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

Waste services need to be considered an essential service and should be planned for in the same way the provision of safe drinking water is. State government should invest in waste infrastructure which can accommodate future population growth and ensure there are areas in the Sydney metropolitan area for these types of facilities. This is exacerbated by the limited putrescible landfill capacity in the Sydney metropolitan area. The NSW waste to energy policy must incorporate best practice standards as adopted in Europe. To provide the community with confidence the NSW Government should invest jointly in these facilities and manage community expectations and education. We need to adopt a circular economy approach by developing recycling markets in Australia to process the material and then into recycled product. Need to address that a lot of packaging is not recyclable and therefore there is no capacity for it to enter the circular economy. Lack of community understanding and support for new technologies needs to be addressed such as waste to energy. Making sure that the community understands how new technologies work will ensure that these new technologies will be accepted. Planning of new release areas and growth centres needs to consider how the waste will be collected. Many new developments do not prioritise waste collection and management and end up with waste management plans that are not suitable or efficient. The NSW Environment Protection Authority's change in regulatory environment for mixed waste organic output was handled poorly and has generated a lot of uncertainty for both industry and councils. After having the research and data available for years the decision was sudden and overnight the exemption was removed. There was no consultation or engagement resulting in both industry and councils unable to plan for the future. Focus needs to be given to all streams of waste not just domestic, improvements within the commercial and industrial sector would have large changes in resource recovery.

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

The section 88 levy is not being returned to the industry at a sufficient level to encourage investment in infrastructure and innovation in the sector. Lack of funding, regulatory consistency and policy certainty by the NSW Government has meant there is limited investment and incentive to build the infrastructure required to recycle organics. NSW Government needs to work in partnership with council and industry. Local councils understand what is best for their local areas. For example mandating all councils to implement a FOGO collection service may not suit especially when there is a lack of research on the compost product and different levels of contamination.

Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?

Expand the product stewardship schemes to drive waste out of landfill and back into the productive economy. It would encourage industry to fund the collection and recycling of its goods once they reach the end of their productive life. Provide incentives or a minimum content requirement for companies to incorporate recycled content in its new products. Makes changes to state government procurement to mandate recycled content in products. Increase littering fines to ensure that waste is appropriately disposed of. Support the banning of single use plastic items like straws, bags and cutlery where there are viable alternatives. This needs to be done at a state government level, local governments can only encourage and promote. Look at examples around the world such as Sweden who are leading the way for waste reduction and resources recovery within a circular economy framework.

Question 4 - How can we recycle better?

State government should enforce targets on the amount of recycled content in packaging. Significant investment should be made in recycling infrastructure with support from government to encourage innovation. Expand the container deposit scheme to include all food and beverage containers. This ensures that a clean recyclable product is produced. Implement mandatory waste reduction and recycling targets for all industries.

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

Look at ways to practically implement circular economy principles to increase investment in this area. State government should invest in facilities to develop a maximum resource recovery of all recyclable materials. This would ensure materials that provide less commercial value have demand and markets. Support and fund research into all streams of waste and resource recovery to ensure the all waste has the best resources recovery outcomes with supporting infrastructure and markets.

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

The Minister in his invitation to provide this feedback identified 3 areas of focus:

1. Sustainability
2. Reliability
3. Affordability

In terms of reliability and affordability of the waste services provided to our communities the NSW Government is not responsible to ensure that the bins are always collected that is the role of councils. We do it well and provide a service to our community that is highly valued and with a high level of satisfaction. The NSW Government needs to support the waste and resource recovery industry, including councils to ensure that:

- the regulatory framework supports investment, long term planning and innovation
- the circular economy model is embedded in the NSW economy and state government business
- ensure that waste and resources recovery services and infrastructure are considered essential services.

This needs to be embedded in the NSW state government planning process that identified locations for this infrastructure and protects buffers so that these areas do not adversely impact on the community.