

**THE ISSUE:**

Australians want action from government to help reduce waste and increase recycling. So while many Australians do their duty – they recycle, have compost heaps, use keep cups for their morning coffee – we need the Government to take a leading role to tackle some of the big, structural problems.

For too long, the federal government has left issues of recycling, plastics and waste to state governments and local governments.

And, while local and state governments have generally moved in a positive direction, plastics and waste are now becoming both a national and international problem.

Last year COAG agreed to a set of 2025 targets to reduce plastics, but so far the Federal Government has been missing in action.

Labor's policy aims to chart a course for how Australia will meet our 2025 targets.

The targets are:

- 100 per cent of all Australia's packaging will be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025 or earlier
- 70 per cent of Australia's plastic packaging will be recycled or composted by 2025
- 30 per cent average recycled content will be included across all packaging by 2025
- Problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging will be phased out through design, innovation or introduction of alternatives
- food waste to be reduced by 50% by 2030.

FACTS ON PLASTICS AND WASTE:**Australia**

- For every Australian, 2.7 tonnes of waste is generated each year
- A hypothetical five per cent improvement in efficient use of materials across the Australian economy could benefit Australia's GDP by as much as \$24 billion.
- Australians spend between \$2200 and \$3800 per year on food that is wasted
- For every 10,000 tonnes of waste we recycle, 9 jobs in recycling are created
- Australia uses 10 million plastic bags per day
- More than half of Australia's waste is industrial waste

Worldwide

- There is an estimated 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans
- About 8 million tons of plastic are thrown into the ocean annually. Of those, 236,000 tons are microplastics – tiny pieces of broken-down plastic smaller than your little fingernail
- 40% of plastic is used once and then thrown away
- Less than 20% is recycled
- Half of all plastic ever manufactured has been manufactured since 2000
- By 2050, plastic in the world's oceans will weigh more than all fish

LABOR'S PLAN:**Urban Rivers and Corridors Program**

In January, Labor announced its Urban Rivers and Corridors Program, which is aimed at cleaning up Australia's urban waterways – one of the program's key goals will be to cut the prevalence of plastics in our urban waterways before it reaches the ocean.

For too long, urban waterways have been used as industrial waste drains, and rather than being green spaces for city dwellers to enjoy, end up being polluted, dirty and often hazardous areas.

Through this program, grants will be available to local government and community groups to help improve our urban environment, including by:

- Changing riverbanks from hard surfaces such as cement to natural surfaces
- Building wetlands to capture, clean and filter stormwater and intercept pollutants
- Revegetation and tree planting along corridors

More than 90% of all plastic polluting our oceans finds its way there via a river – our policy will aim to stop plastic before it can reach the ocean.

National Recycling Fund

We will provide \$60 million over six years to a new National Recycling and Circular Economy Fund for seed, commercialisation and project ready activities that extend adoption of the principles of the circular economy.

If the Fund proves popular, Labor will be open to increasing the amount available.

Activities which could be funded include:

- Local government recycling facilities and material processing facilities, to drive innovation and efficiency such as through the purchase of more energy efficient equipment;
- Seed funding for innovative waste solutions, whether it be technology to develop items that are reusable rather than single use or small-scale recycling – for example the UNSW example noted below, or solutions to recycle material to construct new roads; or
- Innovative solutions to the food waste crisis and to recycle clothing, either from local government, business, or charities such as Oz Harvest

Labor will also direct its \$1 billion Advanced Manufacturing Future Fund to work directly with manufacturers looking to develop solutions to single use packaging, and request the Clean Energy Finance Corporation continue to invest in innovative waste to energy projects.

Banning lightweight plastic bags and microbeads by 2021

On lightweight plastic bags, our policy will mirror what is already happening in the ACT and SA and soon to take effect in Victoria and Queensland – people will be able to still use re-usable plastic bags: the heavy plastic that is far less likely to end up in our waterways. Labor thinks the time has come for the whole country to ban lightweight bags.

Industry is currently voluntarily phasing our microbeads. We are going to put a time frame on this – we will legislate to ensure microbeads are banned by 2021.

Microbeads are found in toothpaste, sunscreen, facial scrubs, body wash, cosmetics such as foundation and blush, and other care products – as they are often products which are washed off, they have a high tendency to end up in waterways.

Labor is open to extending phase outs to other single-use plastics. But we will take time to consult with industry and impacted Australians.

Expanding Product Stewardship Schemes

The product stewardship schemes are voluntary. Government works with particular industries to accredit how particular products can be recycled at the end of their use to avoid going to landfill.

Industry then works with recyclers to allow consumers to drop off products at the end of use for recycling.

Popular schemes currently exist for TVs and computers.

As a matter of urgency, we will seek to expand the schemes to other products which are currently ending up in landfills at alarming rates – solar PV, all e waste, whitegoods.

A National Container Deposit Scheme

Container Deposit Schemes currently operate in South Australia, New South Wales, the ACT, and are due to soon commence in Western Australia and Queensland. One of the key problems with our existing container deposit schemes is there are inconsistent rules across jurisdictions on what materials are collected and how.

Our first step is going to be to work with COAG to ensure states with operating schemes can harmonise their rules around them – such as what sort of cans and bottles are collected, and how they are collected.

The point of a container deposit scheme is to improve the quality of material collected: a CDS, by its nature, separates recyclable products as glass bottles and aluminium cans before they are collected.

We won't force states without a container deposit scheme to join the national scheme, but they will be invited to join.

National Waste Commissioner

For too long, the federal government has allowed the burden of dealing with waste to fall to state and local governments. The Waste Commissioner will be tasked with working with all stakeholders and levels of government to drive policy change and increase public awareness of how people can help tackle waste.

Examples of the work the Commissioner will be tasked with:

- Consult on National Mandated Sustainable Public Procurement standards for paper, plastics, packaging as well as other materials used by governments such as road base
- Expand the Product Stewardship Act
- Consult on the best way to tackle food waste and increase composting
- Educating the Australian public on how best to cut their waste
- Work with Local Government to ease the burden of waste disposal and recycling
- Work with the fashion industry and charities to cut clothing waste

Australian Government to play its part

The Australian Government has an obligation to position itself as a leader – this is not just a moral argument, but as the single biggest purchaser of good and services in Australia (the Commonwealth enters into contracts worth around \$50 billion per annum), the federal government is perfectly positioned to help stimulate demand for recycled products.



A Shorten Labor Government will set mandatory targets for all government departments in relation to the recycled content of materials bought directly or provided by private contractors.

To further stimulate demand for recycled material, Labor will seek to ensure materials with recycled content are part of all major pieces of road infrastructure underwritten by the Australian Government.

Labor will ask the Infrastructure Department to actively investigate whether recycled material in federally-funded road projects is a feasible option.

Playing our role internationally

As a wealthy country, Labor thinks Australia should play a role tackling this international issue.

Recent media notes that there is an estimated 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic, weighing 80,000 tonnes in the Pacific Ocean. The Australian Marine Conservation Society estimates there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans by 2050.

We also need to be aware that for some countries, clean drinking water is only available in plastic bottles – the solution is not simply.

As an island continent and developed country Australia must recognise that it has a responsibility within our region to clean up our oceans.

To this end, a Shorten Labor Government will commit \$15 million over six years to help fund clean up efforts in our region.

This funding and support could be directed towards:

- International efforts to reduce marine litter through the United Nations Environment Programme – this is direct clean up
- Support for the 2020 Our Ocean Conference, to be hosted by Palau
- Private efforts to clean up the world's oceans
- Regional and bilateral assistance to Pacific nations, including through the Overseas Development Assistance program
- Funding of efforts to clean rivers and waterways in Southeast Asian neighbours, including through ASEAN-led initiatives
- Research efforts to discover innovative ways to tackle marine litter
- Offer Australian expertise to help our neighbours develop their own recycling industries