure that people had access to water through non-disposable delivery methods. Cafes and restaurants all offered water at tables, water fountains were installed at public places and schools for easy access, and refillable water bottles are for sale in many stores.

Bundy onTap³⁴, the campaign to be Australia’s first plastic bottled water free town, reports that Australians consume about 600 million litres of bottled water each year, creating over

³⁴ <https://www.bundyontap.com.au/>

60,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. 120 million litres of oil is used each year to manufacture and distribute plastic water bottles. It takes around 2,000 times the energy to produce bottled water as producing tap water, and much of this energy is wasted due to the fact that up to 65% of plastic bottles are not recycled.³⁵

For a bigger city's version, note that San Francisco has also banned the sale of disposable water bottles, and they are in their 4 year phase in period now. As of recently, this ban includes the airport, where people need to bring their own refillable water bottles.³⁶

As a result of Greens campaigning and a Parliamentary Agreement item in 2012, the ACT currently has drinking fountains installed in 184 high-use locations including bus stations, shopping centres, sports fields and parks³⁷. The Greens would like to see more of these rolled out across Canberra, while the sale of single-use plastic water bottles is phased out in all government buildings, including schools, hospitals and offices.

RECOMMENDATION 11: BAN THE PROVISION OF DISPOSABLE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, OFFICE BUILDINGS AND OTHER FACILITIES AND PROVIDE WATER IN REUSABLE CONTAINERS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

RECOMMENDATION 12: EXPAND PROVISION OF WATER FOUNTAINS AND REFILL STATIONS, ESPECIALLY ACROSS SPORTSGROUNDS

Barrier bags

As with other types of single-use, disposable retail bags, the ACT Greens note that single-use plastic bags are incredibly wasteful, and can also become a significant litter issue. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment undertook an investigation into the ACT plastic shopping bag ban last year, in order to determine what kind of shopping bag is the least environmentally damaging. The life cycle analysis was slightly complex, but the short conclusion was that the more that a bag is re-used, no matter what material it is made from, the better it is. Thus compostable or biodegradable bags and paper bags did not come out ahead of plastic bags if they are all only used once.³⁸

³⁵ <http://www.senseandsustainability.net/2018/01/16/9801/>

³⁶ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/595240/san-francisco-international-airport-bans-plastic-water-bottles>

³⁷ <https://www.data.act.gov.au/Infrastructure-and-Utilities/Drinking-Fountains/8eg4-uskm>

³⁸ P.34 https://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1250754/CSE-Unfantastic-Plastic-Aug2018_FINAL.pdf#CSE%20Plastic%20report

In terms of barrier bags, the smaller bags used by supermarkets and fresh produce vendors, there are a range of improvements that could be made to reduce our plastic waste. The Greens believe that the best course of action is to phase out free barrier bag provision by:

- Encouraging people to bring their own fit for purpose bags
- Encouraging people to purchase such items loose
- Setting a date for a ban of free provision of these bags in future (by 2022), and
- Requiring stores to charge a minimum price for them after this ban commences.

There are a plethora of companies that now make small reusable mesh produce bags, such as Onya, who also make zip up bread bags. It should be noted that these bags need not be purchased, but can easily be made at home using old material such as lace curtains.

RECOMMENDATION 13: ACT GOVERNMENT TO BAN FREE BARRIER BAGS FOR FRESH PRODUCE AND BULK FOODS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Unnecessary pre-packaged fruit and vegetables

Many fruits and vegetables come with their own packaging, such as bananas, citrus, passionfruit, garlic, avocados and onions, which all have their own peel. These items do not need to come pre-packaged in-store, and should be sold loose.

The British supermarket chain Morrisons, which is trialling the removal of plastic packaging from its fresh produce section demonstrates that customers purchasing unpackaged fresh produce increased by 40 per cent. The supermarket offered customers the opportunity to purchase such goods either loose or in recyclable paper bags, expanding the availability of plastic-free options and increasing visibility.³⁹

Morrisons also offers loyalty card points to customers bringing their own containers.

During this trial, the chain continued offering consumers packaged vegetables in a neighbouring section. Legislative regulation could offer similar flexibility to supermarkets to ease the implementation process. Other major supermarkets overseas, including Tesco and M&S, have recently begun selling only loose fruit and vegetables. This suggests that major businesses are gradually responding to consumer pressure to remove harmful plastics from their shelves.

RECOMMENDATION 14: BAN EXCESS PACKAGING AROUND FRESH PRODUCE IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

³⁹ <https://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/morrisons-the-first-supermarket-to-ban-fruit-plastic-packaging-1-4931199>

Plastic wrappers around newspapers

Over the years we have had many complaints about the local free paper The Chronicle being delivered to houses wrapped in plastic each week, and people have called on us to ban this. We note that the free weekly paper the Byron Echo is only wrapped in (compostable) plastic in weeks when rain is predicted.

RECOMMENDATION 15: BAN PLASTIC WRAPPERS AROUND NEWSPAPERS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Plastic toy giveaways in supermarkets

The major supermarket chains are continually competing with each other, and their response at the moment seems to generally include incentives such as plastic toys which are given away after certain levels of expenditure. These items are generally reflective of a recent fad, promoting the latest movie, or similar, and whilst temporarily attractive to children, are soon unloved plastic waste. Sometimes these giveaway products are made from preferable non-plastic alternatives, such as pop up Christmas characters which can be constructed made from cardboard.

RECOMMENDATION 16: BAN TOY GIVEAWAY ITEMS MADE FROM PLASTIC IN SUPERMARKETS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Balloons

Note that the ACT passed laws in 2005 that banned the release of 20 balloons or more for environmental pollution and wildlife impact reasons.

As part of a Single-Use Plastic Free Events Policy, Darebin City Council in Melbourne has prohibited single-use plastics from being used or sold on council land.⁴⁰

This means that balloons, straws and cups, are to be banned from public land in part of Melbourne's north in a bid to reduce pollution. This includes balloons, which are banned due to wildlife (especially birds) thinking that the bright plastics, especially balloons, are food.

The ACT Government should consider banning the use of balloons on public land, and should find alternatives for use at festivals and other events. It is important to note that balloons can still be used on private land.

RECOMMENDATION 17: BAN USE OF BALLOONS ON PUBLIC LAND IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST

Other types of regulation

Plastic bags – online shopping

Although the plastic bag ban came into effect in 2011, following a Greens campaign and it becoming a 2008 Parliamentary Agreement item, there have been reports of companies not

⁴⁰<http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Darebin-Living/Caring-for-the-environment/SustainableLiving>

abiding by these laws when delivering orders placed online. This is an area that needs enforcement rather than new legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 18: ENFORCE LAWS ENSURING THAT GROCERIES PURCHASED THROUGH ONLINE SHOPPING IN THE ACT ARE NOT DELIVERED IN PLASTIC BAGS

Procurement

It's great to ensure materials are 'recycled', but if uses or markets for the recycled content are not found, the materials are only stockpiled, and this is still waste.

The ACT Government's sustainable procurement policy⁴¹ currently in place needs to more explicitly articulate that procurement of goods, services and construction must favour recycled products, preferably made in Australia. The policy requires directorates to "integrate the practice of sustainability into the procurement of goods, services and construction. This applies to both the establishment of new, and the renewal of existing contracts including panels and standing offer arrangements." It also requires a principles-based approach to enable "consideration of sustainability issues relevant to each procurement".

Importantly, this means removing specific requirements for mandatory use of specific stationery suppliers, or broadening the access to more sustainable options.

The Victorian Government is working on strengthening its effort in this area⁴². As the Sustainability Victoria website highlights; "as a major buyer of goods, services and construction", government is "well placed to help build a strong market for recycled materials. Recycling is fantastic for reducing waste going to landfill, but it is only a viable option when we have a market for recycled materials".

The national waste crisis presents a strong opportunity for the ACT Government to increase the demand for recycled goods and materials by mandating that all directorates purchase recycled goods for their business activities wherever possible, and increase the weighting for recycled products.

RECOMMENDATION 19: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD INCREASE PROCUREMENT WEIGHTINGS FOR PRODUCTS WITH RECYCLED CONTENT

Ecobuy is a result of a Victorian local government initiative to improve sustainable purchasing options and purchasing power to create a streamlined procurement platform for councils to purchase sustainable products⁴³. As per the Victorian Government initiative the ACT Government directorate business areas should identify where high-volumes of recycled

⁴¹ https://www.procurement.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1345887/Sustainable-Procurement-Policy.pdf

⁴² <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/Government/Sustainable-Procurement>

⁴³ <https://www.sustainabilitymatters.net.au/content/unknown/article/councils-buy-39-green-39-through-eco-buy-708841080>

goods could be used, and remove barriers to targeting these materials - contracts for example, in order to enable products with recycled content to be purchased wherever possible.

Recycled plastic furniture and hardware

Replas products are made from recycled soft plastics and used to make hard plastic items such as bollards, benches, decking, fencing, furniture, garden products, signs, fitness trail equipment, plastic sheeting, garden stakes, and traffic control hardware, suitable for a wide variety of indoor and outdoor environments including those subject to harsh conditions such as salt water and high temperature⁴⁴.

This has on occasion been used by ACT Government for various items as above. Government should consider all outdoor furniture, bollards and fencing being made from recycled plastic wherever appropriate.

Recycled stationery

There is a broad range of stationery products made from recycled materials available for purchase through various stationery suppliers, including plastic pens (biros) which can be made of recycled plastic, calculators, and document storage items⁴⁵.

RECOMMENDATION 20: REQUIRE ACT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO PURCHASE PRODUCTS MADE FROM AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED CONTENT WHEN AVAILABLE, WITH CONSIDERATION OF COST-BENEFIT FACTORS

Supermarket 'packaging-free' or 'plastic-free' aisles

There is a growing trend towards less plastic packaging in supermarkets, however there is little choice available for customers.

As a start towards broader reforms, we would like to see dedicated aisles to allow motivated shoppers to more easily locate these products while also raising their profile amongst the general population. Models for this include the grouping of products under the "health food" or "gluten-free" banner, or even "store specials" in response to trends and customer demand.

We note that overseas there is a proliferation of whole supermarkets that are plastic-free, such as Ekoplaza in Amsterdam which wraps its items in compostable materials⁴⁶, and

⁴⁴ <https://www.replas.com.au/>

⁴⁵ Noting that these can be found centrally on the Victorian local government site <https://www.buyecogreen.com.au/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/28/dutch-company-launches-worlds-first-plastic-free-aisle-test/>

Thornton Budgens in north London⁴⁷ which is working towards being “virtually” plastic packaging free within 3 years starting with plastic-free zones. These stores are working on the basis that purchasing power that says they will refuse to stock products that have plastic packaging will shift the wholesalers’ activities.

While there are a few bulk food suppliers in Canberra, the ACT Greens believe that more wholesale behavioural change could be made through ensuring that larger supermarkets (those with 35,000 line items or more) dedicate sections of the supermarket to low- or no-packaging items, additional to the fresh produce and bulk foods sections. Coles and Woolworths have both previously had bulk-food sections in their larger stores, however, unfortunately many of these seem to be disappearing again. It would also be good to promote goods that are not packaged in plastic, but in more sustainable alternatives such as cardboard or glass.

This could also be offered in supermarket online purchasing website design – with a “packaging-free” grouping of products just like Aldi has a “Gluten Free” listing on its website⁴⁸, Woolworths has a “health food” listing with 827 products, and 368 products listed as “Halal”⁴⁹. Coles’ “Kosher” listing is less prolific, but still shows that disparate products can be flagged for specialised customer demand⁵⁰.

Neither website brings up useful information for the search “packaging-free”.

RECOMMENDATION 21: ACT GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPERMARKETS TO ESTABLISH AND CLEARLY-SIGNAL “PACKAGING-FREE” AND “PLASTIC-FREE PRODUCTS” AISLES, SHELVES OR OTHER AREAS AS AN INTERIM MEASURE WHILE PHASING OUT EXCESS PACKAGING MORE BROADLY

Improved waste collection and management

Waste management and resource recovery is a shared responsibility between consumers, governments, and businesses, although this is very difficult for consumers sometimes if sufficient facilities and information are not provided to them.

Public place recycling

The ACT Greens have been pushing for the provision of (yellow lid) street level recycling bins to be provided in our public spaces. Some bins have been rolled out in City East (as part of the 2012 Parliamentary Agreement), but we would like to see an expanded approach to the

⁴⁷ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/11/07/britains-first-plastic-free-supermarket-zones-open/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.aldi.com.au/en/groceries/gluten-free/>

⁴⁹ www.woolworths.com.au

⁵⁰ <https://www.coles.com.au/our-range/for-special-diets/kosher>

collection and recycling of materials from public places, which of course includes plastic bottle and takeaway container collection.

RECOMMENDATION 22: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO ROLL OUT RECYCLING BINS IN HIGHER TRAFFIC AREAS, SUCH AS THE REST OF THE CITY AND TOWN CENTRES

Container deposit scheme

The Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) appears to be successful in that many residents are using the scheme, many bottles are being recycled, and less beverage container waste is being littered. We're encouraged by the success and expansion of the ACT Container Deposit Scheme, noting the recent opening of new return points at Farrer, Phillip and Evatt.

In Rome, they have found a new way to incentivise people to recycle their bottles – through giving people credit for public transport use.⁵¹ The ACT could explore such incentives, and through use of more CDS machines in higher traffic areas, more beverage containers could be recycled.

Information provision of recycling services available

The ACT Government has some good waste information available on its website, such as the Recyclopaedia A-Z listing of items⁵² and the Recycle Right⁵³ pages. However, many ACT residents do not know of the Recyclopaedia and the information available.

More promotion of the site is necessary to ensure that residents are up to date with available services and restrictions. This could include more use of the 'Our CBR' newsletter, education initiatives in ACT schools, advertising on ACT public transport, information applied to bin surfaces, community service announcements on local radio stations, and greater efforts to ensure that this kind of information is added to other ACT Government communications.

RECOMMENDATION 23: INVEST MORE EFFORT AND FUNDING INTO PROMOTING EXISTING VALUABLE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION RESOURCES WHICH HELP CONSUMERS REDUCE WASTE, SUCH AS RECYCLOPEDIA

Through the work done on putting this submission together, we've become more aware of just how many different entities are becoming involved in the challenging issue of dealing with our waste. From large corporations such as Veolia that can handle huge volumes of landfill waste to small not-for-profit groups such as Plastic Free July that provide inspiration and information, it's possible to feel overloaded and confused. It is important that the

⁵¹ <https://phys.org/news/2019-07-rome-recycling-bottles-transit-cash.html>

⁵² <https://www.tccs.act.gov.au/recyclopaedia/recyclopaedia-a-z-listing>

⁵³ <https://www.tccs.act.gov.au/recyclopaedia/recycle-right>

community and stakeholders in the ACT understand what options are available to fit their needs, especially when looking for innovative ways to manage their waste. The Government should put increased efforts into education and communication, ensuring that the listing on Recyclopedia is comprehensive and kept up to date with new and emerging businesses.

RECOMMENDATION 24: MAINTAIN AN UP-TO-DATE ONLINE LISTING OF COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES CURRENTLY WORKING IN THE WASTE TREATMENT AND REDUCTION SPACE, AS A RESOURCE FOR BUSINESSES, BUILDING MANAGERS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Lids 4 kids

Since 2018 plastic lids have no longer been able to be recycled alongside other hard plastics, so these lids cannot go into our yellow recycling bins. Lids 4 Kids is collecting these small lids, and sending them off to Melbourne to a company called Envision Hands. They are then separated into colours and shredded to be used as new prosthetic limbs or mobility aids using 3D printing technology.⁵⁴

Although this is a relatively small waste item, there is no reason that the ACT Government cannot promote this information with other information on its Recyclopedia A-Z listing, or through other channels. It may also be informative to the community that this type of plastic can be reused for 3D printing, and hence spur on other innovations.

As you can see from the facebook pages⁵⁵, collecting lids is taking off in popularity at the moment, and the ACT Government needn't play any larger role than updating a webpage and promoting the collection points.

Bread bag tags

Bread bag tags are another small plastic item which is not recyclable, but a community group overseas has found a way to use them. The Danielle Cares for Chairs organisation has found a recycling plant to recycle the tags, and they then use the funds gained to purchase wheelchairs.⁵⁶

It may not be very practical to collect these items in Canberra to ship overseas, but this information could still be made available on the Recyclopedia site, in case a community organisation would like to collect them.

Terracycle⁵⁷ will take these tags if you have 1kg of them to send to them, which means that an organisation needs to collect them to build up a sufficient amount to get to the recycling

⁵⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-27/lids-for-kids-canberra-collection-volunteer-envision-hands/11249628>

⁵⁵ https://www.facebook.com/groups/534154670454913/?source_id=338645390402390

⁵⁶ <https://daniellecaresforch.wixsite.com/daniellecareforchair>

⁵⁷ <https://www.terracycle.com/en-AU/brigades/bread-bag-closures-au>

plant. They then use the plastic to make all kinds of things like playground equipment to frisbees.⁵⁸

RECOMMENDATION 25: PLASTIC LIDS AND BREAD BAG TAGS SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE GOVERNMENT'S RECYCLOPEDIA WEBSITE

Reducing and cleaning up litter

Plastic waste is not just a problem in our waste streams, but it is also a significant portion of litter in our environment. Up to 130,000 tonnes of plastic waste end up in Australian oceans each year as well as inland and urban waterways. This includes the rivers, lakes, stormwater drains and waterways of the ACT. The ACT Healthy Waterways Initiative conducted a community survey, which determined clean waterways are extremely important to Canberrans for consumption, recreation, ecology and natural beauty. Waterway contamination due to plastic impacts the quality of water consumed by Canberrans and further demonstrates the urgency needed to mitigate the effects of the plastic-waste crisis.

As well as reducing the amount of single-use plastic being consumed and discarded in the ACT, there should also be a continued focus on reducing littering as well as encouraging litter clean up blitzes, programs and events.

Innovative ways to encourage plastic waste collection could also be explored, such as a "Plastic Fishing" program for corporate volunteering and team-building, school group excursions or holiday program activities, in which participants go boating on Canberra's lakes and ponds with nets and fishing rods to "catch" plastic litter instead of aquatic life, thereby increasing public awareness of the problem of plastic waste in our waterways. This is modelled on a program developed in the UK⁵⁹, and could perhaps be developed in partnership with Waterwatch or local fishing groups.

Another fun way to address the proliferation of litter in our environment is through Trash Mob⁶⁰, a volunteer run organisation that chooses places to litter-pick at while making it fun. They have had many events in 2019 around Canberra, and make them social events, with a free lunch or similar afterwards⁶¹.

Cigarette butts:

Cigarette butts can generally be found in most urban and park environments. Hundreds and thousands of cigarette butts regularly end up in our waterways, drains and so forth, and

⁵⁸ <https://www.terracycle.com/en-AU/pages/recycled-products>

⁵⁹ <https://www.hubbub.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f480f587-6eeb-4e8e-bf75-df15630ddcf2>

⁶⁰ <https://startsomegood.com/trash-mob>

⁶¹ https://www.facebook.com/events/1098534023869733/?active_tab=about

Canberrans need to be reminded to be more mindful with their cigarette butts and educated on the impacts. Although the remnant tobacco in cigarette butts is organic and will biodegrade, the filter is made from non biodegradable plastic cellulose-acetate, and the butt will begin to leach nicotine and pyrene within an hour of being dropped in water or onto the ground. These chemicals are toxic to some wildlife.

The ACT Government should revitalise a cigarette waste awareness campaign. Small targeted cigarette bins could be placed in key areas around hotspot areas, eg. outside pubs and nightclubs. If not placed by government, venues with liquor licences could be required to provide such bins that give their clientele easy disposal options, thus encouraging less litter overall. When no bin is provided, unfortunately this means many people simply do not think of disposing of butts responsibly.

We also note that cigarette butts are able to be recycled, and the City of Melbourne recycles them through Terracycle, to turn them into hard plastic outdoor furniture and playground equipment.

RECOMMENDATION 26: ACT GOVERNMENT TO FUND, CREATE AND PROMOTE A CIGARETTE WASTE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

RECOMMENDATION 27: THAT ACT VENUES WITH LIQUOR LICENCES ARE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE ASHTRAYS AND APPROPRIATE BINS OUTSIDE THEIR VENUES

Education, awareness and behavioural change – enhancing the work of ACTsmart

The Greens see the enormous value of sustainability community education and awareness programs such as the Actsmart Business Recycling Program and the Actsmart Schools Sustainability Program. While this work has been focused largely and necessarily on energy and water efficiency over the last decade, their role could be funded to expand to also focus on waste reduction, especially single-use plastics.

Noting the national waste crisis, the ACT Government now needs to drastically step up its community education and awareness role in relation to waste avoidance, minimisation and recycling. In the lead up to 2022, by which time we would like most single-use plastic banned, the Government should support the behavioural change required. This could be done directly through ACT Government agencies, or through grants to community groups.

Waste initiative possibilities are manifold here, but could include:

- encouraging eateries, delicatessens, etc, to offer a discount to customers who bring their own containers and coffee cups

- increased efforts to encourage businesses to provide better options for employees to recycle their waste at work, including organic waste and soft plastics collection
- talking to event organisers – whether corporate, community, sporting or other - about ways to make their event Zero Waste or Plastic Free
- Helping consumers find the most sustainable products, including ones made from recycled content, such as the Victorian Government sustainability website does⁶²
- More promotion of second hand products (eg. clothing and furniture at charity shops, the Green Shed and Buy Nothing facebook groups)

RECOMMENDATION 28: ENHANCE AND COORDINATE ACT WASTE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES ACROSS TCCS AND EPSD TO INCREASE LEVELS OF WASTE REDUCTION EDUCATION FOR ACT BUSINESSES, EVENTS ORGANISERS, RETAIL OUTLETS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Community grants scheme for waste reduction and increased recycling

Building on the positive work of ACTsmart, the Government could provide a waste specific grants program to encourage the community to develop and expand recycling initiatives and ideas. This would work as per current climate change community grants and environment community grants.

Additional opportunities for community individuals, groups and organisations to increase their ability to progress recycling and waste-reduction initiatives and utilise their expertise would be great way to get the community involved, inspired and proactive about waste-reduction. Grants projects could also be extremely beneficial to growing the knowledge and ingenuity of waste-reduction for the government and provide education to the community more broadly. This could also include community groups actively promoting the plastic free movement, which has had considerable success in other jurisdictions, like Plastic Free Bondi⁶³.

This could have a particular focus on the goal of establishing a plastic recycling industry in the ACT, as well as attracting novel strategies to repurpose soft plastics and reduce plastic waste. Establishing this scheme would encourage innovative and creative minds within our community to help tackle the plastic environmental crisis.

Initiatives and solutions could include things like developing an app to help shoppers find their nearest zero packaging shop or eatery, or developing. There have already been some apps developed that will support behavioural change around creating a more sustainable

⁶² <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/You-and-your-home/Live-sustainably/Single-use-items>

⁶³ <https://www.plasticfreebondi.org/>

lifestyle, such as the Neighbourhood Effect's online guide⁶⁴, which includes information such as where to take your soft plastics for recycling.

RECOMMENDATION 29: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONSIDER TARGETED WASTE GRANTS, AWARDS OR SUPPORT SCHEMES SPECIFICALLY FOR COMMUNITY AND ENTREPRENEURS TO DEVELOP RECYCLING AND WASTE-REDUCTION SOLUTIONS

Sustainability giveaway products

Like in the early 2000s, when the Federal Government provided all households with an egg-timer for timing your showers to increase awareness about drought and influence Australians to use less water and create water reduction habits and behaviours, education is needed for Canberrans about the significant waste issues the ACT and Australia more broadly is experiencing. This education should provide information about why reducing plastic use is important, and also provide the resources to aid people to improve their behaviour such as reusable cups, shopping bags, mesh bags, reusable collapsible takeaway containers, reusable menstrual pads, refillable water bottles, etc. This would serve as an extremely powerful communication tool, and also reduce single-use plastic items considerably. The campaign could be branded with the 'CBR' logo and contribute to the ACT's strong positive community vibes.

As well as helping equip people to reduce their waste, the ACT Government supplying these items to householders sends a strong, positive message about the Government's commitment to sustainability and waste reduction.

Information materials provided with such items could include information about how to create reusable bags out of textiles that would otherwise end up in landfill, or about events or workshops people could attend to learn more. This could even be initiated as a community grant based program where local arts and crafts organisations can make reusable bags for Canberrans' use. Government should also actively promote and educate the public that textiles that would otherwise end up in landfill be donated for recycling. This concept has been explored very successfully by Boomerang Bags.⁶⁵

RECOMMENDATION 30: PROVIDE CANBERRA HOUSEHOLDS WITH A FREE WASTE REDUCTION PACK TO PROMOTE ACTION AND AWARENESS. CONTENTS COULD INCLUDE REUSABLE MESH BAGS FOR FRESH PRODUCE, CALICO OR HESSIAN BAGS FOR GROCERIES, REUSABLE CUPS OR WATER BOTTLES, AS WELL AS INFORMATION MATERIALS

⁶⁴ <https://www.neighbourhoodeffect.com.au/>

⁶⁵ <https://boomerangbags.org>

Bags for supermarkets

Marrickville Council has a reusable/ spare shopping bag 'spare bag outside shops' system, with containers at the front of supermarkets for spare bags in case people have forgotten to bring a bag, or so people can leave spare bags if they have some left after shopping.

RECOMMENDATION 31: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT WORK WITH SUPERMARKETS AND MALLS TO PROVIDE SPARE BAG SHARING AND COLLECTION POINTS FOR SHOPPERS

Plastic containers for delicatessen items at supermarkets

We note that as well as plastic containers being used for takeaway meals, they are also used in supermarkets for delicatessen items. Although the IGA stores leave it up to individual store owners to set their own rules, it seems that many staff in major supermarket chains are confused about the rules and often don't let people bring their own containers. We note that Ainslie Shops is very comfortable with people bringing their own containers for delicatessen goods.⁶⁶ It is important that retailers understand the laws and what is permissible.⁶⁷

RECOMMENDATION 32: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD CLARIFY RULES AROUND CONTAINER REUSE IN SUPERMARKETS AND MAKE RETAILERS AWARE OF THEM

Promoting no or low-waste supermarkets

There are already some outlets that are waste and packaging free, however, such enterprises are not nearly as widespread as they need to be. Stores in the ACT include:

- The Source Bulk Foods⁶⁸, a franchise with outlets currently in Dickson and Belconnen,
- the long-established not-for-profit Food Co-op Shop in the ANU precinct⁶⁹, and
- Naked Foods⁷⁰, a franchise with stores in Braddon and Woden.

There are also a number of online stores, such as Zero Waste Store which is plastic free.⁷¹ The Plastic Free July website⁷² showcases grocery store Wasteless Pantry in Mundaring, just outside Perth⁷³. The store produces less than 3 kg of waste per month, while serving an average of 400 customers per week.

⁶⁶ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6220227/reusable-container-program-introduced-at-ainslie-iga/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.choice.com.au/shopping/everyday-shopping/supermarkets/articles/reducing-waste-at-the-supermarket-with-byo-containers>

⁶⁸ <https://thesourcebulkfoods.com.au/stores/>

⁶⁹ <http://foodco-opshop.com.au/>

⁷⁰ <https://nakedfoods.com.au/>

⁷¹ <https://zerowastestore.com.au/>

⁷² <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>

⁷³ <http://www.wastelesspantry.com.au/>

Other jurisdictions are working hard to promote their sustainable businesses and low waste alternative options, which the ACT Government could do via improved information on an existing website (eg ACTsmart), or through promotion of other sites that already do this work. For example, Waverley Council, which takes in the tourist destination of Bondi Beach, has its “Bondi Unwrapped” and “Unwrapping our Futures” programs. Actions under these banners include funding from the NSW EPA to conduct business waste and packaging audits, providing free educational resources such as Procurement Guides, Staff Training Guides and promotional posters. There is also a community movement Plastic Free Bondi, which promotes businesses in Bondi who have committed to reducing their single-use plastic.⁷⁴

RECOMMENDATION 33: BETTER PROMOTION OF RETAIL OUTLETS THAT ARE PLASTIC-FREE

Repairing plastic products

The Greens believe that product designers and manufacturers should design their products so as to minimise their impact over the product’s lifetime including making a product durable and repairable. However, our society is currently full of items that break and are not repaired, instead they are disposed of in landfill. There are a range of ways to reduce consumption and waste production, some options are outlined below:

- More promotion of second-hand shops and websites
- Expanding repair cafes in Canberra, perhaps through Mens’ Sheds. Canberra Environment Centre holds a Repair Café once a month, where a group of volunteers work together to fix and recycle things⁷⁵. The Bower⁷⁶ in Sydney is their Green Shed equivalent, which has been operating for over 2 decades, and it also runs regular successful DIY workshops on how to repair things.
- Establishing a Tool Library so that people don’t all need to purchase their own items, especially for those items you only need once a year. The Queensland State Government partnered with the State Library and the community to run a tool library in Brisbane out of the State Library in the city⁷⁷.

We also note the need for national Right to Repair legislation, which puts the onus on producers to manufacture items which are able to be repaired, and which is outlined in the national approaches section.

⁷⁴ <https://www.plasticfreebondi.org/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.canberraenvironment.org/repair-cafe-1>

⁷⁶ <https://www.thejunkmap.com.au/portfolio/bower-reuse-repair-centre/>

⁷⁷ <https://brisbanetoolibrary.org/>

RECOMMENDATIONS 34:

- PROMOTION OF SECOND-HAND PURCHASING AND DONATION OPTIONS
- SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING MORE REPAIR CAFES ACROSS CANBERRA
- SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING A TOOL LIBRARY IN THE ACT

Events

Western Metropolitan Regional Council in Victoria, the originator of the Plastic Free July initiative, provides such items as a portable water station (with taps for drinking from and bottle refilling) and a kit containing 100 clean mugs, buckets, washing up liquid and tea towels for events.

Events held at ACT Government locations could receive a discount on venue hire if they undertake to go “plastic-free” and demonstrate that they have achieved this.

RECOMMENDATION 35: ENCOURAGE AND INCENTIVISE EVENTS BEING HELD IN THE ACT TO REDUCE THEIR PLASTIC WASTE

RECOMMENDATION 36: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT SET TARGETS FOR A MINIMUM NUMBER OF ZERO WASTE OR PLASTIC-FREE EVENTS TO BE HELD IN THE ACT EACH YEAR

Nappies

As also discussed in the motion in the Assembly in July, disposable nappies have become an intractable waste stream entering our landfill, and reducing their use will be of great benefit to the environment as well as the cost of running landfill. 800 million disposable nappies end up in landfill each year in Australia - these products use a combination of plastic and paper fibres and require intensive energy to be produced and take hundreds of years to degrade. It must also be noted that people often do not empty their contents into the toilet before disposing of (as they should), thus there is also excessive methane from these used nappies.

A legislative ban on disposable nappies would be extremely unpopular and likely impractical - although we note that Vanuatu will begin phasing in their ban at the end of this year - yet the value of significantly reducing the volume of nappies entering landfill is high. Consequently, non-regulatory mechanisms will be needed to discourage their use. We support a range of key ways to reduce the use of disposable nappies:

Information and workshops

ACT residents, especially new parents, would largely welcome information and workshops introducing and demonstrating the use of cloth nappies. Clear educational material highlighting the benefits of using non-disposable nappies should be produced. Workshops could be run by appropriate government agencies or community groups to provide free

introductory workshops showcasing and demystifying cloth nappies, including information about the various products available and how to use them.

The ACT Government should support community groups to run classes, workshops, information sessions and find greater suppliers and stockists of cloth nappies. Groups such as the Canberra Environment Centre⁷⁸ and Canberra Cloth Bums are already doing some of this work, but by working through the ACT health system or other government service providers, a wider section of the community could be reached. The Environment Centre has a cloth nappy display for people to drop in and see.

RECOMMENDATION 37: ENSURE NGOS ARE ADEQUATELY RESOURCED TO ENABLE ENHANCED PROMOTIONAL WORK ON REDUCING DISPOSABLE NAPPY USE

Information through ACT Government agencies

Starting Canberra's newborns in cloth nappies while they're still in hospital would further encourage new parents to make the choice to use cloth, or even earlier through maternity classes and community health centres. Midwives, MACH nurses and other relevant ACT Government agencies can assist with education and promotion of reusable nappies. The Queen Elizabeth II Family Centre may also be an appropriate venue for cloth nappy workshops.

Wollongong City Council provides one model for this plan⁷⁹ - their figures suggest that for \$7,000 outlay in having a council officer attend pre-natal classes and mothers' groups, almost 700,000 nappies have been kept out of landfill over the 11-month period through to June 2019. Wollongong Council also estimates that by volume disposable nappies are the biggest single item going into landfill from residential rubbish bins.

RECOMMENDATION 38: OFFER WORKSHOPS ON USING CLOTH NAPPIES INSTEAD OF DISPOSABLES TO EXPECTANT PARENTS AT HEALTH CENTRES OR CHILDBIRTH CLASSES TO CREATE GREATER PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THEIR BENEFITS

Cloth nappy information kits

Supplying cloth nappy kits for trialling can be a useful step to aid new parents. Western Australian organisation Green Skills Inc⁸⁰ showcases what can be done in this area. With a grant from the Western Australian Waste Authority⁸¹, Green Skills trains local Parent Educators in how to use modern cloth nappies, and provides nearly all Perth's maternity

⁷⁸ <https://www.canberraenvironment.org/wee-ones-modern-cloth-nappy-display>

⁷⁹ <https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/6220096/why-cloth-nappies-are-making-a-comeback-in-the-illawarra/>

⁸⁰ <https://greenskills.org.au/>

⁸¹ <http://www.wasteauthority.wa.gov.au>

hospitals with Antenatal Cloth Nappy Demo kits. Organisations in WA such as playgroups, support groups, etc, can book a cloth nappy demo via the Green Skills website. It would be easy to offer similar workshops via existing ACT run health services⁸².

Included would be information on the cost of modern cloth nappies – higher up-front, but significantly lower in the long run – the environmental and health benefits, and hands-on demonstrations of the different options available.

Cloth nappy services at early learning centres

Some early learning/ family daycare /childcare centres already offer cloth nappy services as the norm for their children still in nappies, it should be noted that this is often much cheaper for the parents. The ACT Government could list which centres offer cloth nappy services for parents' easy assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 39: INCENTIVISE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE CENTRES TO USE CLOTH NAPPY SERVICES ONSITE

RECOMMENDATION 40: INVESTIGATE CAPITAL LINEN SERVICE OFFERING CLOTH NAPPY SERVICES AT THESE CENTRES AND HOSPITAL MATERNITY DEPARTMENTS

Menstrual products

The Greens have long advocated for reduction in the use of disposable sanitary products. These products are made from a complex combination of paper and synthetic fibres, as well as other plastics. They are clearly not recyclable and add to our residual waste streams.

We were pleased to support the motion debated in the Legislative Assembly on 31 July 2019, calling for more community education on low waste or waste-free options for sanitary products.

The average menstruating person in Australia uses around 10 000 to 12 000 disposable menstrual products over the course of their life, with pads taking more than 500 years to decompose. These products require the use of a significant amount of plastic and water during production and contribute to landfill as they cannot be recycled, as well as impacting on plumbing and sewage if not disposed of correctly.

There are many alternatives available these days; disposable pads and panty liners can be easily replaced by reusable cloth pads⁸³ and now period underwear⁸⁴; tampons are readily

⁸² <https://health.act.gov.au/services-and-programs/women-youth-and-children/newborn-care>

⁸³ There are lots of brands to choose from: <https://hannahpad.com.au/>, <https://www.ecopadsaustralia.com/>, <https://www.floraandfauna.com.au/body/feminine-hygiene/reusable-cloth-pads/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.loveluna.com/>, <https://www.modibodi.com/collections/underpants>

replaceable with menstrual cups⁸⁵. There are a range of products available, some even in major supermarkets, and it should be noted that they pay for themselves in a very short amount of time. The ACT Government should actively communicate to Canberrans that using waste-free sanitary products has immense benefit to reducing waste to landfill or ending up in sewage.

Promotion and awareness activities could be undertaken through schools, hospitals and health care centres.

RECOMMENDATION 41: THE ACT GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF ALTERNATIVES TO DISPOSABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS THROUGH A RANGE OF CHANNELS, AS WELL AS EXPLORATION OF INCENTIVES FOR INCREASED USE

Continence products

Disposable continence products have similar issues to menstrual products and nappies regarding waste generation and difficulty of recycling, as discussed above. The average adult experiencing incontinence uses at least three continence pads a day⁸⁶. Just as for sanitary napkin replacements, reusable continence products can save a lot of energy and water. They may not always be appropriate as a replacement for all people and situations, and their substitution with reusable versions also has similar challenges and solutions to those surrounding menstrual products and nappies. There are reusable pads and pants available for day and overnight use, as well as washable absorbent bedsheets and bed pads.

Key target audiences for promotion of alternatives would be aged care and nursing homes.

RECOMMENDATION 42: THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROMOTE USE OF REUSABLE CONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO TARGET AUDIENCES

ACT Government agency activities

Canberra hospitals and health services

There are some key activities that could be undertaken within ACT health facilities, including:

- Joining the international network of Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network⁸⁷, noting that waste is one of its 10 key goals⁸⁸

And as discussed previously:

- Banning single-use bottles and cups by 2020

⁸⁵ This company has 6 brands instore online <https://www.menstrualcupsaustraliaonline.com.au/>; <https://lunacups.com/>,

⁸⁶ <https://www.modibodi.com/pages/incontinence-underwear>

⁸⁷ <https://www.greenhospitals.net/>

⁸⁸ <https://www.greenhospitals.net/waste/>

- Undertaking education programs for reusable nappy, menstrual and incontinence products

RECOMMENDATION 43: INVESTIGATE JOINING THE GLOBAL GREEN AND HEALTHY HOSPITALS NETWORK, AS WELL AS RAISING AWARENESS OF REUSABLE CLOTH NAPPY, MENSTRUAL AND INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO PATIENTS IN ACT HOSPITALS AND IN OTHER HEALTH FACILITIES

Other ACT Government facilities

There are some key plastic waste reduction activities that could be undertaken within facilities where people are in ACT Government care:

- Banning single-use bottles and cups by 2020
- Undertaking education programs for menstrual and incontinence products as appropriate

RECOMMENDATION 44: INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING REUSABLE MENSTRUAL AND INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO PEOPLE IN THE CUSTODY OF THE ACT GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS AT THE ALEXANDER MACONOCHIE CENTRE, DHULWA, BIMBERI AND IN OTHER GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

Soft plastics collection

Many state government and local councils around Australia are now recommending that people collect their soft plastics and put it in available REDcycle⁸⁹ collection points in major supermarkets. The ACT Government should promote these collection points to ACT residents, which would cut down on the amount of plastic going to landfill, reducing landfill costs to the government.

RECOMMENDATION 45: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROMOTE SOFT PLASTICS REDCYCLE COLLECTION POINTS TO THE PUBLIC

Introducing regular soft plastics collection points across all ACT Government agencies would create an additional stream of government agency waste collection. This would mean that each government agency site would have four bins: recycling, organic waste, soft plastic and landfill.

RECOMMENDATION 46: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROVIDE SOFT PLASTICS COLLECTION POINTS ACROSS ACT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES FOR TAKING TO REDCYCLE BINS

⁸⁹ <https://www.redcycle.net.au/what-to-redcycle/>

Recycling at ACT Property Group sites

Concerns have been raised with us that a number of ACT Government buildings, leased to various businesses and organisations do not provide or even require recycling services or hoppers. This seems in contradiction to ACT Government initiatives to reduce waste to landfill. It seems that ACT Property Group provides landfill waste hoppers, but not recycling options. This could easily be built into charges for tenants, so needn't cost the Government extra money. Noting that financially, it is generally cheaper at a commercial level to pay for recycling rather than landfill hoppers.

If the ACT Government is dedicated and serious about reducing waste-to-landfill and influencing Canberrans to have good recycling and waste reduction behaviours, it should be providing recycling services alongside waste services to building tenants. ACTsmart should also be talking to tenants about additional recycling options such as organic waste and soft plastics.

RECOMMENDATION 47: REQUIRE ALL ACT PROPERTY GROUP BUILDINGS TO HAVE RECYCLING OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR ALL TENANTS

National approaches

Recycled content labelling

Labelling that outlined that level of recycled content would allow consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions and reward environmentally-conscious production strategies.

In April this year, the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia (WMRRAA) called for the fast-tracking of a *Made with Australian Recycled Material* label, especially in the context of China's National Sword policy and countries such as India, Malaysia and Indonesia also tightening their policies on accepting waste from other countries.

A *Made with Australian Recycled Material* label would be one mechanism through which governments could stimulate market interest in recycled products, helping create the economic conditions necessary to reduce unnecessary plastic waste.

Given that the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, Planet Ark, and Prep Design partnered with government and industry to produce the Australasian Recycling Label, which informs consumers how to recycle different types of packaging effectively⁹⁰. These organisations have the experience to help with the design and implementation process of a

⁹⁰ <https://planetark.org/recyclinglabel/>

recycled content label, also they could ensure that these different labels are not too confusing for customers.

RECOMMENDATION 48: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROPOSE THAT COAG COORDINATE INTRODUCTION OF AN AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED CONTENT LABELLING SCHEME TO SUPPORT THE USE AND PURCHASE OF AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED MATERIAL

Recycled content – minimum levels

Noting that despite many recycling technologies being available, companies are still reluctant to use recycled content in the production of their products. For example, Coca-Cola, one of the biggest drinks manufacturers internationally, still only uses around 7% recycled PET in the production of their bottles⁹¹. Given that manufacturing costs are lower for virgin plastic use, regulation will be required to change this pattern.

RECOMMENDATION 49: REQUIRE COMPANIES TO USE MINIMUM RECYCLED CONTENT IN THEIR PLASTIC PACKAGING, AND RATCHET THESE REQUIREMENTS UP OVER TIME AS TECHNOLOGIES ALLOW

Plastic or polymer tax, or no-recycled content tax

Exploring economic tools such as a levy or tax on plastic production at a national level could provide a price signal to explore alternatives to plastic. One example is the Minderoo Foundation, which is currently conducting research on the optimum structure and implementation of a polymer tax and seeking support from oil, plastic and consumer businesses involved in the plastics supply chain.

Last year UK's Chancellor of the Ex-chequer, Philip Hammond, announced he would introduce a tax on so-called virgin plastic in the Budget.⁹² The Government is consulting on imposing a tax on food and drink companies using plastic packaging that does not include at least 30 per cent recycled content. The measure is intended to target in particular virgin plastics that are nearly impossible to recycle such as some food trays and plastic straws.

RECOMMENDATION 50: THAT THE ACT WORK WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO EXPLORE ECONOMIC TOOLS SUCH AS A LEVY OR TAX ON PLASTIC PRODUCTION, OR ON PRODUCING PLASTIC PACKAGING WITHOUT ANY RECYCLED CONTENT, AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

⁹¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/almost-no-plastic-bottles-get-recycled-into-new-bottles.html>

⁹² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/11/07/britains-first-plastic-free-supermarket-zones-open/>

Separable components

One firm step that could be taken – preferably at a national level, is ensuring that products, especially packaging, but really all products - are made of components that are either of a single source product, or otherwise easily separable to enable recycling.

For example, glass, steel or paper are all separable and recyclable items – no matter what was stored in them. However, as soon as a product is made from multiple types of products that are fused together in any way, they get quite difficult to separate and recycle. For example, a Lindt ball wrapper is made of foil and soft plastic fused together and is quite difficult to separate, meaning that neither the foil nor the plastic can be recycled.

RECOMMENDATION 51: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT PRODUCTS AND THEIR PACKAGING ARE MADE FROM COMPONENTS THAT ARE 100% SEPARABLE AND HENCE RECYCLABLE

Lifetime product stewardship

We would like to see producers (and retailers) of single-use plastic products be made responsible for lifetime product stewardship to a far greater degree. Currently, there are externalised costs to these products that are either paid by government (e.g. the cost of disposal in landfill) or by the environment and wildlife (e.g. the cost to the global ecosystem of proliferating plastic in the oceans.) Requiring single-use plastic producers and retailers to take back their goods and packaging would incentivise them to manufacture goods that are cheaper to reuse or dispose of, driving a reduction in resource-use and an increase in recycling.

RECOMMENDATION 52: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT ALL PLASTIC PRODUCT MANUFACTURING COMPANIES ARE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PRODUCTS – AND FOR THEM TO TAKE THEIR PACKAGING BACK, AND THE PRODUCT BACK AT THE END OF ITS LIFE

Right to Repair

We live in a highly disposable society at present, and the vast majority of goods we purchase are not designed for long-term usage. When they break, it is usually cheaper to throw the object out and purchase a brand new one, creating superfluous waste. There is also often a difficulty whereby a company has designed their products so that only their designated company repairer is allowed to do any work on it, otherwise rendering any warranty void. A 'right to repair' would give consumers the right to have products repaired, replaced, or perhaps refunded. Although such a law would likely create a more durable product in the longer run.

RECOMMENDATION 53: CONSIDER A NATIONAL APPROACH TO A 'RIGHT TO REPAIR' SO THAT FAULTY GOODS ARE ABLE TO BE EASILY REPAIRED

Cigarette filters

As noted in the litter section, cigarette butt waste is prolific, and the filter is made from the plastic cellulose-acetate, which does not biodegrade. We note that a plastic-free, biodegradable alternative, called Green Butts⁹³ has been developed which could address this significant issue.

RECOMMENDATION 54: THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BAN CELLULOSE-ACETATE FILTER USE BY TOBACCO COMPANIES WITHIN 5 YEARS

Biodegradable crockery alternatives

We note the broad range of biodegradable options available, such as cardboard containers, or bamboo plates. There are also 'biodegradable plates' made of material that has been highly industrially processed and which come at a cost to people's health. It has been recently discovered that these particular bowls and plates are manufactured with the use of PFAS (per- and poly-flouroalkyl substances) - fluorine-based chemicals which play a role in protecting the bowl from heat and grease (making them difficult to compost), and which leave highly toxic residue on the plate or bowl.⁹⁴

This is of high concern, and given that this is very recent news, the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Authority (ANZFS) should perhaps look into this issue as a matter of urgency, especially noting the number of jurisdictions that are now shifting away from using single-use plastic products.

RECOMMENDATION 55: THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATE THE USE OF PFAS IN PRODUCTION OF BIODEGRADABLE CROCKERY, AND BAN PRODUCTS MADE WITH PFAS AND ASSOCIATED FLOURINE CHEMICALS AS A MATTER OF URGENCY IF THE HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT SHOWS THE NEED

⁹³ <https://green-butts.com/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/16/is-your-takeout-lunch-bowl-covered-in-toxic-forever-chemicals>
<https://newfoodeconomy.org/pfas-forever-chemicals-sweetgreen-chipotle-compostable-biodegradable-bowls/>

Opportunities

The Greens believe that all waste should be treated as a resource and processed in a way that achieves the maximum economic and environmental benefit, taking into account a full life-cycle analysis and working towards a circular economy.

Recycling industries

The national waste crisis with the collapse of international recycling markets has brought about an opportunity for the ACT to focus more on these goals. We note that the WMRRAA estimates that 9.2 jobs can be created for every 10,000 tonnes of material recycled – a welcome opportunity for the ACT region.

Given that the Federal Government, with the support of COAG, has announced that it will ban exports of waste intended for overseas recycling, it will now undoubtedly be looking into how to best implement Principle 3 of the 2018 National Waste Policy⁹⁵ - to “increase use of recycled material and build demand and markets for recycled products”.

We also believe that the private sector should be supported to provide sustainable solutions and create markets for the various streams of waste produced in the ACT. We note recommendation 1.5 of the ACT Waste Feasibility Study - for the ACT Government to “identify and facilitate market development for materials that are currently sent to landfill”, and look forward to the finalisation of the Waste Feasibility Study and its Roadmap. The key for the ACT will be to identify our key waste streams and work with local and regional industries to develop appropriate solutions fit for purpose in our smallish markets. The fact that the rest of the country will also be doing this same work will hopefully enable synchronicities to occur which may allow solutions to be developed faster than usual.

The Greens believe that investment in waste management solutions should not depend upon a high level of waste production to ensure financial viability, especially if systems will require feedstock of an item that will be phased out of production. We want to see detailed life-cycle analysis of any waste management investment before it is made and a focus on closed-loop cycles of production and to emphasise principles of recovery, remanufacture and generation of minimal waste.

RECOMMENDATION 56: THAT NEW RECYCLING INDUSTRIES HAVE FULL LIFE-CYCLE ANALYSIS UNDERTAKEN AND WORK WITHIN A CLOSED LOOP/ CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

⁹⁵ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/d523f4e9-d958-466b-9fd1-3b7d6283f006/files/national-waste-policy-2018.pdf>

Regional coordination

We also believe that regional and interstate coordination is vital to ensuring that waste and resource recovery markets are financially viable. Regional coordination, including collaboration with jurisdictions on packaging reduction and producer responsibility programs could be more successful than trying to create entirely local markets. A regional collaboration on waste could be modelled on the Cities Power Partnership for energy.

It is very important that we create financially viable industries for recycled materials that support the ACT moving towards a circular economy. It is equally important that we shift our procurement patterns to ensure that we can actually support any new industries that are developed.

One specific proposal that has been floated is creating ‘green concrete’ – using rubbish to make building materials, but for these to be viable industries, again it is important for the government to also procure these products wherever possible.

RECOMMENDATION 57: EXPLORE FACILITATION OF A REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON STIMULATING RECYCLING INDUSTRIES

Conclusion

There are a broad range of measures that the ACT and Federal Governments can undertake to support a dramatic reduction in plastic use and waste production. We hope that this submission offers many workable solutions to our plastic waste crisis. However, we would be very happy to discuss any issues raised in the submission if you would like any further information.

Summary of recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT SET WORLD LEADING WASTE TARGETS AND POLICIES, INCLUDING IN RELATION TO PLASTICS	5
RECOMMENDATION 2: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET TARGETS FOR REDUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL WASTE STREAMS IN ANNUAL REPORTS AND BUDGET PAPERS, WITH REDUCTION TARGETS INCREASING EACH YEAR.....	5
RECOMMENDATION 3: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT WORK TOWARDS CREATING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN RELATION TO PLASTICS	7
RECOMMENDATION 4: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD HELP PROMOTE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE AUSTRALASIAN RECYCLING LABEL.....	8
RECOMMENDATION 5: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD COMMIT TO BANNING A RANGE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BY 2022, BEFORE THE NEXT KERBSIDE COLLECTION CONTRACT IS SIGNED.....	10
RECOMMENDATION 6: BAN USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC TAKEAWAY CONTAINERS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	13
RECOMMENDATION 7: BAN USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CUPS, CROCKERY, CUTLERY, STRAWS AND STIRRERS FROM TAKEAWAY OUTLETS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	14
RECOMMENDATION 8: BAN USE OF DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUPS IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST.....	14
RECOMMENDATION 9: BAN ALL SINGLE-USE POLYSTYRENE PRODUCTS IN THE ACT, INCLUDING COFFEE CUPS, PLATES, BOWLS, TAKEAWAY FOOD CONTAINERS, PACKAGING “PEANUTS” AND FOOD TRAYS USED IN SUPERMARKETS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST.....	15
RECOMMENDATION 10: BAN PROVISION OF MINI BOTTLES FOR SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER IN HOTEL AND MOTEL ACCOMMODATION IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	16
RECOMMENDATION 11: BAN THE PROVISION OF DISPOSABLE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, OFFICE BUILDINGS AND OTHER FACILITIES AND PROVIDE WATER IN REUSABLE CONTAINERS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	17
RECOMMENDATION 12: EXPAND PROVISION OF WATER FOUNTAINS AND REFILL STATIONS, ESPECIALLY ACROSS SPORTSGROUNDS	17
RECOMMENDATION 13: ACT GOVERNMENT TO BAN FREE BARRIER BAGS FOR FRESH PRODUCE AND BULK FOODS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	18
RECOMMENDATION 14: BAN EXCESS PACKAGING AROUND FRESH PRODUCE IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	18
RECOMMENDATION 15: BAN PLASTIC WRAPPERS AROUND NEWSPAPERS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST.....	19
RECOMMENDATION 16: BAN TOY GIVEAWAY ITEMS MADE FROM PLASTIC IN SUPERMARKETS BY 2022 AT THE LATEST	19
RECOMMENDATION 17: BAN USE OF BALLOONS ON PUBLIC LAND IN THE ACT BY 2022 AT THE LATEST ...	19
RECOMMENDATION 18: ENFORCE LAWS ENSURING THAT GROCERIES PURCHASED THROUGH ONLINE SHOPPING IN THE ACT ARE NOT DELIVERED IN PLASTIC BAGS	20

RECOMMENDATION 19: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD INCREASE PROCUREMENT WEIGHTINGS FOR PRODUCTS WITH RECYCLED CONTENT	20
RECOMMENDATION 20: REQUIRE ACT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO PURCHASE PRODUCTS MADE FROM AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED CONTENT WHEN AVAILABLE, WITH CONSIDERATION OF COST-BENEFIT FACTORS....	21
RECOMMENDATION 21: ACT GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPERMARKETS TO ESTABLISH AND CLEARLY-SIGNAL “PACKAGING-FREE” AND “PLASTIC-FREE PRODUCTS” AISLES, SHELVES OR OTHER AREAS AS AN INTERIM MEASURE WHILE PHASING OUT EXCESS PACKAGING MORE BROADLY	22
RECOMMENDATION 22: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO ROLL OUT RECYCLING BINS IN HIGHER TRAFFIC AREAS, SUCH AS THE REST OF THE CITY AND TOWN CENTRES	23
RECOMMENDATION 23: INVEST MORE EFFORT AND FUNDING INTO PROMOTING EXISTING VALUABLE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION RESOURCES WHICH HELP CONSUMERS REDUCE WASTE, SUCH AS RECYCLOPEDIA	23
RECOMMENDATION 24: MAINTAIN AN UP-TO-DATE ONLINE LISTING OF COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES CURRENTLY WORKING IN THE WASTE TREATMENT AND REDUCTION SPACE, AS A RESOURCE FOR BUSINESSES, BUILDING MANAGERS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	24
RECOMMENDATION 25: PLASTIC LIDS AND BREAD BAG TAGS SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE GOVERNMENT’S RECYCLOPEDIA WEBSITE.....	25
RECOMMENDATION 26: ACT GOVERNMENT TO FUND, CREATE AND PROMOTE A CIGARETTE WASTE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN	26
RECOMMENDATION 27: THAT ACT VENUES WITH LIQUOR LICENCES ARE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE ASHTRAYS AND APPROPRIATE BINS OUTSIDE THEIR VENUES.....	26
RECOMMENDATION 28: ENHANCE AND COORDINATE ACT WASTE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES ACROSS TCCS AND EPSD TO INCREASE LEVELS OF WASTE REDUCTION EDUCATION FOR ACT BUSINESSES, EVENTS ORGANISERS, RETAIL OUTLETS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC	27
RECOMMENDATION 29: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONSIDER TARGETED WASTE GRANTS, AWARDS OR SUPPORT SCHEMES SPECIFICALLY FOR COMMUNITY AND ENTREPRENEURS TO DEVELOP RECYCLING AND WASTE-REDUCTION SOLUTIONS	28
RECOMMENDATION 30: PROVIDE CANBERRA HOUSEHOLDS WITH A FREE WASTE REDUCTION PACK TO PROMOTE ACTION AND AWARENESS. CONTENTS COULD INCLUDE REUSABLE MESH BAGS FOR FRESH PRODUCE, CALICO OR HESSIAN BAGS FOR GROCERIES, REUSABLE CUPS OR WATER BOTTLES, AS WELL AS INFORMATION MATERIALS.....	28
RECOMMENDATION 31: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT WORK WITH SUPERMARKETS AND MALLS TO PROVIDE SPARE BAG SHARING AND COLLECTION POINTS FOR SHOPPERS.....	29
RECOMMENDATION 32: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD CLARIFY RULES AROUND CONTAINER REUSE IN SUPERMARKETS AND MAKE RETAILERS AWARE OF THEM	29
RECOMMENDATION 33: BETTER PROMOTION OF RETAIL OUTLETS THAT ARE PLASTIC-FREE.....	30
RECOMMENDATIONS 34:.....	31
- PROMOTION OF SECOND-HAND PURCHASING AND DONATION OPTIONS	31
- SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING MORE REPAIR CAFES ACROSS CANBERRA	31

- SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING A TOOL LIBRARY IN THE ACT	31
RECOMMENDATION 35: ENCOURAGE AND INCENTIVISE EVENTS BEING HELD IN THE ACT TO REDUCE THEIR PLASTIC WASTE.....	31
RECOMMENDATION 36: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT SET TARGETS FOR A MINIMUM NUMBER OF ZERO WASTE OR PLASTIC-FREE EVENTS TO BE HELD IN THE ACT EACH YEAR	31
RECOMMENDATION 37: ENSURE NGOs ARE ADEQUATELY RESOURCED TO ENABLE ENHANCED PROMOTIONAL WORK ON REDUCING DISPOSABLE NAPPY USE	32
RECOMMENDATION 38: OFFER WORKSHOPS ON USING CLOTH NAPPIES INSTEAD OF DISPOSABLES TO EXPECTANT PARENTS AT HEALTH CENTRES OR CHILDBIRTH CLASSES TO CREATE GREATER PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THEIR BENEFITS	32
RECOMMENDATION 39: INCENTIVISE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE CENTRES TO USE CLOTH NAPPY SERVICES ONSITE	33
RECOMMENDATION 40: INVESTIGATE CAPITAL LINEN SERVICE OFFERING CLOTH NAPPY SERVICES AT THESE CENTRES AND HOSPITAL MATERNITY DEPARTMENTS.....	33
RECOMMENDATION 41: THE ACT GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF ALTERNATIVES TO DISPOSABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS THROUGH A RANGE OF CHANNELS, AS WELL AS EXPLORATION OF INCENTIVES FOR INCREASED USE	34
RECOMMENDATION 42: THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROMOTE USE OF REUSABLE CONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO TARGET AUDIENCES.....	34
RECOMMENDATION 43: INVESTIGATE JOINING THE GLOBAL GREEN AND HEALTHY HOSPITALS NETWORK, AS WELL AS RAISING AWARENESS OF REUSABLE CLOTH NAPPY, MENSTRUAL AND INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO PATIENTS IN ACT HOSPITALS AND IN OTHER HEALTH FACILITIES.....	35
RECOMMENDATION 44: INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING REUSABLE MENSTRUAL AND INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS TO PEOPLE IN THE CUSTODY OF THE ACT GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS AT THE ALEXANDER MACONOCHIE CENTRE, DHULWA, BIMBERI AND IN OTHER GOVERNMENT FACILITIES	35
RECOMMENDATION 45: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROMOTE SOFT PLASTICS REDCYCLE COLLECTION POINTS TO THE PUBLIC	35
RECOMMENDATION 46: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT PROVIDE SOFT PLASTICS COLLECTION POINTS ACROSS ACT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES FOR TAKING TO REDCYCLE BINS	35
RECOMMENDATION 47: REQUIRE ALL ACT PROPERTY GROUP BUILDINGS TO HAVE RECYCLING OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR ALL TENANTS	36
RECOMMENDATION 48: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROPOSE THAT COAG COORDINATE INTRODUCTION OF AN AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED CONTENT LABELLING SCHEME TO SUPPORT THE USE AND PURCHASE OF AUSTRALIAN RECYCLED MATERIAL	37
RECOMMENDATION 49: REQUIRE COMPANIES TO USE MINIMUM RECYCLED CONTENT IN THEIR PLASTIC PACKAGING, AND RATCHET THESE REQUIREMENTS UP OVER TIME AS TECHNOLOGIES ALLOW.....	37
RECOMMENDATION 50: THAT THE ACT WORK WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO EXPLORE ECONOMIC TOOLS SUCH AS A LEVY OR TAX ON PLASTIC PRODUCTION, OR ON PRODUCING PLASTIC PACKAGING WITHOUT ANY RECYCLED CONTENT, AT A NATIONAL LEVEL	37

RECOMMENDATION 51: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT PRODUCTS AND THEIR PACKAGING ARE MADE FROM COMPONENTS THAT ARE 100% SEPARABLE AND HENCE RECYCLABLE 38

RECOMMENDATION 52: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT ALL PLASTIC PRODUCT MANUFACTURING COMPANIES ARE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PRODUCTS – AND FOR THEM TO TAKE THEIR PACKAGING BACK, AND THE PRODUCT BACK AT THE END OF ITS LIFE 38

RECOMMENDATION 53: CONSIDER A NATIONAL APPROACH TO A ‘RIGHT TO REPAIR’ SO THAT FAULTY GOODS ARE ABLE TO BE EASILY REPAIRED 39

RECOMMENDATION 54: THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BAN CELLULOSE-ACETATE FILTER USE BY TOBACCO COMPANIES WITHIN 5 YEARS..... 39

RECOMMENDATION 55: THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATE THE USE OF PFAS IN PRODUCTION OF BIODEGRADABLE CROCKERY, AND BAN PRODUCTS MADE WITH PFAS AND ASSOCIATED FLUORINE CHEMICALS AS A MATTER OF URGENCY IF THE HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT SHOWS THE NEED 39

RECOMMENDATION 56: THAT NEW RECYCLING INDUSTRIES HAVE FULL LIFE-CYCLE ANALYSIS UNDERTAKEN AND WORK WITHIN A CLOSED LOOP/ CIRCULAR ECONOMY. 40

RECOMMENDATION 57: EXPLORE FACILITATION OF A REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON STIMULATING RECYCLING INDUSTRIES 41