

WASTE, RECYCLING AND PLASTIC POLLUTION POLICIES FOR THE 2022 FEDERAL ELECTION

The next term of the Federal Parliament is a crucial time to build on the growing awareness of waste and pollution issues, and to convert promises into realities. It is also a period where targets on single use plastic packaging are expected to be delivered. New packaging standards and mandates will be critical to achieve these.

Under the Federal system, the Commonwealth has responsibility for Matters of National Environmental Significance, international obligations and setting national policies. These policy proposals are framed to take account of those specific obligations, and where the Commonwealth can have a primary role and responsibility.

1. Sign the proposed International Marine Plastics Treaty

Addressing marine plastic pollution at a global scale is essential. The first step in developing a comprehensive and enforceable treaty has just been taken (UN Meeting March 2022). The UN resolution signed by 174 nations calls for a binding treaty and a whole of lifecycle approach to resolving the problems. This includes product design and production as well as addressing litter and waste issues. The treaty should be in place by 2024.

- Support an enforceable Treaty with specific targets for reduction in plastic use and pollution.
- Take a leadership role in the Asia/Pacific region to encourage neighbouring nations to sign.
- Allocate funding to assist regional neighbours to clean up and invest in services to process collected plastic wastes and litter and introduce alternatives.

2. Introduce a mandatory Product Stewardship Scheme for Packaging

The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) has acknowledged that 2025 targets for packaging including plastics will not be met based upon current voluntary trajectories. This confirms Boomerang's 2021 assessment and proposal (Plan B). Industry commitments now need to be mandated by June 2022.

- Introduce a mandatory Product Stewardship Scheme for Packaging to guarantee that National Waste Plan goals (this includes the targets for recovery, recycled content, and the phase-out of problematic plastics) by 2025 will be met.

- This should also cover manufacturer responsibilities for product design, collection and processing, and any costs that may be incurred.

3. National Standards for reusable, compostable and recyclable packaging by end of 2022

National government commitments include an endorsed target of having all packaging either reusable, compostable or recyclable by 2025. There are no nationally adopted nor binding standards for such packaging. This allows suppliers to make misleading or uninformed claims about their products and will undermine essential outcomes.

- Standards must be in place in 2022 that require manufacturers take responsibility for their products including their design, use, and recovery in a way that ensures all packaging is reused, composted, or recycled, in practice and at scale.
- Modify labelling to be nationally recognised and consistent taking account of the realities and scale of actual recycling or composting practices.

4. Improve and Expand National Plastics Plan

The National Plastics Plan has set goals for 2022 that includes a phase-out of EPS packaging (June 2022); all claimed compostable packaging to be certified to Australian standards (June 2022); and EPS containers, moulded packaging, and PVC labels to be phased-out (December 2022). Voluntary strategies are proposed to be used.

- The Commonwealth should mandate these actions.
- On the basis of continuous improvement, introduce new targets for 2023 including schemes to reduce/collect soft plastics and business-to-business EPS packaging.
- Introduce a Product Stewardship Scheme for cigarette butts.
- Harmonise and support State/Territory Government actions (e.g, heavyweight plastic bags, single-use plastic phase-outs, balloons).
- Introduce Commonwealth procurement practices that support avoidance, reuse, recovery, and greater recycled content of new products.

5. Invest in resource recovery through Recycling Industry Modernisation funding and specific organics recycling

The Recycling Modernisation Fund with contributions from national and state governments and business, was established to provide an expanded and modernised recycling industry for the domestic market.

- Review progress and repeat scheme funding for a further 4 years; and raise targets by 30% by 2030.
- Include a goal to have all regions with consistent standard waste, organics and recycling services and facilities operating by 2025.
- Funding of at least \$500m should be made available to assist the construction of organic recycling facilities around the country to achieve national targets.

6. Community Litter Clean Ups and Plastic Pollution Data

Community clean-ups are an important activity. They educate, reduce litter, collect data, allow source investigation, change behaviour for macro and micro plastic items.

- Continue to fund community litter clean ups and citizen science projects by \$20m pa.
- Ensure associated data collection on litter and marine debris is objectively and publicly reported.
- Provide research funding (\$10mpa) to continue investigation into the impacts and sources of terrestrial and marine macro and micro plastic pollution and innovations that prevent this at source.

7. Support a Circular Economy/oppose Waste to Energy

Thermal treatment (e.g, incineration, conversion to fuel) of disposed mixed materials is counter to the circular economy and has significant pollution dangers. It can also cannibalise organic and recyclable material that would otherwise have a greater resource value.

- Amend waste plans to discourage thermal waste to energy.
- Oppose and withdraw government support for thermal waste to energy plants.

8. Container Deposit Schemes (CDS)

With the successful introduction of CDS, the new recovery and sorting infrastructure can be further utilised for circular economy goals supplying resources for recycling and recycled content. A consistent and harmonised national approach will assist implementation for the expanded involvement of container producers and retailers (although initial state action may establish momentum).

- Support the expansion of the CDS network to include other eligible containers (e.g., wine, plain milk, non-beverage containers) and consider expansion to collect soft plastics. In NSW bottle tops are accepted at collection points but not in some other jurisdictions. Bottle tops should be accepted in all CDS schemes in Australia.
- Investigate and support a trial reusable container collection service through the CDS network.

9. Expand national E-Waste Stewardship

Electronic waste is more than computers and TVs. There is an urgent need to include handheld items with batteries, solar panels and integrate mobile phones. Significant rare materials can be recovered, and contaminated waste avoided.

- Complete investigation and development of an expanded national e-waste scheme by the end of 2022, with full implementation in 2023.

Note: federal and state governments should continue development of product stewardship schemes for other products.

10. A Waste Not/Want Not multi-media campaign

The preferred and most effective strategy for waste is to avoid creating it in the first place. This includes plastics, discarded food and household or business appliances and other products. Our society values quality and functionality of the products and materials we buy but pays less attention to their end of useful life outcomes. Waste minimisation should also be a key goal. Most information is directed at the recovery of discarded items with little focus on avoidance or reuse, despite their inclusion in waste strategies.

A well developed and targeted multi-media public behaviour change campaign can show the general public the benefits of avoiding and encourage them to reduce their waste. The campaign should have two primary focus points - avoiding and reusing: and then advice on recycling as a secondary (but important) component.

- A fully funded (\$50M) multimedia behaviour change campaign (TV, press, radio, and social media).
- A War on Waste style engagement program to explain waste and outline solutions. This will be delivered by a range of communicators from local councils, community groups, social media influencers and notable personalities. It should be a long-running program over many years and subject to recurring funding.
- Promote new innovations, new businesses and products that are contributing to avoidance, reuse, or recovery outcomes.
- Link the campaign to the Right to Repair and other reuse initiatives (e.g., PartyKit Network or Community Tool libraries).
- Include reusable foodware as a focus to normalise this behaviour in our communities.

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