

## Decision time: Australia awash with recyclable material as China's import ban bites

Governments, business and the community need to admit we have a recycling crisis and get to work on solutions fast, Australia's peak waste campaign group said today.

"Australia risks drowning in a sea of highly valuable, reusable materials. For decades, a significant proportion of our recycling has been shipped and processed overseas. China's recent block on dirty reusable plastic imports drastically highlights major gaps in Australia's processing infrastructure," said Jeff Angel, Director of Boomerang Alliance.

"We need collection systems that produce clean recyclate and a growing domestic market, boosting our manufacturing. It's no longer acceptable that products have minimal or no recycled content; or that the material is burned in waste to energy plants. Having done nothing to ward off this crisis in the six months since the announcement from China, the Turnbull Government continues to sit on its hands, refusing to engage with the issue and failing to provide any clear policy direction on how to address the growing stockpile of unprocessed materials."

Australia's packaging recycling rates have remained static for close to a decade, as highlighted in last week's National Recycling Rates Survey (2015-16) from the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO). Reported rates include materials that until Jan 1<sup>st</sup> were being exported for recycling. The loss of China as a major export market will likely result in a much larger proportion of Australia's reusable resources ending up in landfill, subsequently adding downward pressure to our already struggling recycling rates.

"The Australian government must seize the opportunity that this global shift is creating. With investment and the right incentives, the Australian recycling sector could become the best in the world delivering more jobs and a national industry," Mr Angel said. "But a comprehensive approach is required, not only to ensure the effective reclaim and reuse of these myriad resources, but also to drive future markets for the reprocessed materials coming out the other end."

"Our hope is that 'Peak Virgin Plastic' is the wakeup call needed to end the manufacture and consumption of virgin plastics and drive a rapid shift towards a global circular plastics economy, to give the abundance of plastic we already have a new life, over and over again," Mr Angel concluded.

**END**

### **Jeff Angel – Director, Boomerang Alliance**

Jeff Angel is Director of the Boomerang Alliance, a collaboration of 47 allied groups and the Total Environment Centre. Jeff has worked for policy, business and legal changes across a wide spectrum of environmental issues (city and country) for over 40 years including protection of rainforests and wilderness, air quality, urban river regeneration, Sydney's Green Games, land clearing, endangered species and climate change. He has been prominent in debates about waste and recycling and led the campaign for the introduction of a container deposit system in Australia.

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