

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Greens want a healthy, waste free future.

There is no waste in nature, and likewise we want to be a society that doesn't create waste, instead creating products that can be repaired, reused and recycled to live a good life. This is the basis of a [circular economy](#).

[Transitioning to a circular economy](#) begins by recognising that our planet's resources are finite, and that we need to address our unsustainable levels of consumption, growth and waste generation.

Our soils and waterways are being polluted and there is an alarming accumulation of plastics in the ocean. Many of us do our best to reduce waste, but find it hard when a waste-free option isn't available or it's far cheaper to buy a new product than to repair the one you have, for now. [As extractive resources like oil and metals become more scarce, there will be increasing competition over who can best recycle resources](#). For a waste-free, circular economy future we need to address these unsustainable incentives that lead to unsustainable consumption.

The ACT generates around a million tonnes of waste each year, 30% of which goes to landfill, down from 35% in 2011.

Organic waste breaking down in landfill releases methane equivalent to 60,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) each year, which is about 4% of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions. Even humble [coffee grounds have a dark side, but they have a brighter potential](#) if we embrace circular economy principles.

THAT'S WHY THE ACT GREENS WILL WORK TO REDUCE WASTE, INCREASE RECYCLING AND BUILD A CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND WILL:

1. **Reduce waste** through education and single use plastic bans from 2021
2. **Support our local recycling industry** with a \$2 million investment in education, source separation of construction and demolition waste from 2024, and improvements to recycling facilities
3. **Reduce food waste and divert organic waste from landfill** with a food and garden waste collection by 2023, including for households, commercial operators, apartment buildings and food charity systems
4. **Promote the Right to Repair** by advocating for consumers' right to repair products to address built-in obsolescence
5. **Transition to a circular economy** with a \$1.2 million Circular Economy Grant scheme, support for the sharing economies like tool libraries and targets for recycled consumables in procurement
6. **Shift to a zero emissions waste vehicles fleet** with an incentivised phase-in of zero emissions (electric or hydrogen) garbage trucks
7. **Improve waste data by auditing waste systems** and verifying waste diverted or avoided
8. **Better plan for and regulate waste facilities** to meet community needs.

1. REDUCE WASTE

The first step in reducing the impacts of waste is to reduce the amount of waste we generate. This means less pressure on our landfill and recycling systems, better use of resources and a healthier local environment. Many single use plastic items are unnecessary and end up polluting our waterways and oceans or taking up space in landfill. By working together to make small changes to the way we do business, and in our day to day lives, we can reduce waste and use our resources more effectively.

To reduce waste we will:

- a. Ensure waste education programs include a strong waste avoidance message to support community members, institutions and businesses to reduce waste, including food waste.
- b. From 2021, **ban the sale and supply of single-use plastic cutlery, stirrers, plastic straws and polystyrene food and beverage containers**. Plastic straws will be available for those who need them due to a disability or medical condition.
- c. Run an education campaign to support community members to use replacements for single-use plastics.
- d. From 2022, **ban the sale and supply of plastic fruit and vegetable barrier bags, disposable coffee cups and oxo-degradable plastic bags** (conventional plastic bags that include additives to accelerate fragmentation of the material).
- e. Make **ACT Government events single-use plastic free from 2021**.
- f. Introduce a mandatory minimum price on plastic shopping bags.
- g. Continue to advocate for reduced packaging, increased use of recycled materials and increased recyclability through national forums, including advocating for the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation's 2025 National Packaging Targets to become binding as part of a mandatory product stewardship scheme.

2. INCREASE RECYCLING

Recycling materials for their highest value use gives the best outcomes for our economy and our community. The [Better Suburbs consultation showed that ACT residents want more recycling services](#). Rather than sending valuable materials to landfill we can recycle them into new products or use them in construction. Commercial waste and building sector waste comprise around half of the waste sent to landfill each year. We will focus on helping businesses to increase recycling through tailored education, support and regulation.

To increase recycling we will:

- a. Provide an **additional ongoing \$2 million to enhance existing household and business waste and recycling education programs** including the ACTsmart programs. Adapt and expand programs as needed based on evaluation of outcomes.
- b. Increase **public place recycling facilities**, ensuring all town centres and groups centres have public recycling bins.
- c. Improve **current waste treatment facilities** and encourage new approaches and systems to deal with waste that is not being recovered.
- d. Require **businesses to have a separate collection for co-mingled recycling**.
- e. Require **source separation of construction and demolition waste** from 2024.
- f. Regulate to **address problem wastes where necessary through landfill bans** and other approaches.

- g. Promote **Government, commercial and community-run collection points** for problem wastes and provide information and systems to facilitate responsible disposal.
- h. Regularly **update the A-Z Recycling Guide** and expand it to include community-run collection points and local initiatives such as Buy Nothing groups and sharing schemes.

3. REDUCE FOOD WASTE AND DIVERT ORGANIC WASTE FROM LANDFILL

Sending organic materials, such as food, garden waste and timber, to landfill results in methane emissions. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and methane emission from landfill, and accounts for around 4% of ACT greenhouse gas emissions. Making better use of our organic waste can reduce emissions, lead to better outcomes for our community and create a valuable product to enrich soils and build food security. Food waste is a major problem, with an estimated one third of all edible food produced globally lost or wasted. Uneaten food wastes many resources – land, water, transport, refrigeration, processing, packaging and embedded emissions.

To reduce food waste and make better use of organic waste we will:

- a. **Implement household food and garden waste collection by 2023, including for apartment buildings.**
- b. Continue to deliver the **Love Food Hate Waste education** campaign and help businesses reduce food waste.
- c. **Require large organic waste producing businesses to have separate organic waste collection and a food waste reduction plan from 2023.**
- d. **Ensure** delivery of an **organic waste processing facility** suitable for household and commercial organic waste processing with a high quality end product.
- e. Investigate the potential for **requiring large food retailers to donate edible food to charities** and ensure food unfit for human consumption is used as animal feed or is composted or processed in a dedicated organic waste facility.

4. RIGHT TO REPAIR

We believe that consumers should have the right to be able to repair purchased items if they break. This stops products and resources being wasted and gives more power to consumers. The ACT Greens have been advocating through the National Consumer Affairs Forum for the 'right to repair' to be written into national legislation. The 'right to repair' is the consumers' ability to have faulty goods repaired at a competitive price by a manufacturer, a third party, or in some instances, self-repair, using available replacement parts and having access to information.

To protect consumers' rights and reduce waste the ACT Greens will:

- a. **Continue to advocate for consumers' right to repair products to address built-in obsolescence.**
- b. **Work** with state and federal counterparts to establish national right to repair laws.
- c. **Support** local 'repair cafes' to encourage the repair of items rather than their replacement.

5. TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A circular economy, where waste materials are used to create new products, will benefit businesses, society, and the environment. Rather than using materials once, then having to dispose of them, a circular economy aims to gradually decouple growth from the consumption of finite resources. Achieving a circular economy will require a national approach, but we will lead through fostering innovative local businesses, influencing supply chains and working with other states and territories.

To work towards a circular economy we will:

- a. **Introduce a \$1.2 million Circular Economy Grant scheme to encourage business, community and start-ups to trial new approaches to reduce waste, increase recycling and reduce emissions from waste.**
- b. **Preference** zero waste and recycled products in ACT Government procurement by:
 - i. Setting targets for recycled products (percentage of total spend)
 - ii. Ensuring all paper products are made from 100% post-consumer recycled materials.
- c. Conduct life cycle analysis of new recycling schemes before supporting them at a Government level. This should include an analysis of transport emissions.
- d. Fund and support research and trials for addressing problem waste streams such as contaminated paper, timber, textiles, batteries and solar panels.
- e. Support and promote repair cafes and tool libraries to encourage a culture of reuse, build the sharing economy and foster community connection.

6. SHIFT TO ZERO EMISSIONS WASTE VEHICLES

The global transition to zero emissions vehicles is underway and the ACT Government has been a leader in this space. We can continue to lead this transition by shifting to zero emissions waste collection vehicles and encouraging broader uptake of electric and/or hydrogen powered heavy vehicles.

We will:

- a. Require the **phase-in of zero emissions (electric or hydrogen) garbage trucks** in the next municipal waste contract.
- b. Use **incentives in waste contracts and lease fees to encourage low-emissions and zero-emissions heavy vehicles** in the waste and recycling industry and support through education.

7. IMPROVE WASTE DATA

There is a lack of available data on waste generation and recycling. Waste and recycling affects everyone in our community. We support waste data information being made publicly available to increase transparency and encourage community participation in waste management solutions.

To improve waste data we will:

- a. **Collect and publish data annually on ACT waste generation**, waste stockpiles, recycling, organic waste processing and waste to landfill.
- b. **Conduct and publish waste audits** of the ACT's landfills, transfer stations, Material Recovery Facility and kerbside collections every two years.
- c. **Collect and publish data on the estimated waste avoided**, recyclable materials diverted, organic waste diverted and greenhouse gas emissions avoided as a result of ACT Government waste education programs and other interventions.
- d. **Publish the disaggregated results of the quarterly waste industry reports** collected under Part 11 of the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act 2016.
- e. **Collect and publish data on cross-border movement of waste** into and out of the ACT.

8. PLAN AND REGULATE WASTE AND RECYCLING FACILITIES

Waste and recycling facilities play an important role in processing materials. As large facilities may have the potential to cause adverse impacts on the surrounding environment and residents, we believe it is critical that these facilities are well planned and regularly monitored to ensure compliance with regulations.

To ensure effective waste and recycling facilities with minimal impacts we will:

- a. **Provide [clear policy guidance and regulation for the waste and recycling industry](#).**
- b. **Require a lifecycle assessment for waste proposals**, which takes into account the long term impacts of a facility and the broader waste and recycling outcomes (prior to seeking planning approval).
- c. **Establish a Legislative Assembly inquiry into land use zoning** for industrial sites across the ACT by May 2021.
- d. **Introduce a moratorium on new waste facilities** being approved until:
 - i. life cycle and impact assessments are undertaken for these proposals, either through waste expertise in ACT NoWaste, or through independent analysis through an EIS inquiry panel;
 - ii. a clear waste policy and assessment regulatory framework to guide industry proposals is established;
 - iii. a review of industrial zonings is undertaken; and
 - iv. a levy on interstate waste importation is investigated.
- e. **Identify suitable sites for a large-scale organic waste treatment facility** and invite community participation in selecting the location.
- f. **Analyse the largest waste streams being sent to landfill** and plan systems and facilities to recover that waste.
- g. **Analyse specific unmet needs in relation to geographic provision of waste and recycling services**, particularly in the context of new suburbs and population growth projections and the phase out of services at the West Belconnen Resource Management Centre.
- h. **Ensure that all new waste and recycling facilities are built in a way that does not cause air, noise or other pollution for local residents.**
- i. **Properly resource the Environmental Protection Agency** to ensure that waste and recycling facilities operate according to their authorisations and do not pollute or stockpile waste.
- j. **Require regular reporting by facilities** of waste accepted, waste to landfill, material recycled and any waste stockpiling.