



Mr Lee Miezis
Chief Executive Officer
EPA Victoria
GPO Box 4395
Melbourne 3001

Via [Engage Victoria](#)

23 October 2024

Dear Mr Miezis

Re: Updates to Publication 1588: Operating organic waste processing facilities

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the updates to *Publication 1588.2: Operating organic waste processing facilities* ("updated guidelines"). The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia (WMRR) is the national peak body representing Australia's \$17 billion waste and resource recovery (WARR) industry. With more than 2,300 members from over 410 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. In Victoria, WMRR represents over 530 individual members from more than 90 entities. The state generates 19 million tonnes of waste each year with a resource recovery rate of 67% delivering an economic value of \$3.72 billion employing 12,300 Victorians.

The WARR industry is an essential industry that has very much remained in the national conscience in recent years throughout the global movement towards circularity. Australia continues to focus heavily on linear behaviour and consumption, with the organics sector being one of the most progressed aspects of the circular economy. The National Waste Report (2022) reported that Australia generated about 48 million tonnes of organic waste in 2021-22, with about 8.29 million tonnes (58%) of this component being either recycled or recovered. As noted in DEECA's [Circular Economy Market Report 2024](#), Victoria sits below the national average with an existing organics recovery rate of 48%. The provision of clear and transparent guidance for the organics sector – across all levels of the organics supply chain - is paramount to improving Victoria's circular outcomes, especially as Victoria's recovered organics volumes are expected to increase in the near term, buoyed by Victorian Government FOGO grants.

With this in mind, WMRR supports the updated guidelines and welcomes the EPA's shift towards establishing a State of Knowledge that is risk-based, rather than prescriptive. This shift is cognisant of the change from a linear to circular economy and provides the WARR industry with the flexibility needed to adapt and strengthen its markets throughout the transition. WMRR also makes the following comments for the EPA's consideration:

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- i. *The increased emphasis on risk-management supports circular outcomes for the organics industry.*

In WMRR's view, the risk-based approach captured in Chapter 4 (Risk Management) and Appendix B (Risk Assessment for chemical and microbial contaminants) of the updated guidelines are welcome additions to the guidelines, and will prove helpful to organics processors, providing clear recommendations for the management of hazards, performing risk assessments and key considerations for site design and setup. From the outset, it must be stated that adopting the recommendations in the guideline (and specifically those relating to minimizing risks of harm to human health and the environment) largely aligns with existing initiatives undertaken by industry to maintain and promote the product quality of organic outputs – many of which already have established end-markets.

WMRR is strongly supportive of the risk-based approach demonstrated by the updated guidelines and the necessary implication that the EPA will move towards risk-based decision making that can support innovation and improvement. WARR infrastructure, such as organics processing facilities, must be strategically planned, supported, and protected to reflect its role as both an essential community service and an economically viable producer of high value secondary raw materials for use across the productive Australian economy. Due to the changing nature of Australia's circular landscape and the current regulatory and policy settings focused upon increasing resource recovery, it is WMRR's view that a State of Knowledge built upon flexibility (rather than prescription) is appropriate.

In particular, WMRR applauds the technology agnostic theme captured within the risk management section (Appendix B) which expressly includes wording that allows for the use of alternative technologies if it can be demonstrated that the risk is minimised and suitable controls are in place, and the clarification that risk management controls will be dependent on the level of feedstock risk. This approach enables the WARR industry to have the necessary flexibility to respond to changing market requirements, the availability of new technologies and emerging environmental concerns (such as emerging contaminants). Particularly as organics processing operators increasingly transition to processing FOGO (rather than GO), with the expectation of producing the same or similar marketable end-products, it is absolutely necessary that the industry is trusted with making operational and commercial decisions that maintain economically and environmentally viable operations.

- ii. *Although flexible, it is important that the updated guidelines align with other circular economy regulatory and policy settings.*

Whilst the flexibility afforded by the risk-based approach contained within the updated guidelines is crucial for the ongoing viability of the Victorian organics industry and paramount for the success of the circular economy, it is equally crucial that the risk assessment and management methodology is expressed clearly in order to minimise opportunities for ambiguity or confusion.

WMRR notes that in the webinar consultation, some attendees felt there was a lack of consistent rationale behind the risk matrix for feedstock categorisation provided at 7.1.2 of the updated guidelines with regard to high risk and medium-high risk feedstocks (with particular reference to anaerobic digestion and FOGO processing respectively). This is important to acknowledge as the recommendations given in the guidelines for higher risk feedstocks are necessarily more costly and



timely for operators, particularly with regard to testing and sampling for pollution and other risks. It is noted that the EPA consulted with the Australian Organics Recycling Association in its data gathering in preparing the updated guidelines. It may be helpful to provide a reference to that data to rationalise the feedstock risk-assessment matrix.

WMRR stresses the importance of ensuring that the updated guidelines align with associated standards, regulations and policies within the Victorian circular economy and more broadly across Australia. This means that the authority instruments across the whole circular economy system from the supply of materials for reprocessing (upstream) right through to the requirements for end products need to be co-existing and complementary. WMRR acknowledges that the EPA has attempted to negate inconsistencies across the supply chain about the requisite standards for products, materials and technologies by addressing areas such as PFAS management and product quality assurance by incorporating references to the NEMP (PFAS) and the *Australian Standard 4454: Composts, soil conditioners and mulches*. The express reference to these documents sets a clear expectation for operators to ensure that they operate to produce materials that comply with the expected product standards.

To further enhance clarity, WMRR would welcome further reference to, and ensuring consistency with Victoria's household recycling service standard ("Service Standard") within Chapter 5 "Managing Output Material" and in the Risk Assessment (Appendix B). As noted in Appendix B under Figure 4, it is preferable for the risk to be managed upstream. WMRR notes that the acceptable items in kerbside collections will play a significant role in managing the upstream risks of organics processing, and it would be beneficial for the new Service Standard to be referenced to, and consistent with the updated guideline.

In concert with upstream measures to keep organics feedstocks clean, the risk-based approach captured within the updated guidelines should help the Victorian organics industry meet its objectives of increasing organics recovered for market that are safe for the environment and human health, and which continue to minimise these risks for the communities in which the facilities operate.

Please contact the undersigned if you wish to further discuss WMRR's submission.

Yours sincerely

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