

**RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT** Advertising Feature

# Creating change with purchasing power

Industry is calling on consumers to cut waste by buying Australian recycled products.

As consumers, we are accustomed to the idea that buying Australian-made goods is a practical way to support local manufacturers and primary producers.

This National Recycling Week, the waste management and resource recovery industry is urging us to take this concept a step further by putting our efforts into seeking out and buying Australian recycled products.

The push to raise awareness of the value of buying products made from Australian recycled materials is part of a strategy by industry and government to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible, by lifting their recoverability, recyclability and remanufacturability.

This can have immediate practical benefits by reducing waste in landfill, creating domestic industries that will drive local jobs, and by feeding directly into one of the hot-button issues of our time – reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Gayle Sloan, chief executive of the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia, the campaign is about turning linear thinking – where we see a product as having a finite lifespan that ends in its disposal – into a true circular process, where the product is used, then recycled or repurposed again and again.

For Sloan, waste does not have to be associated with the rubbish bin. Instead, we should start looking at materials as resources and asking how we can prolong the life of products we consume.

“We look on waste as something that doesn’t have a value, but most of what we see as waste does have value beyond its initial life,” she says. “Most waste is a raw material that can be reused, particularly if designed well.”

“As an industry, we’re trying to raise the profile that recycled material is simply creating raw material from existing products, and we should use that rather than virgin material.”

“This approach will build a new manufacturing industry in Australia, creating three times as many jobs, while growing the recycling and resource recovery as well as industrial design industries – all of which spells financial benefits for local communities through economic growth and jobs, in addition to the many environmental benefits of keeping materials in circulation.”

According to the *National Waste Report 2020*, Australia generated about 74.1 million tonnes of waste in 2018-19, including 22.9 Mt of masonry materials, 14.3 Mt of



Products made from Australian recycled materials on display at WMRR's Buy Recycled Expo in Adelaide last year. Photo: Brand Photography.



*‘Most waste is a raw material that can be reused.’*

Gayle Sloan

organics (including food), 5.9 Mt of paper and cardboard, 5.6 Mt of metals and 2.5 Mt of plastics. This is equivalent to 2.94 tonnes per person.

About 63 per cent of these materials are already being recovered to be recycled or repurposed into new products. This recovery rate is slowly increasing but it is clear that a more concerted effort is needed to meet the national recovery target of 80 per cent by 2030.

There are significant ways all of us can make a difference, from exerting our power as consumers to influence how products are

designed, to making the right choices at the retail level, therefore creating market demand for recycled and remanufactured products. For example, we can buy soup in a plastic pouch, which is not easily recoverable, or in a tin, which is recycled and recyclable.

Sloan concedes shoppers could be better served by clear, consistent labelling about the level of Australian recyclable material in a product. While there are no standard labelling laws in Australia at present, Sloan urges consumers to make the effort to inform themselves.

Governments also have a role to play in setting stronger policy and regulatory frameworks to encourage recycling of products and materials and procuring recycled materials, for example in their civil works.

Governments can also influence the design of goods to ensure that not only are they genuinely recyclable, but that they also capture recycled materials in their manufacture. These actions are particularly important for our net-zero ambitions because 70 per cent of carbon emissions come from what Sloan calls “materials mismanagement”.

“This is a key part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions – by reducing waste to landfill, to minimising the excavation and use of virgin materials, to reusing and repairing, which keeps materials in circulation and moving away from being a throwaway society.

Governments should be leading and setting a vision around mindful consumption and driving thinking about resource maximisation

and the circular economy,” she says.

Manufacturers should also have a responsibility to manage their products at end of life, to ensure recycling of their materials is maximised. In doing so, they would have to consider how to change the design of their products to meet that objective.

To give this a push, Sloan points to government-imposed mandates on the percentage of recycled content in products that already exist in Europe and elsewhere.

Sloan is hopeful that long-term systemic change will come because of the high level of awareness in the community about recycling and environmental issues. But she emphasises that behavioural change is needed across the spectrum now.

In the short to medium term, the bans on exporting a range of recyclable materials are driving action at home as domestic solutions are needed to deal with these materials. The waste and resource recovery industry has been investing and growing its capacity and technical prowess to meet this demand.

“Australia is moving, just not fast enough,” Sloan says. “The wheels are certainly in motion, but we need consumers to work alongside the industry by demanding change across the rest of the supply chain as well.

They can do that with the decisions they make when they buy something.

“By using our purchasing power, we can change our traditional take-make-dispose model to one that is more circular and sustainable on every front.

“Always remember, the bin is not the final destination.”

# Buy Australian recycled.

The bin is not the final destination.



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