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**Question 1 - What are the key issues facing the NSW waste system?**

Lack of available options for processing recovered materials (mainly plastics) in close proximity to where they are recovered (particularly regional areas). Regional areas have a lack of choice when it comes to processing facilities and often they are located large distances away from facilities that bulk up the materials. The transport of these materials can add significantly to the cost of processing and more often than not the environmental effects of the transport task are not factored into the economic decisions about recycling and processing the materials. In addition to this the facilities become tied to a single processor through long term contracts (which seem to be the norm in the industry) and this has flow on effects for the cost to the local communities that generate the materials and are trying to do the right thing. The volumes of packaging materials generated as wastes (from both residential and business activities), particularly soft plastics. It seems like everything that is purchased by consumers comes wrapped in either plastic or cardboard or is freighted in disposable packaging. Many items are unnecessarily packaged in plastic wrapping. We know the markets are not there to recycle all this plastic and that it is being landfilled. There are no incentives for manufacturers to reduce the amount of plastic packaging, nor is there any pressure from government or retailers to do so. Provided this continues the problem of packaging waste will increase. Lack of personal responsibility on the part of generators of waste for correctly sorting/segregating their wastes, resulting in recyclables diverted to landfill or a large expense to recover recycling from residual waste streams. Some, but not all generators of waste will choose to not segregate wastes, even if that means paying a premium gate price. The correct price signals are not being sent to the generators. Lack of investment in infrastructure. Provided that it's cheaper to landfill waste most waste generators will take that option over the more expensive recycling option. While ever the EPA collected levy is not being returned to the industry and local government to drive innovation and investment, this problem will continue to exist. With the cost of developing and running landfills continually rising it is time to look at alternate options for residue waste streams. Australia seems to be behind the rest of the developed world in transitioning away from landfills to alternate waste treatment technologies. It appears that as landfilling is a historical practise the long term environmental impacts are often overlooked whilst we appear to be overly suspicious of technology based alternates. The environmental agencies need to be proactive in assisting with such a transition away from land filling residual wastes. Appropriate legislative, regulatory and policy controls should be implemented to assist and facilitate a transition away from landfilling residual waste.

**Question 2 - What are the main barriers to improving the NSW waste system?**

FOR RECYCLING: Lack of investment in processing plants, mainly due to the high cost of establishment and long term operating costs. Lack of markets for recyclable materials. For too long Australia has taken advantage of being able to move materials overseas. There has been no incentive for processing and manufacturing from recycled materials to develop in Australia because they would not have been able to compete with the pricing structures in place to send the materials off shore. Government has also not intervened and has let this problem grow. The EPA waste levy could have been used to fund innovation, R&D and establishing local markets, but the foresight has not been present to allow this. The Return & Earn scheme has changed the dynamics of recycling by removing higher value items from kerbside recycling bins thus reducing the value of the bin contents. This can reduce the number of MRFs/processors willing to accept the bin contents or at the very least increases costs for local councils to pass the contents on to MRFs/processors. In some

respects the scheme has been a success, but in others it has been a failure. The amount of material that is collected through the scheme for which there is no local market for reuse and recycling should have been anticipated by government. FOR AVOIDANCE: The combination of cheap labour/operational costs overseas and free trade agreements which seemingly have no emphasis on minimising packaging. Developing countries are prepared to send mass packaging to Australia but are becoming reluctant to receive it back. The EPA itself. The EPA is not itself an effective regulator and a strategic and innovative organisation at the same time. Too often red tape gets in the way and barriers are erected to stop innovation and new ideas being trialled. There are always reasons why something can't happen as opposed to being solution focussed and what can be done to make things happen. There needs to be cultural change in the organisation. TO TRANSITION AWAY FROM LANDFILLING RESIDUAL WASTE: Due to the large capital investment required for the majority of alternate waste treatment options certainty of regulatory and legislative controls is paramount to encourage capital investments in technology. The setting of clear and unambiguous requirements will create certainty of investment for development of alternates to landfilling residual waste volumes. At present the waste levy works as a motivator to minimise the volume of residual waste however if we look at current diversion rates there is limited scope for additional diversion. It appears that it is now time to consider incentivising investment in alternate treatment options to support the development of alternates to landfilling residual waste.

### **Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?**

Reduce waste firstly through avoidance (after all it is the top of the waste hierarchy). Provide incentives (and perhaps penalties) to encourage manufacturers, importers, retailers to minimise packaging (particularly packaging materials for which recycling/reuse options are in short supply). In short the best opportunity is to not produce the problem materials in the first place. Consumers have been conditioned over time to expect and rely that certain products are packaged the way they are to maintain quality, aesthetics, freshness etc., but is the packaging really required? Can this conditioning be modified over time to reverse these expectations so there's a move away from this behaviour? There should be effort made in this space, but the free market won't act of it's own accord unless there is a financial reason to do so, significant social pressure or government intervention. Recycle more. Create the local markets for recyclable materials and reuse. If it's being reused or reprocessed then it's not a waste that's ending up in landfill.

### **Question 4 - How can we recycle better?**

Education is key so support that as a priority. Contamination rates in the comingled streams are too high, particularly kerbside collections. There is a lot of confusion amongst consumers concerning what can and cannot be recycled. Targeted education campaigns are a good way of reinforcing the messages about recycling and what goes in each bin. There are many other countries that have more complex bin systems than Australia where the comingled stream is self-sorted prior to being collected. This is another option, but might only be practical in certain areas. Provide support for parties wishing to invest in processing/recycling plants or related R&D for recovered materials where there is a lack of market for them to be processed into useable goods. There needs to be more of a focus on the lifecycle of a product or material, rather than the aim to make it recyclable. With the economics of recycling becoming ever more challenging the overall environmental gains or benefits should be considered. For example, if a product can be produced that is not recyclable that has a lower overall environmental footprint than one that is recyclable shouldn't the former be adopted as the standard? Why should we continue to necessarily strive for a recyclable product if the overall environmental benefit is not there? Its an illusion to think that there will be a solution for the processing of the recycled product all the time and the current state of the industry in Australia is an example of this. Why keep recycling to reach a target, if the goal of achieving the best overall result for the environment can happen by other means?

**Question 5 - What are the main opportunities for improving the NSW waste system?**

Diverting more of the collected waste levies into the industry. This is one of the main complaints from both local government and private enterprise that the EPA should be listening to and acting on immediately. The levy has become a general source of revenue for the government and this should never have been allowed to happen. The levy has skewed the economics associated with waste management because it is not being invested where it has the most capacity and opportunity to bring about change in the industry. This is a failure that needs to be fixed. Foster a dramatic shift towards waste avoidance. There is not enough being done on avoidance of waste generation at the start of the cycle and instead we seem to be feeding, indeed promoting, rampant consumerism with a priority on economic growth rather than sustainability. Be more proactive about new technologies and embrace what is happening in other countries that are clearly managing their wastes better than we are in NSW/Australia. Why is there such a concentration on proving technologies in NSW when it's already been proven overseas? The focus needs to change. Regulators need to cut the red tape? and realise that we're way behind what's happening in other countries in waste management and provide the incentives required to move the industry and consumer habits forward.

**Question 6 - Any other information that you would like to contribute to the waste strategy initiative?**

An abundance of land, sparse population and a tendency to be sceptical of change has led to NSW and Australia's waste practices being behind other developed countries. However there is currently a high level of interest and support from communities for the implementation of innovative and progressive alternatives for use of recycled materials and alternatives to landfilling. There is a real opportunity for NSW to lead Australia in the development of modern waste treatment solutions. Through the adoption of well-considered environmental and economic policy and incentives, the NSW Government has an opportunity to position NSW as a leader in the Australian waste industry.