

THE ACT GREENS

VISION FOR OUR CIRCULAR ECONOMY



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Member for Ginninderra
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www.greens.org.au/act

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT Of Country

The ACT Greens recognise that the ACT is situated on the lands of First Nations Peoples that have lived and met in the ACT for thousands of years. First Nations Peoples have always lived with, and cared for, the land and waterways of the place we now call Canberra since time immemorial.

We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and pay our respect to elders.

FOREWORD

The Greens believe in people and the planet. Since forming shared government with ACT Labor in 2008, we've pushed the ACT Government further and faster than any other government in the country. Greens policies have led to powering the ACT with 100% renewable electricity, reducing emissions by 40%, launching a nation-leading EV policy and setting us up for an electric future with no fossil fuel gas.

Our ideas have shaped the country's most progressive government. But we are facing big challenges. We have a climate crisis, an extinction crisis, a biodiversity crisis and a waste crisis. Australia generates more than 76 million tonnes of waste per year. Each year, the ACT contributes around 1 million tonnes.

All of these problems have a common cause. Endless consumption on a finite planet does not work. We need to do things differently if we want a sustainable future.

ACT climate action has made amazing progress. But over the past ten years, ACT recycling has not progressed. Some Green ideas have been delivered, like the phasing out of single-use plastics and the start of Food Organics and Garden Organics recycling (FOGO). But we have not made enough change and we are sending as much waste to landfill as we did a decade ago. Our last comprehensive waste management strategy was in 2011. We need a new vision. We need to abandon the path of endless consumption and waste. We need a Circular Economy.

I'm delighted that Minister for City Services, Chris Steel, is preparing a draft Circular Economy strategy for public consultation. A true Circular Economy is a worthy new goal and it requires new thinking. The ACT is an innovative and progressive jurisdiction, but we have an economy and lifestyles based on waste and high consumption. We need to move beyond that. We need to think about what we need, and work out how to make it in a sustainable way.

I am really excited about contributing. Prior to becoming a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I worked for many years in the recycling industry, including running a recycling company and a climate change project. Since being elected to the Assembly in 2020, I've been out speaking to members of the public, recycling businesses and community and conservation groups. I don't want to lose track of all the fantastic ideas! Here are some of the things I've learned that I hope will contribute to our new Circular Economy.

Do you have some great ideas to share? Please get in touch! Your feedback will add to the ACT Greens' vision for a Circular Economy. You can also contribute to the ACT Government consultation on the Circular Economy later in the year.



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WHAT IS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

A circular economy is a system that has no waste. Everything becomes a resource used elsewhere in the circle. Nature operates like this. There is no waste in nature, only food for something else.

This is particularly important for Canberra. We love our bush capital, our urban wildlife and our nation-leading climate action. But we are a growing city with high consumption. Our economy and society constantly push us to consume more, but where did all of this stuff come from and where is it going to end up?

We must move away from endless consumption. We must instead think about what we have and work out what we need and how to get it sustainably. There is a lot of great thinking in this field, but it is hard to change a system based on consumption and waste.

If any jurisdiction can find a way, it's the ACT. We have done it for climate policy. It's time to do it for the Circular Economy.

WHAT DOES THE ACT ALREADY HAVE THAT FITS THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

The ACT Government is already supporting many programs and movements that show Circular Economy thinking.

The Right to Repair movement pushes back against built-in product redundancy that forces people to replace goods earlier than they might like. The ACT Greens have been promoting the right to repair for a decade and Consumer Affairs Minister Shane Rattenbury has been a strong advocate locally, as well as securing a Productivity Commission review that could lead to national regulation to support it.

Love Food, Hate Waste is a behaviour change program with circular thinking. This UK/Victorian program was adopted in the ACT. It aims to educate and inspire people to plan and create meals that buy less in the first place and lead to less waste. But without measuring its progress in tonnes of waste avoided, it is hard to see if this intervention is working.

FOGO or the Food Organic and Garden Organic program is in trial in the ACT. It targets a major waste stream that is currently going to landfill. Food and kitchen waste comprised at least 8% of total landfill in 2015 and around 40% of domestic waste. Food waste represents an even bigger problem when we think about all the embedded emissions and waste water, energy and resources that went into making that food, not to mention the methane emissions as the food breaks down in landfill. This week's announcement of \$13 million of Federal funds for our FOGO facility is extremely welcome news.

The ACT Government is a strong supporter of national Product Stewardship, which calls on manufacturers, retailers and users to share the responsibility for the environmental impact of products. Ideally product stewardship would use original design to create less waste and would ensure recycling schemes are in place for any end-of-life waste that can't be avoided. It has delivered results in some areas, like our recycling scheme for TVs and computers. But it is part of a slow-moving national landscape and there is debate as to whether industry-led schemes should be voluntary or mandatory.

The share economy is growing. Most of us have noticed some big changes as a result, like the switch to streaming services in place of the sale of music and video tapes, DVDs or CDs. There are more changes on the way, like the growing enthusiasm for co-housing. From initiatives like community toolboxes and Buy Nothing groups to private sector businesses like Escooter rentals, the share economy could be transformative.

The ACT has many successful recycling businesses that operate with circular thinking. The Green Shed operates second-hand shops and businesses and salvages around 8,000 tonnes of stuff that would otherwise go to landfill each year. The drop-off garden waste composting businesses run by Canberra Sand and Gravel and Corkhill Bros have been operating for over fifty years and redirected vast quantities of organic waste from landfill and into soil-improving composts and mulches. Newer operations like Capital Scraps, GoTerra and Global Worming help make up an ecosystem of food and garden waste recycling businesses. There are also many Circular Economy artists, entrepreneurs and educators operating independently from ACT Government. I've outlined a few at the end but Canberra is full of inspiration. We do not have to look far to see the solutions to our problems.

These businesses and community groups make a lot of jobs with less infrastructure and machinery than traditional recycling operations. They often avoid waste from being generated in the first place. They recover a lot of waste that is generated.

True circularity is hard to set up but cheap to run. I see significant opportunity for the ACT Government to support more development of businesses and community-led initiatives in this area. But we need a comprehensive strategy to pull it all together and we need to put real funding and commitment into all of these areas.

"The Hume Resource Recovery Estate was set up by ACT Government in the 1990s to foster local recycling businesses. Active government support like this could build lots of new Circular Economy businesses and help those that are already established. We need to develop our local resource recovery industry and make sure that Hume Estate is getting maximum benefit locally to accept, sort and process products for regional use."

- RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

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WHAT IS STANDING IN THE WAY OF OUR CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

A circular economy is a system that has no waste. Everything becomes a resource used elsewhere in the circle. Nature operates like this. There is no waste in nature, only food for something else.

Traditional waste management is structured as a triangular hierarchy. The best option is to avoid waste, then reuse it, then recycle it, then recover energy from it and then dispose of it in landfill. The system has waste built in but the goal is to minimise waste at the bottom of the triangle.

WHY DO WE BUY?

There are entire textbooks written on the psychology of why we buy things we don't need. One of my favourite quotes is by Dr Gail Dines, a Boston sociology professor.

"If tomorrow women in the west woke up and decided they really like their bodies just think how many industries would go out of business - the cosmetic industry, the clothing industry, the diet industry, the gym industry - and then think of all the allied industries that support those industries. So when I say capitalism is dependent on women hating themselves, I'm not exaggerating."

- DR GAIL DINES

I've spent my life working on material solutions to tangible problems. But the longer I look at the Circular Economy, the more I realise we need to consider feelings. Marketers create fear and anxiety and discontent and then offer a false solution to these manufactured problems. They have more money to spend on the myths than any government can invest to counter them. But we must consider the psychology behind a system that sells people things they don't need and then blames them for creating waste we can't recycle.

THE CLIMATE IMPACT OF GENERAL CONSUMPTION

The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has looked into the impact of climate emissions from general consumption in her September 2021 report, [Scope 3 Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the ACT: An Investigation of Current Scope 3 Emissions and Potential Future Reductions](#). She found that 94% of the ACT's climate emissions come from Scope 3 emissions, such as those in the food we eat, the stuff we buy and the buildings we construct. These emissions are 16 times higher than our Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, but we have not yet begun tracking them, let alone managing them. We have effectively targeted the 6% of direct emissions through our 100% renewable electricity and other policies. We have not begun the much harder work of tackling general consumption.

The ACT Government is currently developing new environmental policies that could easily integrate with the upcoming Circular Economy strategy. For instance, Environment Minister Rebecca Vassarotti recently released the ACT Government's first 'Food and Fibre' discussion paper. Minister Vassarotti is also considering waste and resources as she develops policy under her portfolio of Sustainable Building and Construction. The [ACT Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010](#) provides for sector agreements with industry which have not yet been used, but which could be applied to the Circular Economy. The ACT Government has committed to Wellbeing Indicators, which should drive us away from a consumption-based economy and towards one based on meeting genuine needs.

These threads are all an excellent fit for an integrated Circular Economy strategy. They could help us grow and make the things we need in a way that reduces consumption and creates less waste. But we need to bring these strands together, rather than thinking about waste as a separate issue.



We should consider the full environmental impact of waste and not rely too heavily on simple metrics like waste to landfill or tonnes recycled

STAKEHOLDER COMMENT

CIRCLES, TRIANGLES AND THE MAGIC LINE THAT GOES UP

Traditionally, waste management is pictured as a triangle. The best option is to avoid waste, then reuse it, then recycle it, then recover energy from it and then dispose of it in landfill. The system has waste built in, but the goal is to minimise waste at the bottom of the triangle.

WASTE HIERARCHY VERSUS CIRCULAR ECONOMY



Most governments say they stick to the waste hierarchy but in actual fact, put most of their money into disposing of the waste at the bottom of the triangle. Programs and facilities that do exist recycle the waste, recover energy from it and then dispose of it - but there is not enough funding for reuse, recycle and recovery programs and education. There are only a few effective Australian government programs aimed at waste avoidance and none that fit into a comprehensive circular economy strategy.

Below is a good example of how governments say they want a circular economy but present the old triangular waste hierarchy. This diagram is from the Australian Government's National Waste Policy 2018 report. It claims to show a Circular Economy but it has inputs at the top – raw materials – and outputs at the bottom – residual waste. This is the traditional triangular waste hierarchy squashed into a different shape and given a new name. The motives are sound but there is no genuine commitment to circularity.



Diagram from the National Waste Policy 2018. This 'circular economy' has inputs at the top and outputs at the bottom, so it is not truly circular.

The modern economy is often criticised because it is based on growth. Governments pitch a strong economy based on growth. Businesses raise capital in the same way. I know from running my businesses that the key graph I would use to show success was a line on a page going up – more customers, more sales, more reach, more money. But endless growth on a finite planet is not possible.

We need to move away from the triangle, the line and every other shape that requires endless growth. We need a Circular Economy. It's not just a shape. It's a new way of thinking.

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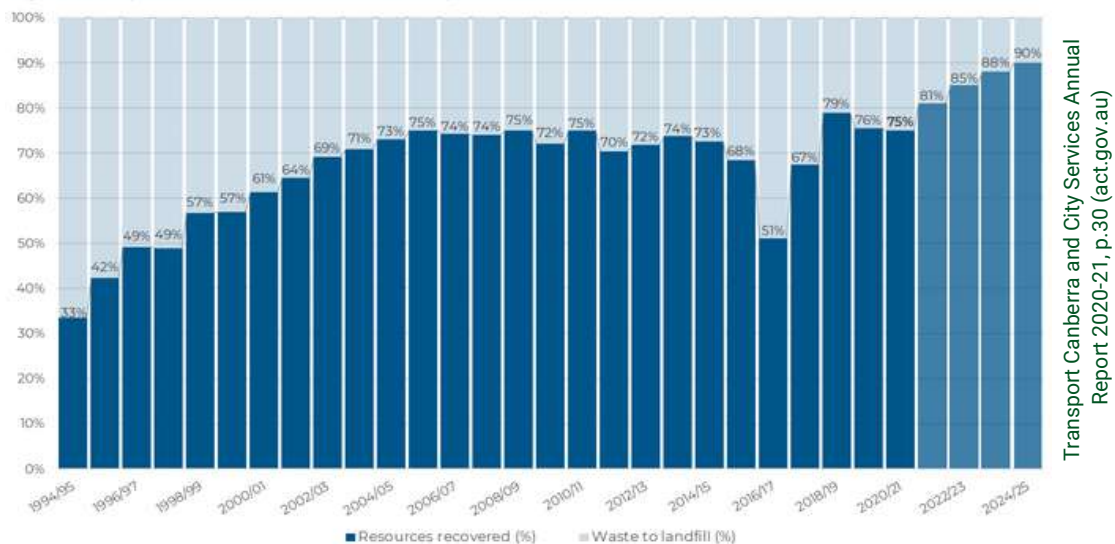
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ACT ZERO WASTE TARGET?

In the nineties, the ACT set the world's first zero waste target of 'No Waste By 2010.' It was big and bold and Canberra was really proud of it. The ACT Government even painted it on the garbage trucks. Many other jurisdictions then followed and set a zero waste target, although I have not encountered any jurisdiction that has achieved zero waste.

The zero waste policy was partly effective. It drove massive change. The ACT Government introduced major new initiatives like kerbside recycling, garden waste drop-off and construction and demolition recycling. These addressed the biggest tonnages in our waste streams. Per capita landfill went down and recycling went up. The ACT achieved a resource recovery rate of 75% of total waste generation.

And then we plateaued. Resource recovery has hovered around 75% for 15 years, with a few significant dips due to spikes in non-recyclable material sent to landfill (like asbestos).

Figure 10. Proportion of resources recovered compared to waste sent to landfill.



From p29 'Transport Canberra and City Services Annual Report 2020-2021', cropped.

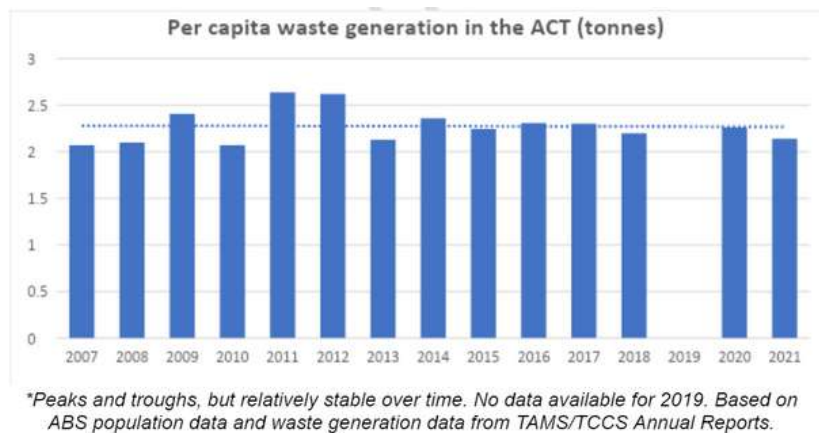
The ACT Government has since changed its goals. In 2011, the ACT Government released its [ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011-2025: Towards a Sustainable Canberra](#) setting out four key outcomes and 29 strategies for the management of waste in the ACT. In 2018, the ACT Government released its most recent waste discussion paper, the [Waste Feasibility Study: Roadmap and Recommendations Discussion Paper May 2018](#), containing renewed pathways to achieving the goals set out in the [ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011-2025](#). This Roadmap and targets aim for 90% resource recovery by 2025. They do not provide any pathway to reach 90% recovery other than energy from waste (noting that we've banned incineration in the ACT).

The Australian Federal Government's [National Waste Strategy](#) sets an even more modest target of 80% recovery by 2030. That target builds in 20% waste in a growing waste stream and makes no effort to reduce overall waste generation.

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WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE ACT'S ORIGINAL ZERO WASTE TARGET?

Canberra's per capita waste generation has not decreased. In addition, Canberra's population has increased. This means that while the ACT got better at recycling under the zero waste target, there was always more stuff to recycle. The ACT continued to send waste to landfill. Consumption remained unabated. The increase in overall waste generation meant our jurisdiction has been treading water.



We need to deal with waste when we are finished with it. But waste generation and general consumption are an even bigger problem. As well as creating waste, they also represent wasted energy, water, resources and climate emissions in their very creation. We need to think about what we need from the beginning.



There isn't yet enough discussion in the general population about the fact that climate change is linked to every SINGLE thing you consume (not just energy). Waste is a good indicator of consumption in general. The government has a great role to play in reporting on our collective waste generation

RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

WHERE DO WE SPEND OUR MONEY?

The ACT has many existing recycling programs and facilities that can be part of our circular economy. Below is a snapshot. Those in white are primarily government-operated or operate with a significant government subsidy. Those in black operate primarily on a private sector basis. Government spends most of its money at the bottom of the triangle, but it says it wants to support items at the top of the triangle.

ACT WASTE AND RECYCLING PROGRAMS



Most ACT Government expenditure sits at the bottom of the triangle (disposal and recycling). In 2020-21, ACT Government spent \$503M on city services (around 8% of the budget). Of this, around \$67M was spent on waste and recycling. The ACT Government spends most of its waste and recycling budget to collect, process or dispose of our waste and recycling and to maintain and remediate landfill cells and the Materials Recovery Facility. We also spend quite a lot on some fairly small schemes within this.

We are spending very little on avoidance programs and education. Most of our avoidance programs target small tonnes of material, like plastic packaging, straws and plastic bags. Some target high volumes of waste but we have not yet spent much on them and they are yet to deliver significant measurable results, like the Right to Repair movement and [Love Food Hate Waste](#). We are also running new programs targeting disposal and recycling and these cost a lot, but they might not be needed if we were better at avoiding waste in the first place. For instance, our Bulky Waste collection program costs around \$4.3M per year. It leads to reuse and recycling at a much higher rate than similar council programs, but it still sends around 60% of waste collected to landfill. If general consumption were lower, if we spent more on product design and behaviour change and circular economy programs, the ACT may not produce all that bulky waste in the first place.

If furniture and appliances were built to last and were easy to repair, would we need Bulky Waste collections for our old and broken stuff?



Getting people to avoid creating waste in the first place is hard for governments to do because it cuts into the heart of capitalism. No shopkeeper wants to see a government telling people not to buy things.

National product stewardship shares the responsibility for recycling between the industry, government and consumers. Schemes available in the ACT include Cartridges 4 Planet Ark, MobileMuster, National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme, Paintback, Tyre Stewardship Australia, Nespresso Coffee Capsule Recycling, Container Deposit Schemes, RedCycle soft plastics, Soft Landings mattress recycling, Terracycle and drumMuster. But progress is slow. Some schemes are mandatory but many are voluntary. This can inadvertently punish good corporates who participate, if their competition can save money by opting out.

In addition, national product stewardship schemes often deal with waste once it's created rather than recognising the benefits of avoiding waste in the first place. For instance, you can recycle your coffee capsules through Nespresso's scheme, but you could avoid producing the waste in the first place by using a coffee maker that doesn't need plastic capsules.

Government has left reuse almost entirely up to the private sector with minor subsidy, despite the fact that reuse sits high up in the waste hierarchy and is part of a circular economy. The reuse businesses, non-profits and community initiatives like Buy Nothing groups are providing an excellent service. But they cannot absorb the quantity of Canberra's stuff and they are working against modern trends towards in-built redundancy, on-line shopping and cheap new goods like fast fashion and fast furniture. The reason they function independently is because they are already operating in a Circular Economy. They make their money or their social value from the resources they create from our waste. Many existing initiatives need more support and many more might pop up with some targeted help, such as a Circular Economy Grant scheme and more community spaces.

"ACT Government should prioritise grants and funding to support reuse and waste avoidance. Imagine what we would achieve if we put real funding and promotion into repair cafes, community toolboxes, ride share and share schemes, community composters and worm farms!"

- RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

WHAT ARE OUR BIGGEST WASTE PROBLEMS RIGHT NOW?

The ACT generates around one million tonnes of waste each year. But exactly what goes into this?

It is really important to maintain good public data so that we know how we are going and so that businesses and the community can understand where our problems are. The ACT used to conduct and publish audits of household bin waste, landfill and transfer station waste and Materials Recovery Facility waste every two years. Audits showed where our biggest tonnages lay and which of our programs were working. We could use these to see if salvage at the tip-face was recovering more recyclables, if householders were using their bins correctly and which major new waste streams were emerging. But the last audits were released in 2014 and 2015. That is a long time without public data.

I am pleased to say that in recent Estimates, I was told that audit reports should be complete by the end of 2022. I would like ACT Government to commit to conducting and publishing regular audits and to think about how to use audits on waste and recycling in a more educative way. For instance, we could do small-scale bin audits on an ongoing basis and use these as ways of educating the public about how to avoid waste in the first place.



We need published waste audits every 2-3 years. Those audits should quantify and characterise all divertible material that's in our waste stream so we can develop programs and targeted education to tackle it.

RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

In the absence of current ACT data, 2020 National Waste Data shows that 21% of overall waste generation comes from household municipal solid waste, 49% from commercial and industrial waste and 30% from construction and demolition waste. Our largest waste streams come from masonry materials and construction and demolition, followed by commercial. But most of our education and new programs focus on household waste. We need to look after our big waste streams. We need to make sure that the commercial sector and the construction sector are avoiding waste in the first place, and then recycling as well as our householders recycle. We need to target new recycling options for our biggest areas of need. We need to make sure the commercial and construction sector use them as well as households.

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PACKAGING

Packaging is a big focus for many consumers, although it has less impact on our overall consumption and waste streams. Many of our new ACT Government programs tackle plastics at the retail end by banning their use or sale in shops and outlets. These programs are high-profile but target a small amount of waste (around 2% of the waste stream). They also sometimes lead to new social problems or new waste products that aren't recycled. For instance, we have banned many single-use plastics such as cutlery, stirrers and takeaway food and drink containers. But some of the replacements like bamboo cutlery, bioplastic containers and paper and cardboard contaminated with food and drink cannot be recycled in our municipal recycling facilities. We are still working through the educational and operational issues to deal with these. Replacement products made from bioplastics have so far not proven easy to recycle in composting and recycling facilities.

The ACT can learn lessons from the New South Wales Environment Protection Authority plastics ban as well as lessons from within our own borders as we travel this journey. We also have a huge opportunity. We have just received Federal funding for a new FOGO facility and a new Materials Recovery Facility. We should build these to make sure that everything bought at a supermarket can be put into the yellow-topped or green-topped bin at home and recycled. If it can't be recycled there, it should not be sold.

In a circular economy, we shouldn't just think about where we discard something at the end of its life. We should also think about how it is made. The Australian Packaging Covenant was successful in leading to real waste avoidance. In its first iteration, it led to thinner packaging and the creation of less material. More recently, the Australian Packaging Covenant set targets to produce packaging made from higher proportions of recycled material and more recyclable packaging. But it is not meeting those targets and governments are not regulating the industry to make sure it does. We should use regulation to make sure that, when an industry sets a target, it must meet that target.

EWASTE, FOOD WASTE AND OTHER PROBLEM WASTE STREAMS

Solutions are close on some of our high-priority problem waste streams. The ACT is already trialling its household FOGO program with a view to Canberra-wide delivery in 2023. FOGO waste is a large portion of landfill and represents around 10% of the ACT's tracked climate emissions. The wasted food represents even higher embedded emissions.

The first tranche of FOGO targets household waste, but supermarkets, restaurants and other commercial players also generate large amounts of food waste and should be included in later tranches. We also need further work for the types of waste that we can't yet easily recycle or design around, like disposable nappies for babies and continence products for adults (these are currently the subject of a Legislative Assembly committee inquiry). We should also work out how our household and non-household FOGO waste might fit in with the existing options operated by Capital Scraps Compost, ShareWaste, OzHarvest, Communities at Work, Global Warming, Goterra, Grind to Ground and home composting.

The ACT Government is also working on a policy to recycle solar panels, EV batteries and electrical appliances. While a relatively small amount of the overall waste stream, these items are high profile and contain highly valuable rare resources. The lack of recycling infrastructure is undermining public confidence. For instance, people commonly criticise EVs because they are worried about where the lithium for batteries comes from and what happens to those batteries at end-of-life. I was delighted last year when the ACT Legislative Assembly passed my motion to investigate ways to recycle these. I'm pleased to see some progress and the advent of better recycling schemes like B-cycle.

When we've set up good recycling arrangements for households, we should use incentives to make sure business is also recycling that type of material. We could use regulation too, like requiring businesses to recycle organic waste and to send all material through a Materials Recovery Facility before they can access landfill.

- RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

HOW DO WE MOVE CLOSER TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

It is the perfect time for a new Circular Economy strategy. Here are just some of the opportunities we have to develop this.

MAJOR CONTRACTS AND FACILITIES

Several major contracts are scheduled for issue or renewal in 2022 and 2023. These include household collection, green waste collection, bulky waste collection, FOGO collection, the Materials Recovery Facility and the Mugga Lane landfill & site services. These key decision points will lock us into a pathway for a decade or more. Let's get them right.

We need to quickly and carefully think about these in a Circular Economy framework. Do they give Canberrans what we need? How will we structure the contracts? Will they contain financial incentives for recovery and penalties for failing to produce and sell and valuable resources? Will they be issued to operators who can demonstrate a circular business model, not operators who simply take money for disposal? Will they contain education and inspiration funds? Will they take into account other environmental impacts? How do we factor in Scope 3 emissions and our Wellbeing Indicators? Will we use zero emissions transport?

The Materials Recovery Facility is a particularly important part of this equation. That facility was designed to accept all standard packaging waste, but many common items can't be processed, including lids, small pieces of plastic and paper, soft plastics and bread bag ties. These items are all readily recyclable but they aren't recovered with our existing system. Small schemes try to capture the waste that escapes, like Lids4Kids and Redcycle, but they are inconvenient for many and they have low uptake compared to the 96% participation in kerbside recycling.

We are going to build a new Materials Recovery Facility and we are issuing a new contract. Let's set it up so that it can recycle all of our standard supermarket waste.

GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

The ACT Government can lead by example and buy and use recycled products. This will drive our own economy as well as pushing the Federal Government and encouraging local councils to follow suit.

The ACT Government has a number of procurement programs that use recycled content, but many result in downcycling rather than true recycling. For instance, Major Projects Canberra uses recycled materials such as glass bottles and plastic waste in road base, but this is a single-purpose downcycled use and the percentage of recycled to virgin material is very low. Many new purchasing arrangements from directorates and much of the construction material used by Major Projects Canberra do not involve minimum recycled content amounts or standards.

We have set a target for zero waste consumption and minimum amounts of recycled content in our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. It's time to follow through and implement this.



"We should have a Circular Economy procurement strategy that encourages Major Projects Canberra and all directorates to use recycled content in a high-value way."

RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

ENERGY RECOVERY

The ACT Government has adopted a waste-to-energy policy that bans incineration and other thermal treatments of waste. The policy allows us to continue our decades-old program of capping methane at the landfill and turning this into electricity. It also allows anaerobic digestion and the production of refuse-derived fuel. We have not yet followed up on these other options. We need to think about what role energy like this should play in our Circular Economy.

“Refuse derived fuel might be useful if made from low value material and used as a substitute fuel in regional facilities like the Boral Cement Works in Berrima, if this can be done without causing environmental harm.”

- RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

INNOVATING FOR OUR FUTURE

We will need a lot of innovation if we are going to fundamentally shift our economy. Many other governments have recognised this, including our neighbours in New South Wales, who have listed 'supporting innovation' in the top of their focus areas for their Circular Economy policy. We've included a Circular Economy grants scheme in our Parliamentary and Government Agreement, but we are yet to implement this.

FOOD AND ORGANICS

We have a plan for household organic waste. Between Love Food, Hate Waste, garden waste bins, garden waste drop-off services and the FOGO trial, we should have households covered. But we are yet to form a plan that will cover all of our schools and commercial food waste. These could use the new FOGO system or any one of the many composters and worm farmers already providing services. We should plan for the whole lot, not just households.

CONSTRUCTION WASTE

Canberra is doing a lot of construction and this generates high tonnages of waste. We have some effective building recyclers but there are still a lot of mixed skips of demolition material heading for landfill. The industry has told me there may be as much as 200,000 tonnes heading across the border untracked.

We are not yet considering embedded emissions in our construction materials. If we did, knocking down buildings and putting up new ones would be less attractive. We need to look at new ways of construction that preserves the value of the raw materials, such as a building refurbishment policy, a manual deconstruction policy to achieve high levels of material recovery, or stronger and more critical assessments before we build new roads and buildings.

There are other gaps too. Canberra has also long needed a borrow pit to allow clean dirt that is not contaminated to be reused in useful ways, rather than sending it to landfill. We could fill up Mugga II quarry with clean dirt so that it can be remediated and given back to the community as a reserve. We could use clean dirt on other useful remediation projects, rather than sending it to landfill.



“ACT Government should develop new policies to avoid the generation of commercial and industrial waste and construction and demolition waste, given how much is generated. We should also be looking at better ways to use clean dirt to remediate areas and return them to community use, rather than sending dirt to landfill.”

RECYCLING STAKEHOLDER

OTHER WASTE

We have many new opportunities for our other generators, like the commercial sector. We have many large waste streams, like textiles and furniture. But we have not seen new local policy developed to target these.

HOW DO WE SHIFT OUR CULTURE?

A Circular Economy requires us to change our lifestyle, our businesses and our fundamental way of doing things. This involves change to our economy and our lifestyles.

The ACT Government has some fantastic education tools, like the A-Z Recyclopedia which shows you where you can recycle different items. In a Circular Economy, there would be no disposal options in that Recyclopedia. Every single thing produced would have somewhere useful to go next. But even as an education tool, it is static, poorly promoted and not well used. We need to put much more funding and energy into tools like this.

We currently spend much more on infrastructure and service delivery than we do on education and behaviour change. But we know education is crucial to any significant behaviour change. It should be a major part of our new strategy, not simply added on at the end.

Education is more than just information. We need to role-model the new way of doing things as a government. We should also connect and promote businesses operating in a circular economy and champion great community stories.

Environment group SEEChange identified that the 'inspire' role is much more effective than the 'inform' role. We need to show people how they can change, and how much better their lives are if they do, rather than simply telling them they must. Fortunately, Canberra is full of inspiration. Here are just a few stories.

Brook Clinton runs Capital Scraps, a social enterprise that collects food waste from households and turns it into compost. Brook has included sustainable principles in every aspect of her business, from her composters built from recycled hardwood to the recycled plastic buckets to collection by bike.

Candice Addicoat is the founder of local design charity S.C.E.N.E. She uses 95%-100% used items and materials. PlastiSCENE is her charity's newest initiative, addressing the planet's massive plastic waste problem by pioneering new designs and techniques. In 2023, the Canberra Region will host her designed waste-plastic Guinness Record piece.



*Candice Addicoat recycles plastic to make crockery, jewellery and other goods:
<https://www.plasticstatic.com.au/look>*

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Mia Swainson is a Zero Waste champion sharing her journey around Canberra and Australia. She's an expert recycler but more importantly, she is amazing at inspiring others and promoting new and transformative ideas.

Sandie and Charlie operate the Green Shed, which employs over 70 people and operates at zero cost to the taxpayer. The Green Shed recovers around 8,000 tonnes of material each year that would otherwise go to landfill, including a tonne of Lego sold to raise funds for the Canberra Hospital Foundation. They also run a charity day on the last Wednesday each month where they donate 100% of all proceeds from the day's sales. They've given away over \$1.25 million so far. Carbon savings from their activities offset more than half of total ACT emissions from waste each year.

Canberra has chefs, artists and frugalistas, knitting nanas, entrepreneurs and everyday people who are inventing new ways to do more with less. These are the stories that will show us what we do and don't need and model amazing new ways of living. We should draw and share inspiration from our Canberra community. We should put real funding and Government commitment into these inspirational stories.

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CONCLUSION

The ACT generates around 1 million tonnes of waste each year. But like the rest of the world, we are facing massive problems from this high-consumption lifestyle. We have a climate crisis, an extinction crisis and a waste crisis. We need to do things differently.

We have set bold and ambitious targets before. In the nineties, we aimed for No Waste by 2010. We didn't reach that goal but it drove massive change.

More recently, we took real climate action. We aimed for 100% renewable electricity by 2020 and we achieved this nation-leading target. It is time to set a big Circular Economy target and commit to it.

We need to do this in a holistic way. We should consider our whole climate footprint and our Wellbeing Indicators. We should unlock the potential of existing programs, businesses and champions. We should link in other portfolios, like Emissions Reduction, Food and Fibre and Sustainable Building and Construction. We should use government procurement, grants, education and inspiration. We should set up our new contracts and facilities in the right way.

We have huge opportunities and it is the perfect time to rethink what we need and how we do things. It is time to set up a true Circular Economy.

Please get in touch and tell me what you think. I'd love to hear your views!



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