

Wangaratta Government Centre  
Level 3, 62 – 68 Ovens Street  
WANGARATTA VIC 3677  
(03) 5722 9498  
ABN. 27 805 031 612

Our Ref: 557

13 December 2019

Infrastructure Victoria  
Level 33, 140 William Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: Submission - Recycling and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Report**

The North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group (North East WRRG) region consists of seven municipal districts and three alpine resort management areas. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Recycling and Resource Recovery Infrastructure – Evidence Base Report* that identifies opportunities for investment, new processes and community action to support Victoria's recycling and resource recovery sector. We wish to respond to the specific questions you have outlined.

**1) Have we identified the right outcomes for Victoria to aim for?**

The North East WRRG commends Infrastructure Victoria on its initial report. This identifies the key issues and opportunities for the sector within Victoria. Further detailed assessment and clarity is required regarding your specific recommendations, and we understand that this will be provided as part of your final advice and recommendations to government.

Victoria faces some major issues as you have highlighted within the report. However, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on the urgent need to develop end markets. The report has addressed several important priorities that will support the development of end markets (e.g. the need to improve data to better understand market gaps or cleaner streams so that materials can be more viably recycled). However, the current lack of end markets is an enormous challenge facing Victoria that is being exacerbated by the announcement of a ban on the export of certain waste streams. It is critical that your final recommendations consider the availability of end markets, and the level of government intervention needed to develop these, if sustainable change is to be achieved.

**2) Have we identified the most effective potential actions for government to take?**

The concepts and priorities explored within the report are supported. It is hoped your final recommendations will include a much greater level of detail in order to guide the successful implementation of the required change.

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North East Victoria can provide relevant examples of success within the region that are in line with the recommendations made within the report.

For example, North East Councils and Alpine Resorts have managed to generally maintain 'business as usual' (i.e. continued recycling) throughout the recycling crisis due to the availability of local infrastructure within the region (e.g. our two MRF's). Procurement activities have placed a strong emphasis on local infrastructure which has meant that not always the 'cheapest' contracts are awarded.

The North East region (along with the Goulburn Valley region) have led the state in the introduction of kerbside FOGO with diversion rates in some cases up to 79%. The Rural City of Wangaratta has also mandated the uptake of FOGO for business and may be one of the only Councils to have done so in Victoria.

The North East WRRG are lucky to work with three of Victoria's major Alpine Resorts and have supported 'the Living Bin' program for a decade now. Over 70% of waste produced at the Alpine Resorts is organic waste. The Living Bin Program, which includes commercial operators, has successfully collected over 90% of this each year. This program exemplifies the high levels of innovation and priority placed on waste and resource recovery within the Resorts. The Resorts allow the ability to trial small scale projects which is important for the successful scale-up of potential state-wide solutions. We are looking forward to seeing the Alpine Resorts lead the way in the introduction of the Circular Economy for Victoria and hope to see them supported by the Victorian Government to do this.

While the report has placed a priority on the introduction of kerbside FOGO, we would like to see the final recommendations include specifics around its optimal implementation. There are four Councils within the North East region that have introduced FOGO and a fortnightly residual collection. This has been one of the key aspects of the overall achievements made by this region to reduce waste from landfill and results will fall well short of the required targets without this important step.

**3) Which, if any, of the initiatives implemented in Wales would you like to see applied in Victoria?**

The outline provided of the initiative taken by Government in Wales shows great leadership. As identified within your report, a vast improvement is needed in the availability and accuracy of waste and resource recovery data which is something that Wales seems to be doing well. Victoria would also benefit from a greater level of materials separation; however, the contamination rates occurring in Wales are extremely high in comparison to what is being achieved by Councils within North East Victoria (currently ranging between 5 – 7% for recycling and 0.1% for FOGO).

**4) What do you think of the market design opportunities proposed to improve waste sector outcomes and efficiency?**

NEWRRG are supportive of the concepts presented within the report but as discussed above would like to see greater focus and detail placed around the development of end markets to ensure change is sustainable.

**5) Where do you think government should focus their efforts to increase recycling and resource recovery? (for example, through setting targets, promoting consistency or funding local councils?)**

As your report has highlighted, there is no silver bullet. It will require a combination of all these things to ensure much needed change is achieved.

While strong leadership and direction is needed, it is important to understand that one size does not fit all, particularly for regional areas where a different model may be needed to achieve the same objectives in a more viable way for regional communities.

**6) Which materials or infrastructure types present the most opportunity in your region?**

We support the advice within the report outlining the importance of infrastructure to be spread throughout Victoria and especially outside of Metro Melbourne. The report also acknowledges the need for significant upgrade to infrastructure throughout Victoria. Specifically, Councils serving the needs of regional communities face an increasing burden regarding the operation of best practice resource recovery centres. It is hoped that there will be the opportunity for significant Government investment to ensure that these centres are suitably resourced and meeting best practice guidelines into the future. This may need to include a process of review and rationalisation across the region.

The North East WRRG would like to see the further expansion of capacity to process organic material within the region (among other things) and believe that the Rural City of Wangaratta is uniquely placed to achieve this with the further support of the Victorian Government.

There is an urgent need for materials processors (in particular plastics, paper and cardboard) throughout Australia. The North East region would be well-placed to service these needs given its unique location and major transport linkages.

There are many opportunities to enable the local recycling industry. For example, the North East region has an MDF factory which requires used (clean) timber. During the process of manufacturing dry fibre, garden waste is used to heat their boilers. Currently they use (clean, chipped) pallet timber waste mixed with virgin material. While this could be sourced locally, the clean timber is currently transported long distances to satisfy the company's needs. Yet, garden and timber waste are plentiful materials in region.

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The waste sits in stockpiles at transfer stations and cost Councils money to mulch. This timber, including garden waste, could be transported to an MDF if it was collected on a hardstand (a concrete slab) and gross contaminates (pot plants/bags of rubbish/metals) were removed. State or Federal Government funding to progress these facilities towards better practice would advance the recovery of materials and improve the economic challenges facing both local government and industry.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we believe that bold steps must be taken to make long term decisions that will build a better recycling and resource recovery industry for Victoria and to significantly reduce the current excessive levels of waste generated within Australia.

We look forward to receiving your final report in April 2020 and helping to implement the recommendations made.

Yours faithfully,



Kristy Kay  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER