

Environment and Communications References
Answers to questions on notice
Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Portfolio

Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000117
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: National Plastics Design Summit 14 February 2022
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

In December 2021, the then Minister for the Environment, Hon Sussan Ley announced that the National Plastics Design Summit would be held in Canberra on 14 February 2022.

1. Can the department confirm if this summit took place? If not, was there a rationale provided by the Minister or Department at the time as to why this did not occur on the planned date? If it did take place, please provide evidence of its outcomes.

Answer:

A National Plastics Design Summit did not take place. Attempts to schedule an in-person summit were impacted by COVID-19 throughout 2021 and 2022.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies

Question No: IQ24-000118

Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division

Topic: Evidence provided in the Department's submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways

Question Date: 15 July 2024

Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

In the Department's submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways, which reported in May 2024, the Department submitted that industry had been making 'substantial efforts to transition toward certifiable compostibles', that 'there has been strong progress on EPS loose fill and food beverage containers', and that 'significant progress has already been made to phase out PVC labels.' (correlates to point 2.22 in HoR report).

Q) Can the Department please provide detail on the data and evidence that correlates to these claims made in the Department's submission? Can the department please provide evidence of how we Australia is actually tracking against each of these deliverables?

Answer:

The annual Australian Plastics Flows and Fates (APFF) report provides a comprehensive time-series picture of plastics flows across all polymer types and applications.

The 2021-22 report published on 18 July 2024, reports changes in annual consumption between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (table 46) as follows:

- Degradable plastics reduced by 95%
- Certified compostable products dropped by 75%, but no 'biodegradable' products (without being certified compostable) were reported or identified on the market
- EPS loose fill reduced by 50%.
- EPS meat trays reduced by 100% and 88.9% for food containers, and
- PVC labels reduced by 100%. The APFF reports there has been minimal or no use in consumer packaging in Australia from around 2021.

The Australian Plastics Flows and Fates report is published on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's website (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/publications/australian-plastic-flows-and-fates-national-report-2021-22).

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000120
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Update on industry's progress in transitioning towards higher-value, easier recyclable plastics
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.32 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways states that the Department did not provide the inquiry an update on the industry's progress in transitioning towards higher-value, easier recyclable plastics such as PET, HDPE, LDPE and PP and encouraging the design of easier to recycle products.

Q) Please provide specific updates on industry's progress in transitioning towards higher-value, easier recyclable plastics such as PET, HDPE, LDPE and PP and encouraging the design of easier to recycle products.

Answer:

The Australian Plastics Flows and Fates reports published on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's website indicate that, between 2020-21 and 2021-22 consumption of:

- **PET** increased from 379,800 to 405,800 tonnes (with use of locally processed recycle more than doubling)
- **HDPE** increased from 633,500 to 750,900 tonnes (with use of locally processed recycle increasing by 31%)
- **LDPE** increased from 433,300 to 442,000 tonnes (with use of locally processed recycle increasing by 19.6%)
- **PP** decreased from 544,200 to 541,800 tonnes (with use of locally processed recycle increasing by 8.7%)

The Australian Government's work to reform national packaging regulation will support industry's transition to more easily recyclable plastics by including mandatory design requirements so that packaging is designed to minimise waste and be recovered, reused, recycled and reprocessed safely in line with circular economy principles.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000121
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: National Plastics Plan - action items
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.33 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways states the second key component of the National Plastics Plan (NPP) is 'recycling' and that the NPP provides nine actions for Australia to take responsibility for its plastic waste. The HoR report then states the nine actions.
 Q) Please provide specific detail on updates of Departmental work and progress against each of these nine actions.

Answer:

Progress against the 9 actions is set out in the following table.

Waste Export Ban	Regulate waste plastic exports by banning the export of unsorted mixed plastic from 1 July 2021 and unprocessed single polymer or resin plastics from 1 July 2022	Completed
		<p>Since 1 July 2022, regulations require that waste plastics must be sorted into single resin or polymer type and further processed, for example flaked or pelletised, prior to being exported.</p> <p>Exporters are required to hold a waste export licence, under the Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020.</p>
Turbo-charge Australia's recycling capacity	The Recycling Modernisation Fund will turbo-charge Australia's recycling industry, generating \$600 million of recycling investment. This will also be supported by the Modern Manufacturing Strategy (\$1.5 billion) which identifies recycling as a national manufacturing priority	Completed
		<p>The Recycling Modernisation Fund (RMF) is on track to leverage over \$1 billion in total investment.</p> <p>The Australian Government's additional \$60m Plastics Technology Stream of the RMF opened for applications in 2023. Minister Plibersek announced the first 3 successful projects under this stream in July 2024.</p> <p>Circular economy principles will also be considered for all investment decisions under the Government's \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund, further stimulating investment in recycling capacity.</p>
Product Stewardship	Invest \$7 million to support 10 projects through the National Product Stewardship Investment Fund, to establish new plastics product stewardship schemes and expand existing schemes	Completed
		<p>Through 25 grants, the NPSIF supported the development, or expansion of 22 product stewardship schemes between 2020-21 – 2022-23.</p> <p>The fund increased the number of industry-led product stewardship schemes in Australia and increase the recycling rates of existing schemes.</p>

Regional solutions	Assess and identify collection processes and the feasibility of reprocessing packaging waste in remote and regional areas through partnerships	Completed
		<p>The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) reported on key actions for remote and regional areas under Australia's National Waste Policy Action Plan. The report is available here.</p> <p>The Australian Government co-funded 2 rounds of RMF grants in 2021-22 between \$10,000 and \$1 million to provide greater access to recycling infrastructure for regional and remote communities. Supported projects under the RMF can be found through the RMF data viewer on the department's website.</p>
National Packaging Targets	Industry to deliver 4 National Packaging Targets by 2025, of which 2 concern recycling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% of plastic packaging being recycled or composted • 50% of average recycled content included in packaging (20% for plastic packaging) 	Underway
		<p>APCO continues to work with industry to make progress towards the National Packaging Targets.</p> <p>The new national packaging regulatory scheme under development will implement mandatory obligations and build on industry's action to improve packaging design, recycling outcomes, and the uptake of recycled content.</p>
Used Packaging Materials NEPM	The first review of the National Environment Protection (Used Packaging Materials) Measure 2011 and Australian Packaging Covenant to evaluate how well the co-regulatory arrangements are working to reduce the environmental impacts of packaging	Completed
		<p>An independent review of the NEPM in 2021 found that it was ineffective.</p> <p>Australia's environment ministers agreed in 2022 to reform Australia's national packaging regulation.</p>
Australian Circular Economy Hub	Establish a National Circular Economy Hub and Market place by end 2021	Underway
		Planet Ark launched the National Circular Economy Hub in 2021 and is continuing to progress development of an online marketplace.
Material performance standards	Work across the plastics recycling supply chain to develop nationally consistent performance standards for material recovery facilities to deliver clean feedstock for remanufacturing	Completed
		The Australian Government provided funding to the National Waste and Recycling Industry Council to develop recovered material specifications.
Industry to use more recycled plastics	Businesses to commit to increase their use of recycled content through Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation's (APCO) Member Pledge program	Overtaken
		<p>APCO advised in 2022 that this program would not proceed.</p> <p>The new national packaging regulatory scheme will impose mandatory obligations, including for the use of recycled content.</p>
Government commitments to use recycled plastics	The Australian Government has strengthened the Commonwealth Procurement Rules to make sustainability, including the use of recycled materials, part of the value	Completed
		In addition to the original commitment set out in the National Plastics Plan, the Australian Government released the Environmentally Sustainable Procurement

	for money assessment for everything it buys.	Policy under the Commonwealth Procurement Rules in April 2024. The policy leverages the Australian Government's spending power to drive demand for environmentally sustainable goods and services, including goods with recycled materials.
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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000122
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: APCO's Recycled Materials Pledge
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.35 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways states that APCO's Recycled Materials Pledge was announced on 11 May 2022, but the Committee did not receive evidence on its progress or effectiveness.

Q) Please provide evidence on the progress and effectiveness of APCO's Recycled Materials Pledge.

Answer:

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water does not have information on this subject. This is a matter for the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO).

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000123
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Material Performance Standards
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.37 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways states that Material Performance Standards "have not yet eventuated."

Q) Is the Department actively working on Material Performance Standards as part of the design rules work that is currently ongoing? If so, please provide detail on MPS work. If not, please provide rationale as to why this isn't a current priority for the Department.

Answer:

1. The Australian Government commissioned the National Waste and Recycling Industry Council to deliver a report on national recovered material specifications for sorting and processing facilities. The report was published in 2022 and recommended 49 existing sorting and processing specifications, including proposed amendments to 11 of the recommended specifications, and seven new specifications. The report outlined indicative timeframes, responsibilities and steps for governments and industry to achieve each specification. Recommendations from the report continue to be progressed through:
 - a. Release of the final waste export licensing rules for the export of mixed paper and cardboard
 - b. Kerbside harmonisation work underway through the Environment Ministers Meeting
 - c. Continued investment in recycling infrastructure through the Recycling Modernisation Fund, and
 - d. Reform of Australia's packaging regulation which will impose mandatory design requirements on packaging placed on the market within Australia.
2. Australia's Transport and Infrastructure Ministers also commissioned guidelines by AustRoads on the use of recycled plastics in road infrastructure. The final report "Use of road-grade recycled plastics for sustainable asphalt pavements" was released in October 2022.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000124
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Enforcement of the Used Packaging NEPM
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.62 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways states that some stakeholders were of the view that 'the lack of any enforcement' of the Used Packaging NEPM 'has undermined confidence and led to significant free-riding.'

Q) Can you please provide details on how enforcement of the Used Packaging NEPM is undertaken, and any relevant decisions made by the Department in the last 5 years relating to enforcement measures under the Used Packaging NEPM.

Answer:

Under the *National Environment Protection Measure (Used Packaging Materials) 2011* (NEPM-UPM), compliance and enforcement actions are the responsibility of participating jurisdictions under their regulations.

An independent review of the co-regulatory arrangement in 2021 identified failures with implementation and enforcement.

Environment Ministers subsequently agreed to reform Australia's packaging regulations. This work is underway.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000125
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Industry-led phase-in of microfibre filters on new residential and commercial washing machines
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.73 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways relates to the NPP's goal for "an industry-led phase-in of microfibre filters on new residential and commercial washing machines by 1 July 2030.

Q) Can you please provide details on any work the Department has done to support this goal and an update on the program's progress.

Answer:

In 2021, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water commissioned work to support a proposal to Standards Australia for the development of a standard to control microfibres released from household and commercial washing machines. This work concluded that any Australian standard on microfibre testing should align with international developments.

Australia is participating in a project led by the International Electrotechnical Commission to assess the feasibility of measurement methods for microplastics coming out of household washing machines.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies

Question No: IQ24-000126

Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division

Topic: Industry-led cross-sectoral stewardship task force

Question Date: 15 July 2024

Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.73 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways relates to the NPP goal for the Australian Government to initiate an industry-led cross-sectoral stewardship task force to reduce cigarette butt litter in Australia and consider potential stewardship schemes.

Q) Please provide specific details of any work the Department has done to progress the specific NPP goal related to initiating this taskforce.

Answer:

The Australian Government is not pursuing this action.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000127
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Review into the role sewerage and stormwater systems have in contributing to marine plastic pollution
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.85 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways relates to some stakeholders' suggestion that a review be undertaken into the role sewerage and stormwater systems play in contributing to marine plastic pollution.

Q) Does the Department have any plans to understand such a review? If so, please provide detail on what work has been done to progress this. If not, please provide rationale and details as to why this is not being progressed by the Department.

Answer:

- The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is funding CSIRO to undertake a multi-year (2022 to 2025) project to better understand plastic waste losses to the environment.
 - As part of this project, CSIRO will evaluate stormwater management in Australia, including approaches to prevent plastic leakage via these systems, and trial technologies to improve outcomes.
 - The completed project is due to be delivered to the department in the second half of 2025.
- The Australian Government is funding a number of projects under the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) to research major sources of microplastics, their pathways to the marine environment, and to identify key knowledge gaps in their management.
 - This includes investigation into microplastic pollution via wastewater.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000128
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Marine Debris Threat Abatement Plan
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.85 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways relates to the Marine Debris Threat Abatement Plan. The report states that the Department confirmed the Threat Abatement Plan would be reviewed but did not provide a timeline.

Q) Please provide detail of any work the department has done to progress the review of the Threat Abatement Plan. Please provide any updates on potential timelines that this review will occur.

Answer:

The department will review the plan in due course.

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Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000129
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Waste Data Visualisation Platform
Question Date: 15 July 2024
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Point 2.102 of the House of Representatives' inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways relates to the final key component of the NPP, including the investment of \$20.6 million to create the public facing Waste Data Visualisation Platform and the expansion of the Australian Plastics Recycling Survey.

Q) Is there currently any work being done by the Department to progress these two elements of the NPP?

Please provide specific details of any investment or work progressed by the Department related to the development of the Waste Data Visualisation Platform. Please also provide details of any investment or work progressed by the Department related to the expansion of the Australian Plastics Recycling Survey.

Answer:

- The Waste Data Visualisation Platform (now called the Waste and Resource Recovery Data Hub (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/how-we-manage-waste/data-hub/data-insights/organics-kerbside-collection-services-data-viewer)) is a digital platform that displays current, publicly available information sourced from local, state, territory governments and industry.
- The project also delivered the following interactive dashboards (averaging over 5000 views per month in total):
 - National Waste data viewer – launched 8 April 2022 (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/how-we-manage-waste/data-hub/data-insights/national-data-viewer)
 - Recycling Modernisation Fund data viewer – launched 1 July 2022 (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/how-we-manage-waste/data-hub/data-insights/recycling-modernisation-fund-data-viewer)
 - Waste Export data viewer – launched 30 August 2022 (soon to include Waste Imports) (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/how-we-manage-waste/data-hub/data-insights/waste-export-data-viewer)
 - Organics Kerbside Collection Service data viewer – launched 23 November 2023 (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/how-we-manage-waste/data-hub/data-insights/organics-kerbside-collection-services-data-viewer)
- The Australian Plastic Flows and Fates project (formerly named the Australian Plastics Recycling Survey) has been conducted annually since 2000, and now provides a comprehensive time series picture of plastics flows across all polymer types and applications. The most recent Australian Plastic Flows and Fates Study 2021-22 National Report was published on 18 July 2024 (www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/publications/australian-plastic-flows-and-fates-national-report-2021-22).