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

The current WARR targets based on tonnes diverted do not account for environmental impact. Targets for the new strategy should consider an environmental base. For example, soft plastics have drawn significant community focus, but make up a small percentage of weight/mass in the waste stream. This material is just one example that has significant impact on land and marine environments & requires action, but has minimal contribution to a tonnage based diversion. State based targets should be supported by separate metro and regional targets that are potentially achievable within the life of the strategy. Regional Councils have limited ability to achieve the current targets, let alone any increase to these. * Lack of regional/state infrastructure to support the well-established recycling systems and community expectations. A meaningful and adequately resource infrastructure plan needs to be developed and implemented as an immediate priority. Waste avoidance needs to be given the importance and profile it deserves to achieve significant reduction in waste to landfill. The LFHW program has been a great success for the EPA and local communities, the same model program should be developed and implemented for packaging e.g. smart shopping. Councils are tasked with addressing the waste at end of pipe and providing services to the community in this regard, energy however needs to be directed toward choices at the consumer end.

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

There has been an over reliance on off-shore processing for a significant period, meaning a lack of planning at state and regional level for waste and resource recovery system. The recent changes to the international markets have resulted in significant impacts on recycling contracts and services to the communities. NSW and federal government must take the lead to ensure sustainability of these services into the future through advocacy and support of domestic infrastructure and markets, and levels of recycled content in products. Contamination of the kerbside recyclables remains a priority issue, consideration needs to be continually given to how this should be addressed, along with the collection and processing systems - is 3-4 bins per household really the most efficient way to provide waste services in communities, which requires significant & ongoing investment in community education. International examples should be investigated to redefine or confirm 'best practice'.

Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?

Avoid waste in the first place, especially in the domestic space - see above response. There also needs to be effort directed into excessive packaging, especially of food. The hygiene and food safety standards are obviously key considerations, but there must be improvements - otherwise by tackling single use plastics, only part of the problem of soft plastics is being addressed. Lead the way in all levels of government by reusing materials, legislating recycled content percentages and use in operations. Product stewardship schemes that consider not just collection of a levy on purchased items (eg paint & beverage containers), but an effective system of how to collect this material back for all consumers - not just metropolitan. Also a continual review of these systems - Return and Earn collection points should be reviewed to ensure they are actually an effective system. Whilst the number of containers collected obviously continues to grow overall, are RVMs and over the count points, especially in regional/remote areas the most effective system for the community to access and how could it be improved?

Question 4 - How can we recycle better?

Consistent and targeted campaigns on the importance of recycling correctly. Recent media campaigns in our region alone have highlighted the importance of using messages and images that people connect and relate to - personalise it. War on Waste as an example gained so much traction - it was because people were shown what the problems are, and could understand it is compounded by our everyday decisions. The reverse is also true, a difference can be made, but the message & focus has to be relatable. Direct funding for data collection for regional councils. This could be yearly or biennial waste audits, or tablets where there are no weighbridges, vehicle counters at unmanned etc. It would help many regional councils with their waste strategy and support efforts to improve recycling in regional areas. Phase out single use plastics, however there also needs to be support and consideration of advocated alternatives that the same issues will not prevail in time.

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

Discussed in above responses & points raised. Further, recognition of the role regional waste groups, being RENEW NSW is critical to ensure continued progress and to help achieve the state priorities/targets. Many regional/western Councils have staff with waste as just one of their responsibilities over significant geographic areas, therefore regional support and collaborative networks are a valuable support vehicle. Local government support and commitment is paramount to achieving state wide targets & objectives. The WLRM funding packages have been extremely effective since their inception. However - increased level of funding is needed through additional funds redirected from the waste levy a broader scope of funded programs would be welcomed to fund recycling/reprocessing infrastructure and ways to lower the cost of transport for regional areas. As an e.g. the organics collection and infrastructure grants provided the stimulus for the introduction of these services in many NSW Councils - it is unlikely it would have happened without the funding. A similar concept/model could be used for other waste services and systems to get something off the ground. A large number of NetWaste Ccls only have a MGB - a financial stimulus for not only separating potential recyclables (e.g. similar to organics grants - bins, education resources, audits), but also collection means (such as a truck and bins, small infrastructure) would mean the service could remain in house and provide opportunity for potential reprocessing options regionally. The CRC model and program is also a great example of standardising messages & services across the state, with a central contractor. Improve waste and resource recovery outcomes for state significant developments, such as wind farms and solar farms. Being state significant development, local Councils have no ability to input on the conditions of approval, but are left with trying to deal with the waste generated during the construction phase. These developments are prevalent in rural/regional areas who typically have small landfills with limited capacity or ability to deal with the waste appropriately. Increased focus on the importance of developing the circular economy - there are some great things happening, but these need to be communicated widely and not be seen as one-off examples, or 'trials'.

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

The WLRM has been the vehicle to implement many effective programs, changes and new services across the state, however to ensure it is as effective as possible, those who have been grant recipients and grant managers should be given the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback. Opportunities should be provided for involvement in any stakeholder, consultation and learning sessions remotely, whether through electronic platforms, or preferably, regionally delivered sessions.