Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

IS25-000012

Ms Apolline Kohen
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Kohen

RE: Submission invitation – Inquiry into the Impact of microplastics and other toxins on human health

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs' inquiry into the impact of microplastics and other toxics on human health.

This submission provides the Committee with an understanding of the department's role and responsibilities, focussing on our commitment to accelerate Australia's transition to a circular economy, while safely managing pollutants and hazardous substances.

Pollutants and human health

In Australia, responsibility for regulating chemicals is shared between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and across portfolios. The Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) leads on national approaches to assessing the risks of chemicals to human health. The department assists DHDA in assessing the risks of industrial chemicals imported or manufactured in Australia under the Australian Industrial Chemicals Introduction Scheme (AICIS). The department assesses the risks to ecosystems from industrial chemicals and provides advice to the Executive Director of AICIS.

The department administers the *Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management (Register) Act 2021*. The Act establishes nationally consistent standards to protect the environment by managing import, manufacture, export, use and disposal of industrial chemicals, whether on their own, in mixtures and in some cases when in finished goods, including those that may contain microplastics.

Under the Act, risk management measures may include restrictions on the use and disposal of waste products including activities that may lead to the unintentional release or re-use of harmful chemicals. Where environmental risks cannot be managed their introduction and use in Australia may be prohibited.

These measures aim to prevent future harm to the environment and reduce circulation of these chemicals in the economy.

Plastic pollution

The department is responsible for leading Australia's engagement in negotiations to develop a new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution under the mandate of UNEA Resolution 5/14. Australia advocates for a comprehensive, life-cycle approach to plastic pollution, including cooperation across the global value chain.

As part of these negotiations, Australia is supporting measures relevant to microplastics, including recognising intentionally added microplastics as a factor in identifying problematic plastic products, promoting product design that reduces leakage into the environment, and minimising microplastic releases throughout product lifecycles.

Research on microplastics in Australia

The department is supporting research on microplastics through the National Environment Science Program Phase 2 (NESP 2). NESP 2 is a multi-year research program funded by the Australian Government that supports all levels of government and decision-makers to deliver on their environmental commitments. The objectives of the NESP 2 program are achieved through co-designed applied science with a focus on practical and evidence-based solutions and strong engagement with the Traditional knowledge of First Nations communities.

The applied research for NESP 2 is delivered through four research hubs. The Sustainable Communities and Waste (SCaW) Hub is led by the University of NSW and is focused on supporting sustainable communities and facilitating the transition to a safe circular economy. The Hub has been conducting research on microplastics released from synthetic turf, and tyre particles released through tyre road wear. Research conducted under the SCaW Hub has also contributed to new Australian ISO standards for measuring microplastics in the environment.

Further information about the research projects on microplastics funded by NESP 2 can be found here: www.nespsustainable.edu.au/research/impact-priority-2-plastic-and-waste-materials.

The department is committed to achieving better outcomes for the environment through policies and programs informed by science, innovation and collaboration. The department takes a risk-proportionate, pragmatic approach to protect the environment, ensuring efficient and effective use of departmental resources.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Knudson
Deputy Secretary

18 February 2026