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Name	Tim Askew
Role or organisation	Role or organisation - Regional Program Manager, Hunter Joint Organisation

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

NSW needs to materially shift focus from 'Waste' to 'Resource Recovery and avoidance' as part of this strategy. Key issues relating to this shift include:

The sheer volume of waste still being produced. Further funding of waste reduction education programs and advocating for legislative changes at the State and Federal government levels is required to reduce unnecessary waste.

Improved focus on a whole of government approach to Resource Recovery to ensure that the solutions are developed in consultation with or led by other areas of State Government not just the regulatory authority.

Low status of waste and resource recovery in the planning system and as an essential service. Waste and resource recovery infrastructure and services continues to be given a lower priority than other essential services in the NSW planning system. The outcome has been inadequate planning and protection for this essential service that creates situations where the most efficient waste services are not implemented. Waste infrastructure needs to be protected from encroachment and sited strategically.

Embedding a Circular Economy approach to resource recovery in NSW. This could be achieved by:

- o Working with local government, research institutions and the business community on a coordinated approach to the Circular Economy.

- o Reducing regulations or creating pathways for approval of circular economy initiatives to foster investment. E.g. The lack of domestic markets for domestic recycled content that has resulted in a lack of domestic secondary processing infrastructure.

- o Working with Federal and State counterparts to further develop the 'designing out' of waste issues or 'designing in' circular economy principles into our products and services. This could be done by embedding circular economy principles into planning legislation for development applications, standard recycled content product specifications approved by State Government and expanded product stewardship programs.

The product stewardship approach is important in this consumerism age where products/materials have short life span and result in increased waste production. There is a risk that circular economy initiatives will go to QLD, VIC and SA if the State Government does not create the opportunities or funding mechanisms to make it happen in NSW. QLD, for example, is investing all levies into resource recovery projects at the moment.

Other key issues to be resolved and considered include:

Alignment of the waste policies and strategic directions with other NSW government policies.

Lack of transparent strategic targets in a measurement framework that is consistent across the country, eg household reduction targets per capita as opposed to % inclusion of C&I and C&D in the WARR metrics.

Understanding the key drivers of illegal dumping through detailed research and developing solutions based on the research.

Transparency around the waste levy collected, where the money collected is spent outside the waste industry and where it is reinvested back into waste management to demonstrate the Government's commitment to reduce, recycle, reuse.

Is the State heading down the path of source separation of recycling only or will it allow processing separation as well and which approach is the most efficient from an economic and environmental point of view. Can we afford and does the community benefit from both approaches?

We need a long-term strategy for landfills to determine how long we intend to continue landfilling and to what level or type of waste will continue into landfills. We need to ensure local government is not penalised if the State Government moves to ban or reduce landfill use. Reducing landfill use will be another mechanism to improve and encourage resource recovery and the circular economy approach to waste.

Lack of state-wide strategic planning for waste infrastructure. The current strategy established NSW targets without a state-wide infrastructure plan to manage and recover resources from waste to meet these targets. The costs of building and modernising waste and resource recovery facilities are extremely high and there has been underinvestment resulting in an underdeveloped recycling system. This is despite the NSW Government having a ready stream of revenue through the waste levy to support the development of the system.

Energy from Waste policy - we need to update approaches to Energy from Waste options as part of the circular economy suite of solutions to waste. The policy needs to facilitate proven options and allow testing of new innovation in energy from waste.

The lack of quality data is inhibiting policy and investment decisions, as is the lack of central coordination and management of waste sector data for informed decision making. There is also a lack of transparency and accountability to ensure that the community's recycling is managed responsibly and they receive value for money.

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 are an extremely small percentage of the waste stream in weight but have significant impact on land and marine environments. State based targets should be supported by separate metro and regional targets that are potentially achievable within the life of the strategy, for example different organics targets for metro and regional areas.

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

The definition of waste itself should be changed to - a resource opportunity. The definition of waste can limit opportunities to reuse it as a resource or product and creates a lack of eligibility for waste exemptions and reuse. Waste management regulatory burden on Councils. Through time more legislative functions have been devolved to local government with little support from the NSW Government. Lack of engagement and alignment of policies and processes across all levels of government and within State Government departments. Risk of losing opportunities to other States. Barriers to investment in new technology. eg waste to energy Lack of on-shore processing (& manufacturing) opportunities. Lack of approved specifications or approval turn around time for recycled content materials and products that can be reintroduced via circular economy approach. Lack of consultation. Thorough consultation with the providers of waste and recovery services to ensure all issues are on the table, discussed and openly resolved before changes are made to the system. Contamination of kerbside recycling at householder level and technological challenges of removing contamination through processing have resulted in poor quality output that is difficult to find markets for. There is a shortage of infrastructure for secondary processing of waste and remanufacturing of products with recycled content. Lack of critical streamlined state level community education on eg waste avoidance, organics recovery and reducing contamination in kerbside recycling bins. Poor waste data and lack of data that inhibits policy and investment decisions.

Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?

NSW needs to materially shift focus from 'Waste' to 'Resource Recovery' as part of this strategy. This could be achieved by: Continuing to work on reducing the volume of waste produced through funding of waste reduction education programs and advocating for legislative changes at the State

and Federal government levels. Developing a whole of government approach to Resource Recovery to ensure that the solutions are developed in consultation with or led by other areas of State Government not just the regulatory authority. Continuing the work started on embedding a Circular Economy approach to resource recovery, which will reduce carbon emissions as well. This could be achieved by:

- o Working with local government, research institutions and the business community on a coordinated approach to the Circular Economy
- o Reducing regulations or creating pathways for approval of circular economy initiatives to foster investment.
- o Working with Federal and State counterparts to further develop the 'designing out' of waste issues or 'designing in' circular economy principles into our products and services. This could be embedding circular economy principles into planning legislation for development applications, standard recycled content product specifications approved by State Government and expanded product stewardship programs. The product stewardship approach is important in this consumerism age where products/materials have short life span and result in increased waste production.

Waste reduction will also be achieved through/by:

Generated waste should be categorised into those that are truly circular in nature (i.e. waste that be avoided, reused, recycled or replaced) or not, and those that are not part of the Circular Economy should be considered for phasing out or a plan/strategy for becoming part of the circular economy.

Ensure that the community is included in the development of these strategies.

Capacity build and invest in the expansion of the reuse and repair sector and address barriers to buying second-hand and repaired products, including right to repair legislation for products that have significant environmental cost to build and discard

Continuing to encourage avoidance of waste generation through education, pressure from product stewardship programs and encouraging the designing out of waste (i.e. one of the Circular Economy Principles)

Enabling and encouraging households through incentives and education including the consumer based programs to support utilisation of alternate products and services that reduce waste.

Redirecting the waste levy to programs that reduce waste like: o recycling infrastructure research and development

o provision of additional resources to local government and Joint Organisations for localised waste reduction programs o additional resources and new technology to RID squads for managing illegal dumping and littering (drones, surveillance devices etc)

o non-competitive grant funding for remote/regional councils with less than 30,000 residents to implement waste compliance and other waste reduction actions

Consideration of additional levy on problem wastes, high waste producing industries or non-circular economy wastes to encourage change and new economies. Developing a funded and implementable action plan to deal with waste reduction including developing a reduction program on packaging, especially on cardboard and soft plastics, as a key focus area for our region.

Question 4 - How can we recycle better?

Greater education and understanding for the community (transparency) around what can be recycled, where it goes and how it is being recycled/reuse. A consistent statewide approach to education that is funded at the State and Local government level, that can be tailored to each LGA and the community need in those LGAs.

Funding for investment in improved recycling infrastructure and cleaner source separation systems. Research best practice systems from around the world. Invest in R&D and technologies to support advanced waste and recycling separation at facility level.

Integrate development of recycling processing into Infrastructure NSW Agenda and/or DPC to elevate the importance of developing infrastructure to support local processing and manufacture of recycled materials.

Implement consumer based programs/incentives and strategies to utilise alternative products provide households with tools to support them.

Leverage off the Federal Government discussion around processing recycling on shore and develop a localised approach to recycling (if efficient, effective or environmentally beneficial to do so).

Reduce contamination including hard to recycle materials and products. Phase out and provide economic and regulatory incentives to reduce the use of single-use plastics and problematic and unnecessary materials including those that are hard to recycle.

Work with the Australian Government to: regulate / ban production and importation of hard-to-recycle materials introduce producer responsibility schemes with binding targets to drive action by producers to take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products Standardise packaging labelling and certify use of recycled content.

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

Developing a whole of government approach to the Waste Strategy, that reduces red tape for new processing facilities for recycle products. Improvements to the planning system to prioritise waste and resource recovery. Improve waste and resource recovery outcomes for state significant developments. Prioritise waste and resource recovery within district plans, SEPPs and LEPs and evaluate the benefit of a SEPP for waste and resource recovery. Strategically plan and protect waste and resource recovery infrastructure. Transition towards a circular economy. NSW Government has a lead role in developing holistic policy approaches that supports transition to a circular economy. Substantial commitment and investment from all levels of government is needed to transition towards a circular economy and a resilient and responsible waste and resource recovery sector. Investigate the potential of creating a proximity principle when it comes to the collection and processing of waste into a resource. The principle should be that the waste should be processed as close as feasible to the source that created the waste. This would align to the federal government approach of processing waste onshore. Review the effectiveness of the waste levy. Waste levies currently have limited impact on reducing the waste generated by ratepayers, as they have no direct financial incentive to reduce waste going to landfill, paying generally a flat fee for their waste. Consideration should be given to the removal of the waste levy burden for Councils for operational purposes such as daily cover material. The State Government should conduct investigations and research into a tiered waste levy to support initiatives that align with strategy objectives. Only a small proportion of the levy paid by ratepayers is returned to councils for waste management and recycling programs. The NSW waste levy is used to fund other NSW Government priorities rather than reserving the revenue for waste management and recycling programs as its purpose. The implementation of waste levies across Australia in an equitable and consistent manner so that interstate transfer of waste is minimised, should be advocated. A commitment to fund and resource regional coordination for strong waste and resource recovery outcomes should form part of the 20 year Waste Strategy. This will maintain and strengthen the regional coordination of Councils to the benefit of the State and Local Governments. Better transparency and access to timely, robust and credible data so that best value can be achieved for the community. There is a lack of central coordination and management of waste sector data for informed decision making Design a framework for collecting, analysing and sharing state-wide waste and resource recovery data at LGA level in a timely way for informed decision making including:

- o Improved timing of release and quality of the WARR data
- o A framework and funding source for consistent, quality compositional audits that bring cost efficiencies of scale.
- o Technologies for collecting data at remote facilities eg unmanned landfills

- o Introduce systems for tracking and reporting on materials that are recycled and provide incentives for highest possible resource recovery

Strengthen industry oversight as it is dominated by a few large and a handful of smaller operators with some operating with little transparency or accountability. Councils seek the best value for their communities and the knowledge that their recycling is being responsibly recycled but without

industry transparency and data this is difficult to know if achieved. Lack of transparency also discourages other price models such as cost/risk sharing to be responsibly considered. There is need for the waste and resource recovery sector to be provided with clear policy directions underpinned by consistent regulatory certainty if the waste and resource recovery system is to improve. For Example, recent regulatory uncertainty around MWOO output has undermined confidence in organics processing pathways and outputs, as well as resource recovery of other waste products.

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

This is a submission on behalf the Hunter Joint Organisation and the 10 Councils within the Waste Region.