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

In both policy and practice, waste is not adequately recognised by all levels of government and the community as the essential service that it is. This systemic issue has resulted in the current piecemeal approach to waste and resource recovery in NSW. The 20 Year Waste Strategy provides an opportunity to take the much-needed long-term strategic view of the industry. Waste is an Essential Service The provision of garbage (waste) services is listed in the Essential Services Act 1988 along with energy supply, public transportation, public health services and water supply. Waste services (and supporting infrastructure) must be given the same priority and planning provisions as electricity and water to ensure these services can be provided at a reasonable cost to the community. Lack of availability and capacity of waste processing infrastructure and accessibility for waste services (for example, adequate road widths and transportation corridors), will result in high financial and environmental costs to the community. Role of Governments Despite being a function of local government under the Local Government Act 1993, the provision of municipal solid waste services needs to be recognised as an essential service at all levels of government. Whilst councils are diligently fulfilling their obligations to provide and cost waste management services under the Act, the NSW Government has a key leadership role and responsibilities for waste management. Through time some of these legislative functions have been devolved to local government little support or ownership by the NSW Government, aside from resource-consuming grant programs. The POEO Act 1997 outlines NSW Government responsibilities for illegal dumping, littering and licensing, whilst the WARR Act 2001 promotes waste avoidance, resource recovery and extended producer responsibility. In 2001, this was progressive with NSW being the first state or territory to establish EPR policy. However, since then, we have strayed from the objectives of the act, and the current program suggest a loss of significance of the waste hierarchy with minimal efforts and funding allocated to higher order waste avoidance. Leading jurisdictions around the world are solidly progressing towards more aggressive targets of zero waste to landfill, in line with the resource recovery order set by the waste hierarchy. The hierarchy for sustainable waste management begins with waste avoidance, reuse, recycling, recovery, then landfill last of all. However, our efforts seem to be reversed, resulting in our inability to achieve the current targets of 70% resource recovery. Prioritising industry efforts according to this well-regarded waste hierarchy, is the pathway to realising a true circular economy, where activities serve their purpose in the hierarchy and the earth's finite resources are valued appropriately. In this future, products are made to be recycled, and the practice of capturing energy recovery from non-recyclable waste is valued over landfill. The current method of setting arbitrary targets for recycling and resource recovery of municipal waste needs to be reconsidered and is consistent. The ability of local government to meet these targets is directly dependent on the availability of the correct infrastructure to meet these processing needs, of which all are owned by private industry. Waste Infrastructure Planned population growth in NSW and economic growth will all contribute to increased waste generation. The Draft NSW EPA Infrastructure Strategy 2017-21 has already identified a lack of waste facilities to support this growth and process the resulting waste. We are in dire need of new infrastructure, yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify suitable lands for waste infrastructure, particularly due to urban encroachment. In Sydney, this is exacerbated by the high land values, even making existing waste infrastructure sites desirable for profitable urban development. Suitable sites need to be identified and safeguarded by the NSW government to ensure an adequate network of waste infrastructure to meet the population's needs, and not too distantly located that the transport of waste reduces the

environmental benefit of recycling or processing the waste.

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

The lack of political will and leadership, in recent years, has been a significant barrier to improving waste in NSW. A whole of government approach is sorely needed, to enable state-level planning for a waste and resource recovery system that is recognised and functions as a priority essential service. Government leadership would entail ensuring regularly consistency and risk mitigation for local government disposal and waste processing contracts. The revocation of the Mixed Waste Organics Outputs resource recovery exemption in October 2018 has resulted in all sides losing with: community paying an excess for poor resource recovery outcomes, reduced appetite for private sector investment in the industry and a loss of trust in the NSW EPA decision-making and stakeholder engagement processes. Another contributing barrier is the poor waste data and lack of current available data, which inhibits policy and investment decisions, and fosters a lack of trust and transparency among industry stakeholders. Whilst we have resource recovery targets in place, no pathways to achieving these have been clearly established, and again it is left to councils to negotiate with the industry as to what can be achieved. With planning and approvals processes long and costly, a more coordinated approach is needed to secure long-term waste supply contracts to enable the correct waste infrastructure in accordance with the principles of the waste hierarchy. Without a clear vision of what the industry is heading for, it will be difficult to develop clear and consistent waste and resource recovery messages to engage the community.

**Question 3 - How can we best reduce waste?**

We have known for a long time how best to reduce waste, and that is, by following the principles set out in the waste hierarchy. Unfortunately, the most impactful actions (avoid and reuse) seem to receive the lowest priority, whilst landfill continues to provide an income stream for government. The waste hierarchy begins with waste avoidance, although our current efforts are seeing waste generation in NSW increasing at a faster rate than population growth. It is well-understood that waste generation rates are closely related to economic growth in the EU, waste prevention programs commonly include actions to decouple waste generation from economic growth. Political support and endorsement of key waste and resource recovery messaging is needed, under a state-wide community engagement plan to promote overarching waste messages such as: waste avoidance, reuse, buying back recycled, managing problem wastes, as well as increasing community acceptance for new technologies that would help us achieve higher resource recovery. A regulatory push to promote use and buyback of recycled content, and for manufacturing industries to create products that are made to be recycled, is also required to ensure that we are in fact recycling.

**Question 4 - How can we recycle better?**

Recycling is the process of converting waste into reusable material meaning that to effectively recycle, we must use recycled content. To facilitate this, consideration of standards for design for reuse or recycling on imported material, and corporate responsibility requirements to reduce and manage materials within a company's products and packaging (for example, restricting use of virgin materials). Domestic secondary reprocessing infrastructure is under-developed and state and federal governments have a key role to address the current market failures and find facilitate maturation of the Australian industry. This has come at a cost to the community, particularly when the China National Sword Policy became effective as councils were also negotiating Container Deposit Scheme refund sharing negotiations (with many recycling contracts belonging to a single provider in metropolitan Sydney). Government can show leadership through sustainable procurement policies to drive the markets using its large buying power. Using recycled content in civil works, for example, provides a simple and logical solution for use of problematic crushed glass and other materials (such

as shredded plastics and tyres), reducing contamination caused by those materials. Other environmental benefits include the increased longevity of roads using recycled content, and associated abatement of greenhouse gas emissions. Product stewardship schemes play an important role in increasing the value of otherwise undesirable materials that are not economically viable to recycle or transport for processing and creating sustainable markets for these products. Products that are problematic or costly to deal with should be considered, for example, polystyrene beads (as used in bean bags), cannot be collected via conventional means as the beads are difficult to contain and become windblown litter in the environment. Additionally, the seven types of products currently being collected via Community Recycling Centres have already been identified as sufficiently problematic that state government subsidises the disposal costs for these items. This is a strong indicator that items such as gas bottles, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors should also be targeted for product stewardship.

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

Consistent with the issues presented above, elevating the status of waste as an essential service in policy and practice would create a solid platform for the next 20 years of the Strategy. The 20 Year Waste Strategy can provide a strong strategic planning for infrastructure and processing opportunities of waste and resource recovery streams. The NSW Planning legislative framework can be strengthened through inclusion of SEPP clauses regarding waste and resource recovery infrastructure and associated planning approval process. WSROC supports any efforts to improve data capture and improve timeliness of data reporting. We would support improved efforts by all levels of government to work with the private sector who deliver waste and recycling infrastructure, to understand capacity constraints, improve planning for increased population growth and resource recovery, and accelerate necessary infrastructure to support recycling and resource recovery markets. The waste levy and decreasing availability of landfill space in the Sydney region are both drivers to establishment of new technologies higher in the waste hierarchy. A review of the waste levy, consistent with the Legislative council's report on Energy from Waste would be welcome, with the recognition that as NSW progresses towards greater resource recovery the reduced levy income would be a measure of success. A 20 Year Waste Strategy, that maximises resource recovery in line with the principles of ecologically sustainable development, would require reinvestment of the waste levy to create the right market settings for a strong industry that supports local jobs and promotes good environmental outcomes for our next generation. Strong state and federal government leadership is crucial to provide direction, certainty for investment, value for local communities, and consistency in community engagement messaging. Learning from world leaders in resource recovery, there is a clear direction and commitment from the governments involved. Recent publicity about the waste industry has sparked an increased community interest in waste. Despite some of this stemming from negative publicity, the high public engagement on the issue provides a great opportunity to lead the conversation with community into what a sustainable waste management system could be. Negative public perception can be overcome with transparency and accountability of the sector and alleviating damaging misconceptions about the industry and new technologies.

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

The government has deferred much of its action on waste policy to the development of this 20 Year Waste Strategy. We hope that the consultation process will be genuine, and given the due diligence required for the essential service of waste management that the industry is so passionate about. A well-developed and adequately funded Strategy will propel NSW to the forefront in resource recovery and allow sustainable waste management to truly make a positive impact in reducing our environmental footprint. This submission has been prepared by the Western Sydney Regional

Organisation of Councils (WSROC) and is indicative of the professional views of nine councils participating in the Western Sydney Regional Waste Strategy: Blacktown City Council, Blue Mountains City Council, Cumberland Council, Fairfield City Council, Hawkesbury City Council, Liverpool City Council, City of Parramatta, Penrith City Council and The Hills Shire Council.