

Attachment A

Inquiry into the *Product Stewardship Amendment (Packaging and Plastic) Bill 2019*

Introduction

The Northern Territory Government is pleased to have the opportunity to provide this response to the Senate inquiry on the *Product Stewardship Amendment (Packaging and Plastics) Bill 2019* (the Bill). The Northern Territory Government is committed to protecting and minimising the impacts of waste on the Northern Territory's unique environmental assets.

Background

At the April 2018 Meeting of Environment Ministers, Ministers agreed that the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) would deliver the target of 100 per cent of Australian packaging being recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025, or earlier. APCO has further refined the agreed target for packaging:

- 30% average recycled content in all packaging by 2025 (irrespective of origin)
- 70% Australian plastic packaging will be recycled or composted by 2025
- problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging will be phased out through design, innovation or introduction of alternatives.

In December 2018, Environment Ministers endorsed the National Waste Policy: Less Waste, More Resources 2018 (National Waste Policy), which incorporates these national packaging and single use plastics targets. Environment Ministers also agreed to strengthen the national plan to address waste priorities including reducing plastic pollution, and supporting industry development.

Ministers will consider a draft National Waste Policy Action Plan (action plan) at the next meeting of Environment Ministers in November 2019. Unnecessary and problematic single-use plastics have been identified by all jurisdictions as a key priority that needs to be addressed by the action plan.

In the Northern Territory, the *Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Act 2011* (the Act) established a ban on light-weight single use plastic shopping bags and a container deposit scheme (CDS) from September 2011 and January 2012 respectively.

Response

The Northern Territory welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Bill and is committed to working with the Australian, and state and territory governments and industry on the national waste policy agenda, including phasing out problematic single use plastics and plastic packaging.

There is merit in legislating bans and other regulatory measures to reduce the impacts of waste products on the environment. However, such a regulatory approach needs to be considered as a part of a broader

suite of approaches. That is, behavioural change in consumer purchasing and industry change in manufacturing and reprocessing is equally as important.

The NT considers that, in the first instance, there is merit in voluntary industry based approaches to phasing out clearly identified problematic single use plastics. Coupled with clear Australian standards for packaging, manufacturing and reuse of plastics as well as targeted consumer behaviour programs, this is likely to be equally as effective as regulation. If a voluntary approach proves to not be effective, then a mandatory approach would need to be considered.

The NT further considers that the Bill, whilst sound in intent, is likely to be premature and contrary to the agreed approach of working with industry to phase unnecessary and problematic plastics out over a couple of years. An industry lead approach in the first instance is in keeping with the Council of Australian Government's commitment to ensuring regulatory processes are consistent with best practice regulation principles, and the Northern Territory Government's commitment to deliver effective and efficient regulation with minimal imposts on businesses and the community.

Investment in education and behavioural change nationally is considered critical to drive consumer change, reduce demand for single use plastics, and inevitably change industry practice.

The NT considers that the successful phase out of unnecessary and problematic plastics will be highly dependent on clear definitions and timeframes for phasing out developed through consultation with industry, and will need to consider potential impacts for state and territory governments and existing regulatory frameworks such as container deposit schemes and plastic bag bans.

Thank you the opportunity to make a submission on a highly important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact Ms Joanne Townsend, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Environment and Natural Resources should you have any further queries.