



Ref: 19/808899

The Hon. Matt Kean MP  
Minister for Energy and Environment  
GPO Box 5341  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Minister Kean,

### **Waste Management: A Critical Urban Issue**

I welcome the opportunity to provide a response to your request dated 3 September 2019 regarding how the waste sector in New South Wales can be improved. The Greater Sydney Commission has recognised the major challenge represented by waste management for the Greater Sydney Region.

The *Greater Sydney Region Plan* (GSRP) identifies, as one of its key Directions, the necessity of an efficient city in which resources, such as waste, are used wisely. (Direction 9 of the GSRP). Objective 35 of the GSRP promotes the greater reuse and recycling of waste to support the development of the circular economy. This is essential to manage Greater Sydney's growth and enhance its status as one of the most liveable global cities.

The GSRP identifies the importance of retaining and protecting existing urban services land across the Region to safeguard land for waste management and recycling facilities. It also supports innovative solutions to reduce the volume of waste and reduce waste transport requirements.

The Commission supports the NSW Government's approach to setting a long-term vision for reducing waste and driving sustainable recycling markets.

Unless there is effective management of this critical issue there could be adverse impacts on:

- Liveability – this requires better planning of waste services that meets the needs of our population now and into the future for wellbeing and the quality of place.
- Sustainability – the control of waste is required so that the health of the environment and waterways is maintained.
- Productivity – ensuring that waste collection and disposal is undertaken by an efficient and competitive freight, logistics and supply chain network including regional connectivity.

The current waste management system has evolved incrementally, opportunistically and reactively, without an overall strategy of developing a robust 'circular economy' through the waste sector.

From a city governance perspective, this should consider all material flows into and out of the city, including water and energy and the potential to trend, over time, towards circularity. It will involve a transition of current practices to innovative approaches.



The starting point, and stimulus, may be the goal of effective waste management, however, it is clear that there are significant potential synergies with waste water treatment, organics and water reclamation, food production and soil and landscape restoration. Consequently a 'circular economy' strategy must also be cognisant of the geography of the particular city for which it is being developed, and for that reason the spatial implications of waste management are of interest to strategic land-use planning.

### **Key ideas and actions for better outcomes in the waste sector**

1. There is a role for policy and planning to assist in the identification of suitable locations for waste management; for their protection and to make them available to the private sector. The establishment of 'Waste Districts' is centred on the idea of large self-buffered urban services precincts distributed across the city. This idea would facilitate changes in the waste sector to deliver the following benefits:
  - Integrated management of all waste streams across a defined area or District;
  - Co-location of similar waste management activities for the supply and delivery of recyclable materials for distribution.
2. Consideration should be given to the investigation and implementation of innovative waste management approaches that have been successful in other global cities. A strategic approach to the management of waste (at both Council and State level) with the opportunity and policy support to investigate innovative solutions may trigger new responses from the waste sector. One option is to draw on the experience of other cities involved in waste to energy programs that may be cost effective and environmentally sound in appropriate locations. For example, the Amager Plant in Copenhagen uses feed from domestic waste to supply hot water for heating (please see attached an extract from a booklet on the plant). There are other examples that may warrant investigation.
3. Develop strategic land use plans that support more effective District waste management, recycling and waste services. These services are critical urban infrastructure, and an essential part of our urban system. The future location of these services within our industrial and urban services lands needs to be planned to support good growth management with better waste management. The Commission's Thought Leadership Paper – *A Metropolis that Works* highlights that place-based strategies for industrial and urban services land should include retention of appropriate sites for critical urban services including waste treatment, recycling and resource recovery.

I look forward to continuing our engagement on this key issue to collaboratively deliver better outcomes in the waste sector and implement innovative directions for the management of waste strategies in our 3 Cities.

Yours sincerely

**Lucy Turnbull AO**  
**Chief Commissioner**