



Yarra Climate Action Now

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**Re: YCAN Submission in response to the Circular Economy Issues Paper**

To whom it may concern,

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) is a growing, dynamic and award-winning community group, based in the City of Yarra, who want stronger action on climate change. Our members are ordinary people with families, work and study, but who are also passionate about ensuring a safe climate and sustainable future. YCAN is our way to take action into our own hands; we think globally but act locally. We are optimistic about the potential for a circular economy to contribute to a more sustainable future, so congratulate the Victorian government for their investment and support to assist in making this a reality.

YCAN is particularly interested in promoting a safe climate, and we believe improving our collective performance on management of materials efficiency, waste and recycling is a critical enabler of a sustainable climate future. All new products carry embodied carbon emissions from the energy used to produce them (and many consume finite raw materials), so encouraging recycled products is better. But all recycled products carry embodied emissions from the energy used to collect, transport and reprocess them, so reusing, repairing and avoiding are better again. If products make it through the system and end up in landfill, their embodied emissions are truly 'wasted' and certain products (organics) contribute further to global warming as they release methane when allowed to decay in an anaerobic environment. As an alternative to landfill, we believe that **waste-to-energy technologies should only be used for waste which is truly residual** (i.e. can't be repurposed) and should be regulated with strict controls around input streams, efficiency and emissions.

We see the Circular Economy Policy as an opportunity for the Victorian Government to be a leader in transforming our economy away from the 'take, make, dispose' linear model. As well as providing environmental benefit, such a shift has the potential to give Victoria a competitive advantage in attracting new 'green' investment. But transforming to a true circular economy (where materials are kept in their highest and best use for as long as possible) **requires a substantial change in practices and mindset**. This challenge should not be underestimated, and we would encourage the government to invest resources and careful thought in **designing and delivering sustained education and behaviour change programs** to support the shift.

The priority actions that YCAN would like to see implemented as part of the Circular Economy Policy are:

- A container deposit scheme;
- Banning of unnecessary single-use plastics;
- A renewed focus on extended producer responsibility; and
- Support for local community-based and Council-led initiatives.

### Container Deposit Scheme

The Victorian Government should respond to overwhelming public support and implement a Container Deposit Scheme for Victoria (or otherwise advocate for a national scheme). The scheme's design should be based on experience and best practice both nationally and internationally. It should also clearly demonstrate a positive impact on litter rates and resource recovery rates, and return value to the community. Victoria is now the only State without a Container Deposit Scheme in action or in planning, and it is time for us to catch up. If the business case stacks up in other jurisdictions, it is difficult to see how our context is so different that it wouldn't stack up here in Victoria.

### Banning problematic single-use plastics

Plastic is by far the most damaging of consumer materials because it is produced using non-renewable fossil resources and persists in the environment to cause unquantifiable damage to natural ecosystems. The government is to be praised for introducing a ban on single-use plastic bags (to come into effect later this year) and on committing to develop a plastic pollution action plan. However, YCAN also wants to see bans on other unnecessary single-use plastics, including take-away containers, cutlery, plates and cups, cotton buds, straws and balloons. Other jurisdictions (including the EU) have successfully legislated to implement such bans and Victoria should follow these examples. Alternative to a ban, the government could consider taxing these items such that their price reflects their true costs, including negative externalities from environmental damage. In the absence of strong regulatory intervention (either bans or strong price signals), low costs and convenience will continue to ensure that businesses and consumers use damaging plastics in an unsustainable manner. From our experience campaigning for change at a grassroots level, we know that community education and behaviour change initiatives alone are insufficient. Bans or price signals are effective means to ensure that non-plastic and reusable alternatives to problematic single-use plastics are widely adopted.

### Extended producer responsibility

In general, too much of the recycling system burden falls on individuals, local governments and the recycling industry. Manufacturers should be made accountable for making products that last, that are designed to consider their end-of-life management, and that minimise the consumption of finite resources (e.g. through efficiencies in production processes or utilising recycled content). Where investment in more advanced sorting and re-processing facilities are required, this cost should be internalised in products by making manufacturers responsible (for example, through product stewardship schemes). Where investment is required to manage a negative environmental externality generated by the product (e.g. litter clean-up costs), again this cost should be borne by manufacturers and/or retailers (for example, cigarette butts and mattresses).

### Support for local community-based and Council-led initiatives

Given the slow pace of change from Federal and State governments, Councils and local community organisations have taken the lead on developing local solutions to consumption and waste-related challenges. For example, there are many zero and minimal waste groups that have been established to educate their local communities on how to reduce their waste footprint. There is a strong repair

café movement. Councils support many of these initiatives through small grants programs and other in-kind assistance. Many Councils are also taking steps to ban single-use plastics from events and managed facilities. This local-led action is positive and contributing to the emergence of 'local' circular economies. The Victorian government should leverage this community goodwill and energy by providing additional cash and in-kind support to these efforts (for example: grants programs, awards, facilitation and information sharing forums).

Please don't hesitate to get in touch should you want to discuss these matters in more detail

Kind regards,

Kerry Echberg

Convenor

Yarra Climate Action Now

