

Joint Media Statement

THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY UNITES – KEEP RECYCLING AND BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS

(Monday, April 15, 2019) Australia's recycling industry is concerned that Sunday's *60 Minutes* program didn't paint the full picture of Australia's recycling efforts and didn't highlight the industry's contribution of some 50,000 jobs and \$15 billion in value, with real potential for more benefits.

The report included: a false claim that much of Australia's plastic waste is being disposed of incorrectly in south-east Asia; didn't sufficiently highlight recycling's many upsides, and; should not discourage the vast majority of Australians who regularly recycle to keep doing so because their efforts matter.

Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR) CEO, Peter Shmigel, said: "Australian recycling is highly successful, despite some ill-conceived claims in the broadcast. In fact, up to 90 per cent of material collected for recycling is made into new products."

Waste Management & Resource Recovery Association (WMRR) CEO, Gayle Sloan, said: "Australia's industry is aiming to get even better through investment, innovation and community education to build a stronger domestic recycling system, and is therefore advocating a new labelling scheme for community confidence."

National Waste & Recycling Industry Council CEO, Rose Read, said: "The community votes in favour of recycling through its very strong participation. We encourage householders to continue to separate and sort their recycling correctly to reduce contamination and realise the environmental and economic benefits of recycling."

According to the *National Waste Report 2018* undertaken by the Commonwealth Government, plastic exports from Australia *decreased* last year by 25 per cent.

It also found that:

- Australians generated 67 million tonnes of waste (including 13 million from kerbside collections)
- 37 million tonnes of waste was recycled (5 million from kerbside collections)
- 33 million tonnes of the recycling was undertaken in Australia
- 4 million tonnes of material was exported from Australia for recycling (over 50% being metal)

It is estimated that between 10 and 15 per cent of kerbside recycling cannot be recycled because it is contaminated with nappies, soft plastics, garden hoses, bricks and batteries.

A claim was made by *60 Minutes* that 71,000 tonnes of recyclable plastic was exported to Malaysia.

“If the claim that all these materials are not being properly processed is accurate, this is very concerning, as there are also legitimate processors in Malaysia. 71,000 tonnes represents less than 2 per cent of the 4 million tonnes of what is actually exported and less than 0.2 per cent of the 37 million collected for recycling,” Mr Shmigel added.

“The community want and support kerbside recycling. With better support from all levels of Government, the waste management sector is well-placed to achieve better recycling outcomes,” added Tony Khoury from Waste Contractors & Recyclers Association of NSW (WCRA).

The local recycling industry, which employs more than 50,000 Australians and generates up to \$15 billion in value, is currently making some of the most advanced recycling investments in the world in response to the impacts of restrictions across Asia, including high-tech infrastructure to improve sorting and processing to produce high quality materials from recovered waste from households, businesses and construction sites.

Recycling groups including the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR), Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association Australia (WMRR), the Australian Organics Recycling Association (AORA), Waste Contractors & Recyclers Association of NSW (WCRA) and National Waste and Recycling Industry Council (NWRIC) have been urging greater investment, regulatory reform and policy support from Governments.

A recent *ReachteI* survey commissioned by ACOR found that almost 93 per cent of people said reducing waste and recycling products into new products is important to them and 87 per cent supported increasing recycling and reducing landfill by processing food and garden material from rubbish bins into useful products.

“There is not a shred of doubt that the industry wants to see maximum resource recovery. Our local industry is investing heavily and working collaboratively to upgrade local processing capacity which in the past were, to some extent, built to meet China’s previous specifications,” added Ms Sloan.

“We need a *Made with Australian Recycled Content* label which will do two key things – empower the community to take action and ownership of the materials they consume and incentivise manufacturers and brand owners to include recycled content in their packaging and products. This will create new markets for recycled materials and ensure a sustainable future for kerbside recycling, local resource recovery, and remanufacturing. Developing any industry is a collaborative effort and one that takes time. As we move forward, the industry is seeking leadership from all levels of Government.”

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