



PO Box K61, Haymarket. NSW 1240
Ph: 02 92802130
ACNC Registered Charity. ABN 33484952023
49 environment NGOs - www.boomerangalliance.org.au

14 August 2019

Attention:

Hon Matt Kean
Hon Leeanne Enoch
Hon David Speirs
Hon Lily D'Ambrosio
Hon Eva Lawler
Hon Peter Gutwein
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Shane Rattenbury

Re: Waste, recycling and plastic pollution issues at next Ministers of Environment Meeting

Dear Ministers,

With Australia's heads of government and international and domestic pressures making plastic waste and pollution a central policy issue – we urge Australia's environment ministers to move quickly on effective responses at their next MEM Meeting. Our key concerns are single use plastics and mandatory recycled content standards.

We note recent policy considerations by the MEM:

National Waste Plan targets to:

- ***Phase out problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2030***
- ***30% average recycled content across all goods and infrastructure procurement by 2030***

'Ministers endorsed a target of 100 per cent Australian packaging being recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025.'

(Meeting of Environment Ministers Communique April 2018)

Single Use Plastics

Most jurisdictions, with the exception of NSW, have introduced a lightweight plastic bag ban. Most jurisdictions have introduced or plan to introduce a container deposit scheme for bottles and cans, except Victoria. Both schemes have and will continue to slash litter and increase recycling. A number of states are developing plastic pollution reduction plans.

It is essential that all jurisdictions maintain a 'continuous improvement' approach to single-use plastics - after all, there is still a plastic waste and litter problem and the majority of plastic is still being thrown away after a single use.

Boomerang Alliance believes that Australian jurisdictions need to set an active roadmap for 2025. There are readily available alternatives and a public appetite for a switch to alternatives. Boomerang Alliance has identified a list of these single-use plastic products that feature heavily in litter volumes. They include coffee cups and lids, straws, cups and containers, cutlery, plastic bags and plastic water bottles. Many of these items are included in a European Union list of single-use plastic takeaway items scheduled to be phased out by 2021.

The Boomerang Alliance Plastic Free Places program, in partnership with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) and currently operating in four states (QLD, NSW, WA and SA) is demonstrating that the café and hospitality sectors and the general public are ready, willing and able to switch products and their behaviour to the preferred alternatives. Consequently, laws for planned phase outs of single use, littered plastics are viable.

To support this community behaviour change and expand it throughout Australia, a phase-out of single use plastic takeaway should be introduced - **we propose it take effect by 2021.**

The widespread adoption of reusable products is the best and most preferred option for takeaway. However, we recognise that reusable products may not always be possible.

It should be noted that when it comes to single-use plastic takeaway items, recycled plastic options may not be preferred. They are derived from fossil fuels, unlike genuinely compostable products that are plant-based. Most importantly the public cannot distinguish recyclable plastics from ordinary plastics and increasingly expect vendors to provide genuinely compostable items.

Manufacturers and suppliers are prepared for such a phase-out. With an increasing number of jurisdictions considering their options, coupled with public profile on single-use plastics, manufacturers can now provide alternative products and at competitive prices, with prices reducing all the time due to increasing demand.

We also note that even 100% compostable items still need to be collected and composted.

Recycled Content Requirements

We recognise there are moves to increase the use of recycled material in new products such as roads. Our focus is on packaging as a great deal of packaging is made from virgin materials and while theoretically recyclable – this does not occur in practice.

The crucial need is for recycled content to be made mandatory. This will provide the underpinning for investment in new collection and reprocessing infrastructure. While there is discussion of a 30% recycled content guide – this should be treated as a minimum and

where 100% is possible for particular products (as already occurs with some beverage bottles), this should occur.

Clearly both government and business need to be wedded to recycled content requirements over the long term, otherwise the reprocessing industry will not grow, nor be sustainable.

On these two critical agendas we are seeking:

- **Action on the national plan to ban the export of collected recyclables and commitment to an associated investment in domestic recycling.** This supports NWP targets 1, 2 and 3.
- **Agreement to introduce procurement policies for government and business that will create a market for recyclables, particularly plastics.** This supports NWP target 3.
- **With other jurisdictions who have introduced or plan to introduce a CDS, agree to expand all state schemes to include wine and spirit containers; encourage recycling by requiring that all collected containers to have significant recycled content from 2023; and consider an increase to the deposit on containers to 20 cents by 2023.** This supports NWP targets 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- **A national Plastic Bag Ban and Container Deposit Scheme in each State.** A bag ban and CDS in each State and Territory directly supports NWP targets 2, 3 and 4.
- **A national phase-out of thick plastic bags (<70 microns as has been put in place in New Zealand). This should set a phase-out date (2021) and be mandatory in all jurisdictions.** This directly supports NWP targets 1, 2 and 4.
- **A phase-out of single use (non-compostable) takeaway packaging. This to include coffee cups/lids, straws, cups and containers, cutlery, bags and plastic bottles, with a proposed phase-out date of 2021.** This directly supports NWP targets 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Boomerang Alliance also seeks support for a national **Plastic Pollution Reduction Strategy** to set new policy and practice for other single use plastics. Single use plastics are prevalent in retail, hospitality, in food, product and transport packaging as well as agriculture, in business and industry and in coastal and marine environments. Applying a principle to have all such packaging avoided, reused or recycled, would have a significant impact upon plastic waste and litter, if effectively implemented.

The strategy must engage all stakeholders and take a continuous improvement approach.

Jeff Angel
Director