

A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

CLEAN, GREEN AND CLEVER

Endless consumption on a finite planet does not work. Our throwaway system is wrecking the planet and filling our lives with junk we don't need. [Around 90%](#) of global biodiversity loss and water stress, and a significant proportion of climate emissions, are caused by the way we extract and process natural resources.

Here in the ACT, we generate over 1 million tonnes of waste each year. Our recovery has stagnated at around 75% for decades. The ACT set the world's first zero waste target and made great progress on recycling, but has not managed to reduce consumption or overall waste. We need to do things differently.

We need to move to a Circular Economy. We should avoid unnecessary consumption, design out waste from the start and then recover all materials that we use and turn them back into useful products.

The [ACT Government's Circular Economy Strategy](#) is a good start but it lacks a clear pathway. We need to genuinely reduce the consumption that is driving climate change.

We can draw from the work of others in this area, such as Scotland's [Net Zero Nation](#). And we must commit to tangible steps that bring us closer to a Circular Economy.

THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Implement citywide food waste recycling by 2026
- ▲ Recycle all supermarket packaging by 2028
- ▲ Implement mandatory product stewardship for clothing
- ▲ Implement end-of-life recycling for any new government procurement and installation of solar panels, EVs and large batteries
- ▲ Support Circular Economy businesses through Government programs and a new grant scheme
- ▲ Improve Government transparency around waste and recycling
- ▲ Renew our ban on incineration and oppose an incinerator in our region

FOOD WASTE

The Greens have [campaigned for decades](#) for a household food waste composting service. That's because food sent to landfill generates the powerful greenhouse gas methane. Food and organic waste now represents one-tenth of our climate emissions. And these are rising fast - up from [92kt](#) CO2e to [180 kt](#) CO2e in the last decade. But household food waste recycling has [stalled](#). But household food waste recycling has [stalled](#). We are in a climate emergency. We need to act now.

Many governments in Australia and around the world recycle food waste without a centralised industrial composter - like the [French City of Besançon \(at-home and community composting\)](#), [Cooma Council](#) and [Goulburn Mulwaree Council \(outdoor composting\)](#), the [Central Coast Council](#) (subsidised home and community composting) and the [City of Sydney](#) (Goterra insect farming).

The ACT has a successful food compost pilot in Belconnen with no industrial composter and it's just been extended to include another 1,150 apartments and townhouses.

The ACT has a number of mature commercial composting and insect-farming businesses that are increasingly moving towards small deployable modules and on-site solutions, not large centralised industrial processing facilities.

We can also provide Canberrans with education and real support for backyard and benchtop solutions to reduce overall waste and reduce costs and emissions from shipping waste around.

And with any food waste solution, we need to invest properly in education to avoid and reduce food waste in the first place and to use the recycling and composting systems well.

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Roll out a city-wide household food and organic waste program by 2026 using a combination of the methods we already have.
- ▲ Provide additional support for food waste education and composting programs provided through community partners.
- ▲ Investigate subsidies for backyard and benchtop home composting and worm farms like [other councils](#) do.

PACKAGING

When you put packaging in your yellow-topped bin, where does it go?

In theory, yellow-topped bin waste goes to a Materials Recovery Facility for recycling. This is how kerbside recycling and Materials Recovery Facilities were originally designed. But the sad reality is that a lot of our plastics and packaging ends up in landfill.

In December 2022 the ACT Materials Recovery Facility burnt down and the ACT Government is still determining

what will be recycled in the (yet to be built) replacement facility.

In the meantime, we're sending our recycling interstate. A lot isn't recovered, including [soft plastics, many hard plastics, small pieces of paper, bamboo cutlery, bioplastic containers, bread tags and more](#).

We also have the Container Deposit Scheme. This works well for those who use it, but uptake is low. It recovered [4,637 tonnes last year](#) from our total waste stream of [over 1 million tonnes](#).

Meanwhile, community groups like Lids4Kids, Lions Club of Canberra and RecycleSmart are trying to solve our waste problems for us. They're taking on responsibility where governments and industry have failed. But it is hard to make these work. Even the industry-backed schemes can fail, like RedCycle.

Some councils are running or trialling the soft plastics recycling scheme [Curby](#) - a scheme that recovers soft plastics from yellow-topped recycling bins.

Federally, Australia is working on [national product stewardship for packaging](#). Product stewardship means industry is required to pay for the recycling of their products. This creates an incentive for industry to make products that have less waste and are more recyclable, and the cost of recycling is included at the outset. Product stewardship for packaging looks promising, with new regulation and schemes [expected soon](#).

The ACT already has a local framework for product stewardship schemes under our *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act*

2020. Once we have a scheme, we can enforce it.

We are also phasing out unnecessary [single use plastics](#). While some people rely on [some plastic products](#), there's a lot of items we don't need. And when they get out into our environment, they can harm wildlife and cause pollution. We need to be constantly looking for the next round of low-benefit, high-harm products. For instance, we are working on making ACT events plastic-free and we have already banned the large release of balloons – why not extend this to all events, and all intentional release of balloons?

The ACT Greens will:

Set an ACT Government commitment to recover all standard supermarket waste by 2028 and meet it with these methods.

- ▲ Design and build the new Materials Recovery Facility to recycle all supermarket packaging by 2028.
- ▲ Advocate for and then enforce national product stewardship for packaging.
- ▲ Run a feasibility study into Curby and other promising schemes to recover any packaging that won't be recovered with the above.

FAST FASHION

Australians are huge consumers of fast fashion. We each buy around [56 items of new clothing](#) each year. But much of it ends up as waste - almost [9% of waste in landfill is textiles](#). Canberra has [local options for reuse and recycling](#) but we need a more systematic response for collection and processing.

We also need to make sure textiles are designed to be sustainable, repairable and recyclable from the start. There are recycling processing options in Australia, like [BlockTexx](#) and [Upparel](#), but they need support and systemic uptake to work well.

Industry is working on [Seamless](#), a clothing product stewardship scheme which aims to have 60% of clothing retailers participating by 2027. Seamless is asking brands to pay a few cents for each new clothing item, which will be used to create a national collection and recycling scheme for old clothing. Many major brands have already signed up, but participation is voluntary. It's on the national priority list for [urgent product stewardship](#) but progress is slow.

We should also support the repair movement. We have a great start already with examples like [Roundabout](#), the [Community Toolbox](#), the [Hawker Repair Cafe](#) and many more.

As well as recycling and repair options for clothing, we need options for other textiles, including sheets, towels, curtains and furniture. We should advocate for national product stewardship arrangements for non-clothing textiles and we should make those mandatory as soon as possible.

Let's make it mandatory to participate in clothing recycling. We can advocate for Federal mandatory laws. If that fails, we can make the existing voluntary scheme mandatory through ACT law.

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Make clothing product stewardship mandatory by 2028.
- ▲ Support local repair and reuse options for clothing, textiles and furniture.
- ▲ Advocate for mandatory textiles product stewardship as soon as possible.

CLEAN ENERGY RECYCLING

The ACT is electrifying everything. We are powered by 100% renewable electricity. We're phasing out fossil fuel gas and phasing in EVs. But many worry about how we will obtain the lithium and precious metals we need for this energy transition. And how will we recycle the solar panels, wind turbines, batteries and other clean energy waste?

The Greens tabled laws to [end modern slavery](#) within our border and in ACT Government supply chains. These led to [stronger procurement standards to protect workers](#). We also secured [Assembly agreement to investigate recycling](#) for solar panels, large batteries and electrical appliances. But we don't yet have local arrangements or national product stewardship in place.

The Federal Government committed to [product stewardship for solar panels](#) but it isn't yet running. We have product stewardship arrangements for household batteries through [B-cycle](#) but not for [EV batteries](#) or large battery systems, like the Big Canberra Battery. Queensland has led work on [safe battery disposal](#) and battery fires are of increasing concern. The Clean Energy Council has looked at [wind turbine recycling](#). All of these materials can be recycled but we need to make sure the system is simple and widely used.

We can include end-of-life recycling for any new government procurement and installation of solar panels, EVs, large batteries and wind turbines. We can also advocate for national product stewardship for all clean energy waste and make these schemes mandatory.

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Implement end-of-life recycling arrangements for solar panels,

EVs, large batteries and wind turbines installed and/or procured by government from 2025.

- ▲ Work with B-Cycle and others to set up national product stewardship and then make it mandatory for EVs, solar panels, wind turbines and batteries.

GRANTS, SPACE & SUPPORT

The Circular Economy is more like a forest ecosystem than a factory. It's made up of artists, designers, businesses, community groups and government services. Clever people look at how we design, repair and reuse things, how we replace products with services and how we recycle. New operators pop up all the time.

The Greens have championed this ecosystem. We support [the Right to Repair](#) movement and [local repair cafes](#). We hosted Australia's first two sustainable design exhibitions during [Recycling Week](#). We set the Green's [vision for a Circular Economy](#). We spoke up for better recycling through [Mandatory National Product Stewardship](#), [FOGO](#), [green waste services](#) and [materials recovery](#).

Starting a business in a developing sector is costly and comes with risk.

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Authorised by Pat Dollard for the ACT Greens

Many businesses are not eligible for existing grants, like the Community Zero Emissions scheme. Most federal funding has been directed towards climate change rather than the Circular Economy.

Many Circular Economy operators provide useful services to the community, like shoe and clothing repairs, repair cafes, community toolboxes, toy libraries, furniture upcycling, arts repurposing and recycling collection points. There would be great benefit to the community having these spread throughout the suburbs.

Let's grow the forest!

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Establish a \$150k community grants scheme dedicated to support Circular Economy business.
- ▲ Provide subsidised leases of affordable premises across all parts of Canberra and create a dedicated sustainability hub.
- ▲ Provide navigation staff contacts for Circular Economy operators inside ACT Government.
- ▲ Develop a comprehensive Reuse and Repair strategy for the ACT.

AUDITS & EDUCATION

Prior to 2015, the ACT Government ran regular waste and recycling audits. These showed how much waste we were generating, what kind it was, and how well we were recycling it. These reports are an essential basis for effective policy and programs. But no audits were published between 2015 and 2022.

We need to run and publish audits once every two years. These should be run for domestic kerbside waste and recycling, landfill and transfer waste, and the Materials Recovery Facility.

There is great goodwill to recycle but many in our community find the details confusing. We need more effective community education if we want our recycling rates to improve.

The Auditor-General is currently auditing the [procurement of the reusables facilities](#). ACT Government should commit to implementing any accepted recommendations from this and other waste and recycling audits.

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Publish waste and recycling audits at least once every two years.
- ▲ Run direct education and audits on bin use and recycling.
- ▲ Commit to improve based on Auditor-General findings.

NO INCINERATOR

The community is rightly concerned about the pollution and health risks from incineration. The Greens heard these concerns and led the charge to [ban thermal incineration in the ACT](#) through the [ACT Waste to Energy Policy 2020-25](#). That policy [expires soon](#).

The community are also worried about incinerators in our region, like the [Tarago Incinerator](#). We can't control what happens across our border but it affects our air, our water and our agriculture.

The ACT Greens want to renew our ban and oppose incineration in our region. This should include making representations to the NSW and Commonwealth Government where necessary.

We should also continue to manage other hazardous waste responsibly, including ensuring that PFAS levels in food containers and hazardous materials in other products are properly regulated and controlled.

The ACT Greens will:

- ▲ Renew the ban on thermal incineration in 2025.
- ▲ Oppose thermal incineration in our region.

WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

ACT Government has [80 FTE positions](#) working in Transport Canberra and City Services on waste, recycling and the Circular Economy. Most elements of this package will be delivered with these existing staff resources.

This package requires new recurrent funding of \$150K per annum for a Circular Economy grant scheme.

If we deliver food waste through without a large centralised industrial composter, this package will save \$26M-\$40M in avoided capital works funding.