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Question 1 - What are the key issues facing the NSW waste system?
a. The push vs pull approach when it comes to waste. Currently, in NSW what we see is waste being 'pushed' either overseas (that is now ending) or into stockpiles, or waste materials sent directly into landfill. Very little is re-utilised. This needs to change towards pulling materials into useful products that can be re-used. b. Markets need to be created. We need to look at materials that have been pulled from waste into commoditised markets. This involves a number of elements including setting a price and ensuring a quality product. c. Specification of (waste) material quality into construction. Existing specifications are written around virgin materials or only allow a low rate of repurposed materials to be included in products, for example, in asphalt for road construction. Specifications lack the flexibility to incorporate repurposed materials to the high rate we could while still producing as good or even higher quality outcomes.

Question 2 - What are the main barriers to improving the NSW waste system?
a. Funding and focus on researching and developing markets. A lot more funding and focus is required to create and understand materials that can be pulled into useful streams of use. We acknowledge that there has been investment into repurposing facilities, however the focus should also be placed into pulling materials (including material from repurposing facilities) into useful purposes. b. The perception that repurposed materials are 'inferior'. A cultural change is needed across the construction industry, community and government around understanding that repurposed materials can be comparable with virgin materials. If used the right way, Downer has also demonstrated that some end products containing repurposed material can be of a higher quality and durability compared to standard products (Reconophalt). Waste needs to be used as a useful product. c. Lack of an outlet for recycled materials. Specifications and procurement processes need to target a high landfill diversion and material repurposing rate. d. Collaboration between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), waste industry and private sector. While this is starting to happen, we can all do much more to improve our collaboration which will cause an improvement in innovation, capability and full utilisation of skills into commercialising/commoditising materials into useful products. e. Lack of stewardship over waste products. Creating an environment where people can take full stewardship over their waste products and landfill diversion process will facilitate change on all levels.

Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?
As above. Look at pulling products (and creating true commercialised/commoditised markets around them), not pushing waste.

Question 4 - How can we recycle better?
When establishing outlets for recycled materials the product needs to be perpetually recyclable, preventing secondary disposal later. Some current products that incorporate recycled materials are unable to be reused after initial repurposing, which only delays the impact of the waste.

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

In our view, the barriers to improving the waste system can be overcome if everybody plays their part. This is not just limited to government but also includes the private sector. The regulatory regime and specifically the resource recovery licensing system needs to be reconfigured to create greater scope and additional and quicker pathways for innovation and collaboration. The opportunities include: a. Rebalancing the regulatory regime to consider environmental opportunity as well as environmental risk. b. Redefining environmental risk to include landfilling of material as a risk to the environment. c. A logic-check to consider the 'opportunity cost' to the environment when the regulatory regime requires material to be landfilled. d. A system that values materials, rather than a system that prescribes sources and uses of waste, and provides outlets for those repurposed materials. Further to the above responses, a view of the NSW waste system supported by data will be useful in making system improvements. Verifiable data sources and methods of reporting could be significantly bolstered in the circular economy policy document what gets measured (properly) gets done. For example, with the knowledge gathered from waste data in NSW, we can better understand the volumes, regions, material types, composition and industry sectors. This can help us make considered decisions and help create strategies around how we can reuse and repurpose these materials into useful streams.

Question 6 - Any other information that you would like to contribute to the waste strategy initiative?
This is a great opportunity for all stakeholders in the NSW waste system, including government and the private sector, to work together on solutions to reduce waste, recycle and improve the broader waste system. We welcome the opportunity for greater collaboration to create markets for materials pulled from waste and demonstrate how recycled materials can be repurposed into useful products of equal or higher quality. We are happy to discuss our responses further.