



Mr Dave Pepper
Director General
City and Environment Directorate
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By email: singleuseplastics@act.gov.au

1 May 2026

Dear Mr Pepper

Re: A circular future for the ACT: Problematic Products and Single-Use Plastic Reduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the City and Environment Directorate (CED) on the discussion paper: *A circular future for the ACT: Problematic Products and Single-Use Plastic Reduction* ("[Discussion Paper](#)"). The Discussion Paper articulates the progress already made by the ACT under the *Plastic Reduction Act 2021* (now the *Circular Economy Act 2023*), proposes actions to encourage avoidance and reuse, and identifies 14 single-use plastic items being considered for future phase-out under the *Problematic Products and Single-Use Plastic Reduction Plan* for the ACT ("the plan").

The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia (WMRR) is the national peak body representing Australia's \$21 billion waste and resource recovery (WARR) sector. With more than 2,300 members from over 400 entities nationwide, we represent the breadth and depth of the sector, including representation from business organisations, the three (3) tiers of government, universities, and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), including research bodies. As fierce proponents of the resource and waste management hierarchy, WMRR's advocacy closely aligns with the objective of the *Circular Economy Act 2023* ("the Act") – to transition to a circular economy where waste is minimised and valuable resources are kept in circulation for as long as possible.

Reducing the impacts of single use plastics is a key focus for the sector. [Government data](#) for 2023-24 shows that approximately 87% of plastics in Australia are sent directly to landfill after use, underscoring the urgent need for decisive action. WMRR strongly advocates for initiatives that phase out unnecessary plastic waste at its source and commends the ACT's approach to prioritising upstream reduction and reuse. However, WMRR was disappointed that the Discussion Paper did not explore a similar approach to what NSW has taken to addressing design-for-recycling regulations or mandatory recyclability, instead pointing to the Australian Government's commitment to reform packaging regulation at the national level. Whilst WMRR accepts that packaging reform is on the national agenda, more can be done by each jurisdiction to shift some responsibility onto those that supply materials to design their products with human health and environmental outcomes in mind. For example, NSW has committed to establishing a 'red list' of chemicals of concern to address the risk of emerging contaminants entering recycling and organics streams.

WMRR submits that when finalising the plan, the CED should look to optimise opportunities for jurisdictional alignment and support single-use plastic bans with further circular economy measures that further mitigate the risks of problematic products entering into the WARR system (especially via food serviceware and associated packaging) and engender systematic consumer behaviour change.

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i. *Phase outs of priority items should seek to align with other jurisdictions in so far as possible*

It is WMRR's view that priority should be given to actions that align the ACT with other jurisdictions—particularly NSW, the precedent for which was set with the container deposit legislation. As Australia operates as a single national market for products, with 62% of plastics consumed in 2023–24 being imported, greater alignment across jurisdictions will not only strengthen national environmental outcomes but also ensure businesses that rely on the use of these items can access more competitive and consistent national supply chains. This need for alignment is particularly important between the ACT plan and [NSW Plastics Plan](#) due to the proximity and shared supply chains.

The table below captures WMRR's comments against each of the proposed items considered for phase out.

Item	WMRR comment
Plastic barrier bags for fruit and vegetables (produce bags)	These should be phased out as priority with a suitable transition period (circa 18 months as per NSW) to align with other jurisdictions.
Plastic Flower bags	This is a lower priority – due to the lower volume and the lack of alignment with other jurisdictions.
Plastic produce stickers	WMRR supports the phase out of these ahead of 2030 as per NSW, noting that other states have also indicated that they will follow suit with NSW. However, WMRR strongly argues against introducing “compostable” stickers to replace these and instead encourages the consideration of other alternatives (such as laser labelling for fruit). Research by the NSW EPA has demonstrated that scope creep of ‘compostable items’ into organics has increased chemical and physical contamination, there is a real risk that one compostable item allowed into the composted waste stream can encourage further compostable items to enter organics streams. Protecting the quality of organics output products should be the primary concern rather than the replacement of plastic.
Plastic lined coffee cups, plastic lids and plugs	These should be phased out as a priority. Regulations should be made for takeaway food businesses such as fast-food restaurants and cafes be required to accept and also offer reusable cups provided by customers for takeaway beverages. This aligns with the approach of NSW, SA and WA.
Plastic cold cups	These should be phased out as a priority. Regulations should be made for takeaway food businesses such as fast-food restaurants and cafes be required to accept and also offer reusable cups provided by customers for takeaway beverages. This aligns with the approach of NSW, SA and WA.
Plastic bowls with lids	These should be phased out as a priority. Alternative recyclable options are possible. Regulations should be made for takeaway food businesses such as fast-food restaurants and cafes be required to accept and also offer reusable containers provided by customers, and design for recyclability requirements should be implemented for these items. This aligns with the approach of NSW, SA and WA.
Plastic sauce containers and sachets	These should be phased out as a priority. Recyclable options are not practicable given the size of the packaging for condiments which is unlikely to be able to be captured in existing MRF infrastructure given the size of screens used.
Plastic soy sauce fish containers	These small items are part of the biggest category of litter and are too small to be recycled by current methods. These should be phased out as a single use item as priority in alignment with SA and NSW (noting that NSW has required these to be designed for recycling, otherwise phased out).

Item	WMRR comment
Plastic cigarette liners	This is a lower priority, as WMRR understands that this is being addressed via national forums for on a national approach to regulating cigarette butts.
Plastic Bread Tags	This is already banned in other jurisdictions and should be prioritised for an ACT phase out.
Plastic food sticks	This is already banned in other jurisdictions and should be prioritised for an ACT phase out.
Plastic pizza savers	This is already banned in other jurisdictions and should be prioritised for an ACT phase out.
Prepackaged goods with attached plastic items (currently exempt under the CE Act)	This should be prioritised to align with NSW which banned integrated food and beverage packaging with the transition period ending 1 January 2025.
Plastic Confetti	This is already banned in other jurisdictions and should be prioritised for an ACT phase out.

The foreseeable impacts of phase-outs/bans include transition costs for businesses, supply-chain adjustment, and the need for consumer education to enable appropriate behaviour change. However, the ACT is well equipped to manage these impacts having already introduced bans for single use items such as plastic microbeads in rinse off products, expanded packaging, polystyrene and oxo-degradable products – evidence that these impacts can be managed with adequate transition periods. Given the proximity and likely shared supply chains, it would make sense for the ACT to mirror the *NSW Plastics Plan* which identifies a timeline of actions leading to 2030 in so far as possible.

ii. Transitioning to a reuse culture in the ACT should be supported by further circular economy measures

Given that items like coffee cups and snack packaging are the largest contributors to takeaway litter in the ACT, significant gains can be achieved by prioritising and mandating their reuse as soon as possible. As highlighted in the previous table, WMRR recommends that immediate priority for regulatory measures should be given to:

- requiring businesses to accept reusable cups and offer reusable cups, and
- the development of reuse-only precincts and plastic-free places to support reuse behaviours in the ACT.

However, WMRR submits that a combination approach inclusive of mandatory design and labelling rules, genuine extended producer responsibility to design for reuse or recyclability, brand-level litter transparency, and exploration of deposit/take-back systems for reusable items will also be needed to drive systemic reform towards a circular economy. Whilst the ideal framework would be based on a national directive (similar to the EU's *Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation – EU 2025/40 (PPWR)* which takes a lifecycle approach to products based on mandatory design rules, extended producer responsibility (EPR) obligations and recycling and reuse targets,) the ACT can extend its existing single-use plastics framework to go further than priority bans and reuse, by also looking to:

- introduce design standards requiring single use plastic items to be recyclable. It is important however that a 'real' definition of recyclable is applied – that is, actually recyclable as per ACCC green claims requirements (not just 'technically' recyclable). This means that the item must be able to both be placed in a stream to deliver it to the correct processing facility, but also given export restrictions, there must also be the ability to recover through suitable and accessible remanufacturing facilities - of which there remains a significant shortfall of in Australia.

- include actions requiring product manufacturers to avoid using harmful contaminants in both plastic and non-plastic materials. WMRR recommends the ACT mirror the NSW EPA's precautionary approach to chemicals in food packaging, including a published 'red' list of chemicals of concern by the end of 2027. This rightly places responsibility on producers of food and beverage packaging to ensure materials are safe and fit for purpose, rather than shifting the burden of contamination onto the WARR sector.
- phase-out or restriction of unnecessary compostable packaging, noting it poses a real risk of contaminating recycled organics products. Given the ACT's plans to expand its FOGO collection service subject to a large-scale FOGO processing facility being built, protection of the safety and quality of organic outputs must be kept front of mind as part of the broader 'systems thinking' around plastics in WARR streams. WMRR discourages the use of any 'compostable packaging' – including compostable fruit stickers – which [NSW EPA data](#) has shown can contaminate recycled organics products through inevitable 'scope creep' of similar looking products into organics collection systems.
- reduce microplastic pollution by requiring all new washing machines supplied in the ACT to achieve the national microfibre standard and be labelled accordingly (following the development of a national standard).
- ensure public litter data identifies the brands responsible for the littered items. This transparency drives accountability, placing responsibility on producers to ensure their products are safe and suitable, and helps shift the burden upstream to those creating the waste in the first place.
- consider opportunities to expand existing collection infrastructure to collect re-use cups for take back. The CDS scheme has demonstrated success in incentivising consumer recycling and reducing littering of plastics. Using existing incentivised CDS collection systems could provide consistency and clarity for consumers, promotes the effective source separation of recycleable plastic materials and to date. WMRR supports actions that look to align jurisdictions' collection and recycling regimes and encourages working with other state CDS schemes to ensure a nationally consistent approach.

WMRR trusts these comments will help shape the final plan and welcomes opportunities to engage further. Please contact the undersigned if you wish to further discuss WMRR's submission.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive Officer

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