

22/7/19

To: ACT Government
C/O Your Say

From: Tammy Ven Dange
CEO, [The Refoundry](#)
Canberra Australia

RE: Open Response to the ACT Single-Use Plastic Discussion Paper

Congratulations to the ACT Government for considering ways to reduce single-use plastics in the Territory. I'd like to offer some insights and suggestions with this submission.

In 2011, the ACT was the third State or Territory in Australia to introduce the ban of single-use plastic shopping bags, and I have seen the results firsthand.

In December 2018, I organised the volunteer clean-up of Lake Burley Griffin. This was the first time that a major clean-up effort had been done both by boats and by land. In three hours, we collected 74 bags of rubbish and many larger objects. Remarkably, from the rubbish we recorded for reporting purposes, only 1 single-use bag was found.



Rubbish collected at one of six sites at the Clean-up Lake Burley Griffin Day 2018

In more recent times, the ACT Government has added container deposit schemes, green waste pick-up and a glass processing capability amongst other initiatives.

Still, this is not enough.

As the owner of a new social-enterprise that is making products out of recycled plastic to help the environment, I have studied the supply chain in detail over the last six months. And I believe that more can be done. These are my suggestions:

- **Create waste policies around the hardest things to recycle, not the easiest things to eliminate.** Polystyrene is extremely difficult to recycle because it burns too easily in the process. Soft-plastic or LDPE #4 is also difficult despite some of it being collected by Red Cycle.

On the other hand, most plastic cups and plates aren't as hard. While there are substitute materials like bioplastics, the current recycling systems aren't built for them as they usually need to be composted in household waste in order to biodegrade.

- **Don't forget apartments in waste and recycling policies.** Apartments are the largest housing developments currently being built around Canberra. These buildings take a lot of pressure off of city services because there's only one location to pick up rubbish for dozens to hundreds of households. Yet, apartments are always the last to be considered for schemes like green waste.
- **Track the entire recycling process to measure success.** There have been huge controversies in recent times about the contaminated rubbish that has been sent to other countries. Most recently, Visy was in the [news](#) for a shipment of Australian plastic sent to Bali and returned.

It's my understanding that much of Canberra's recyclables is sold to Visy by Re.Group. Therefore, can the recycled plastic statistics quoted for the ACT actually be skewed when plastic eventually goes to landfills either here or abroad?

- **Consider mandatory recycling for larger businesses, major events and universities.** Volunteer collections of recyclables are not enough. Too much plastic is still being missed from the largest users of plastic in Canberra. While there is a cost to mandatory schemes, it should also incentivise these entities to do more since they are a large part of the problem.
- **Incentivise private industry to help with the plastic problem.** Despite all the effort that is going into separating recyclables, the manufacturers making my own company's products are worried about having enough recycled plastic feedstock to meet our needs.

There still aren't enough processors in Australia that can fully sort the various plastics (other than PET and maybe HDPE) particularly into colours. This limits the type of products that can be made because everything turns into a dark grey if there's any contamination in the batches.

As a result, I'm already considering the potential need to set up our own processing plant to ensure that we have the recycled plastic feedstock. Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be many incentives to do so in the ACT.

Furthermore, while both the ACT and Commonwealth government have publicly stated the need to buy more recycled products themselves, there has been little evidence that any steps have been made in their procurement policies or elsewhere to support the recycled plastic industry.

Incentivising businesses of all sizes and not-for-profits to help solve these issues will bring you an eco-system solution rather than one that is piece-mealed together by the individual companies that are already known to government.

While we are all trying reduce our plastic use, the reality is that plastic products are still the preferred option by many global and local companies. The real question then should be, "How do we minimise its long-term harm to the environment, animals and even humans?"

I recognise that this particular discussion paper is for single-used plastics only, but I encourage the ACT Government to fully consider the entire lifecycle of plastics. I hope you find value in this response. Thanks for this opportunity to provide feedback, and feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tammy Ven Dange". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Ven Dange
CEO, The Refoundry