



SSROC submission on:

Draft NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan

Chapter 1: Meeting our residual waste and food and garden organic waste needs

**Submitted to the NSW Environment Protection Authority
by email: wasteinfrastructureplan@epa.nsw.gov.au**

Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils

Bayside – Burwood – Canada Bay – Canterbury Bankstown – Georges River – Inner West –
Randwick – Strathfield – Sutherland – City of Sydney – Waverley – Woollahra

Introduction

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) is an association of 12 councils spanning Sydney's southern suburbs, eastern suburbs, CBD, and inner west and covering a third of the Greater Sydney's population, over 1.8m people. Our Councils manage around 655,000 tonnes of household waste each year, which is about 20 per cent of all NSW household waste.

SSROC provides a forum through which our member councils can interact, exchange ideas and work collaboratively to solve regional issues and contribute to the future sustainability of the region. We advocate on behalf of our region to ensure that the major issues are addressed by all levels of government. Our current focus includes the environment, procurement, waste, and planning.

General comments

SSROC commends the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) on releasing the draft chapter 1 of its *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan* (the Plan) that touches on the challenge of delivering and building in NSW, and Sydney in particular. It is not lost on Local Government that the challenge facing the industry and communities to alter the trajectory of our society's consumption and resource recovery habits is huge. NSW EPA endeavours to be a leader in public sustainable waste management policy, and SSROC will continue to seek ways in which councils and Local Government bodies such as ROCs can co-design and collaborate on this course. Councils are central and critical partners, being the only part of government with legislated responsibility for waste management.

SSROC also acknowledges that the EPA has developed an urgent and informed case for change in residual and other waste infrastructure. While we have constructive feedback on where the Plan falls short, we are heartened by the Minister's commitment to deeper reforms.

We acknowledge and continue to encourage the Government's effort to engage and commit its counterpart teams and departments with critical roles in achieving this vision. For a decade or more, Local Government has advocated for a whole-of-government approach and greater accountability to solving this issue. This Plan activates a good faith effort in this regard by obliging the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), NSW Office of Local Government (OLG), Property & Development NSW, and its Waste Assets Management Corporation to facilitate the delivery of new infrastructure.

Summary of SSROC recommendations

1. Remove entirely the option to reopen old landfills.
If there is a former landfill site that the NSW EPA is considering reopening then consult separately with stakeholders on that individual site with the necessary level of detailed study on all environmental and social impacts; reopening old landfills should not be an open-ended part of a statewide infrastructure plan.
2. if the EPA has intentions of expanding landfills, it should:
 - make it explicit that this is a short-term solution for the bulk of residual waste, and volumes will be reduced as alternatives become available, and

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain how it intends to resource, support and fund modern markets and infrastructure to separate or remove recoverable or reuseable materials, or deploy regulatory measures such as bans to landfill.
<p>3. Waste material flow analysis (by DCCEEW) and land audits and assessments (by EPA, Property & Development NSW, Industrial Lands Action Plan) should result in a geo-spatial map where zones of new infrastructure should be identified. This analysis should overlay population and housing growth figures (DPHI).</p>
<p>4. The EPA release a summary of the planned content of the whole NSW Waste Infrastructure Plan including the chapter titles, and work with councils and industry to calibrate delivery expectations, and be more transparent about the entire process.</p>
<p>5. That State Government build the critical message structure, content, resourcing and stakeholder engagement to lay the groundwork for broader community discussions and social licence to build or operate new infrastructure. It is not enough to use <i>Have Your Say</i> forums and leave the rest to Local Government.</p>
<p>6. That DPHI engage Local Government on a workable planning timeframe and system. It is agreed that change is needed, but acceleration must not result in poor quality outcomes.</p>
<p>7. That DPHI consider standard conditions or exempt and complying development fixes for bin storage and building infrastructure upgrades.</p>
<p>8. That the NSW Government must find structural, financial and governance arrangements to resolve the impending waste crisis in a coordinated way that delivers sustainable environmental and efficient outcomes for NSW citizens and businesses.</p>
<p>9. That NSW Government use stronger and more appropriate language and commitments to developing the changes needed to designate waste services as essential in the Essential Services Act.</p>
<p>10. That NSW Government establish a scope-limited body to be accountable to appropriate Ministers for delivery of the whole-of-Government response to waste and circular infrastructure.</p>
<p>11. Remove 'Circular' from the title of this Plan and reinforce what it is likely to be: a Waste Processing and Disposal Infrastructure Plan, or similar. NSW and Local Government need to be honest brokers and reduce conflation between 'waste' and 'circularity', which represents a massive and fundamental economic, industrial and social shift.</p>
<p>12. That a separate Circular Infrastructure Plan identify the needs, opportunities and master planning required for circular infrastructure or circular precincts. Local Government will be looking for:</p>

- a. strategies to drive change throughout the supply chain, aiming to design reusability into materials and products and increasingly eliminate the need for end-of-life disposal,
- b. local opportunities to incentivise and scale the reuse and repair of products,
- c. enablers for local community drop-off and reuse/repair centres, 'pop-up' opportunities, and online services

Circularity is a complete economic and material/nutrient transformation that is much bigger than sustainable waste management. This Plan facilitates action at in the bottom half of the waste hierarchy, which is important but not transformative.

13. Provide cohesive infrastructure planning for second-hand and downstream re-processing in material and nutrient markets.
14. That substantial and reliable funding for joint and commercial ventures must be released and allocated for strong business cases. The Government should seriously consider the section 88 Waste Levy for this purpose; and if the levy is not reinvested in the sector, then other sources of funding are needed.
15. That EPA provides clear and unambiguous funding, resourcing and ongoing support for essential and proven technology solutions that decarbonise or significantly capture waste emissions. Work with Infrastructure NSW and other departments with experience in Net Zero ambitions and infrastructure delivery.
16. That Local Government (either councils or groups) be invited to participate in intergovernmental working groups.
17. That the Premier's Department, Cabinet Office and Treasury lead the delivery of the waste and circular infrastructure plan.
18. That the EPA lay out a time-bound breakdown of the activities suggested in the workplan, with end dates included and delivery times not left open-ended. Commit to the projects such as a land audit, rather than express them as conditional statements.

SSROC provides the following feedback in more detail, which has been informed by our 12 Member Councils.

Does 'Reopening old landfills' belong in a NSW Circular Infrastructure Plan?

Reopening old landfills has major environmental implications, and is not a strategic solution. Excavation involves several significant environmental pressures that must be managed:

- Gas management issues – closed landfills continue producing methane long after they are closed. Disturbing waste mass can release concentrated pockets of greenhouse gases.
- Leachate management – contaminated liquids exposed to air and moisture can migrate into ground and surface water. Old landfills may lack adequate liner systems.
- Air quality concerns – digging up buried waste releases dust, particulates and volatile organic compounds into the air.

- Soil and groundwater – heavy metals, chemicals and other contaminants accumulated over time can spread during excavation.
- Waste settlement – continuous settlement of layers can be destabilised during opening, leading to uneven settling, infrastructure damage and safety hazards.
- Ecological disruption – closed landfills develop into wildlife habitat over time. Reopening interrupts these established ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Regulatory compliance – Modern environmental standards are typically much stricter than when older landfills were originally permitted, requiring extensive upgrades to meet current regulations. This would create administrative and technological challenges, necessitating significant investment from the State purse.

If the EPA intends to re-open an old landfill, then it should be transparent about which one/s, and heavily involve Council and community. Old landfill sites and buffers may be no longer suitable for waste operations because of residential encroachment or re-purposing over the years since the site's closure. For its part, SSROC and its member councils could not conceive of a community or a council in Greater Sydney that would accept this proposal.

Placing such emphasis on, and investing in, landfill as a solution for residual waste, risks establishing a disincentive for change from current disposal practices. This would threaten to delay the urgent delivery of more sustainable solutions, such as potential energy from waste facilities.

Recommendation 1. Remove entirely the option to reopen old landfills.

Murky strategic intention

The Plan represents a tension between its stated goals: “The NSW Government’s first priority is to keep waste out of landfill ...”, and its plans to increase landfill capacity.

SSROC acknowledges the difficult task to address the urgent and consequential shortfall in residual waste capacity, while also presenting a way forward for waste infrastructure generally. However, landfill expansion and accelerated planning for residual waste does not belong in the same Plan as the behavioural leap toward circularity, growth in onshore capabilities in recycling and re-processing, reuse and repair strategy planning, product stewardship schemes and behavioural sciences involved in changing societal norms.

Furthermore, NSW lacks the long-term geo-spatial mapping informed by land use, transport, environmental and regulatory planning. The impact of this gap in forward planning is that the service risks, contingency and consequence planning are relegated and priced-in to contractual arrangements. It also tends to push essential waste infrastructure further away from waste generation zones. Our preference is to take the example of the [Victorian Recycling Infrastructure Plan](#) which used material flow and population projections to inform spatial insights and mapped zones where future resource recovery, transfer stations and waste management infrastructure will be needed.

The benefits of a strategic geo-spatial delivery plan are that the State could divert from the current fragmented approach, provide clarity for communities and councils who require an evidence-backed rationale, and protect necessary zoning and land use needs from encroachment or inconsistent uses.

Recommendation 2. if the EPA has intentions of expanding landfills, it should:

- a. make it explicit that this is a short-term solution for the bulk of residual waste, and volumes will be reduced as alternatives become available, and
- b. explain how it intends to resource, support and fund modern markets and infrastructure to separate or remove recoverable or reuseable materials, or deploy regulatory measures such as bans to landfill.

Recommendation 3. Waste material flow analysis (by DCCEE) and land audits and assessments (by EPA, Property & Development NSW, Industrial Lands Action Plan) should result in a geo-spatial map where zones of new infrastructure should be identified. This analysis should overlay population and housing growth figures (DPHI).

Operating with unknown ‘chapters’

Local Government waste managers, commercial service providers and infrastructure operations directors all work from comprehensive strategies. With only the first chapter of the Plan, it is not possible to understand where the actions and delivery planning are heading, what dependencies exist, and what expertise is needed. The first chapter is focused on responding to the residual landfill cliff and organics processing and transfer capacity – both important segments which, in spite of decades of advocacy from the waste, productivity and sustainability sectors, have become critical.

While it is a dynamic and relatively fast-moving landscape with Ministerial backing, the resource recovery industry and local government leaders cannot invest with security, build stakeholder or shareholder confidence, or seek out partnerships without understanding the full picture of the State’s overall strategic direction. Councils, for their part, are operating in a very constrained budgetary context.

SSROC understands that the succeeding chapter will involve resource recovery and reuse infrastructure planning. But missing chapters also conveys a perception that the overarching strategic framework is missing, or sits to the side of the *Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2021-27 (WaSM)*, the *WaSM Guide to Infrastructure Needs*, the *NSW Plastics: The Way Forward* and other State strategies.

*Recommendation 4. The EPA release a summary of the planned content of the whole NSW Waste Infrastructure Plan including the scope of the next chapter (and any other subsequent chapters), **work with councils and industry to calibrate delivery expectations, and be more transparent about the entire process.***

Little recognition of the need for community buy-in

The Plan exhibits very little practical appreciation of community uptake for new infrastructure, often known as social licence, to build or operate. Therein lies the perceived risk that this aspect will be left disastrously for commercial operators to mitigate and Local Government to manage. It is SSROC’s understanding through known case studies¹ and our

¹ Kwinana, WA and Parkes NSW Activation Precinct for Energy from Waste, community consultation

own social research into energy from waste facilities² that communities, if given evidence of systemic problems and the strategic case for safe and suitable operation of waste infrastructure, will eventually be compelled to accept the need for these technologies. Communities will need sufficient assurance that strict environmental regulations will be imposed and adhered to, and outputs are safe and compliant, before councils can begin to genuinely discuss the local resilience and resource recovery opportunities that new facilities will bring. But even best-case community acceptance may not translate into investment, so it is essential to deliver stakeholder awareness and education initiatives early and often.

Recommendation 5. That the State Government build the critical message structure, content, resourcing and stakeholder engagement that lay the groundwork for stakeholder and community discussions and social licence. It is not enough to use Have Your Say forums and leave the rest to Local Government.

Specifically with energy from waste, it is critical that the EPA is seen to be in these communities, leading an informed and constructive dialogue. Councils can be on hand to support NSW Government to de-risk proposed infrastructure messaging, but only with State Government playing a key role in outreach and strategic communications.

Streamlining planning processes must never sacrifice quality and compliance

There is a growing concern – backed by experience of other State Significant Developments and so-called red tape reduction efforts – that Local Government’s legitimate controls and consultation will be sacrificed. Councils are steadfastly dedicated to managing controls and consultation, and ultimately this is an investment in the quality of the outcome.

For example, DPHI’s proposed accelerated planning timeframes are 18 days for the Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), and 80 days for the assessments. This does not line up with Council’s existing planning, consultation periods or workflow. For Local Government, this reads as fast-tracking that side-steps legitimate and necessary Council input around environmental and public health stress testing.

A secondary consultation and compliance process is a facility’s licensing requirements or variation assessments. The Plan is silent on these needs and timeframes.

Recommendation 6. That DPHI engage Local Government on a workable planning timeframe and system. It is agreed that change is needed, but acceleration must not result in poor quality outcomes.

DPHI standard conditions to make Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) and Food-only Organics (FO) collection easier, cleaner and cost-effective

Residential apartment building design may not be optimised for food organics collections. Consistent SSROC audits have shown that Multi-Unit Dwellings (MUDs) notoriously perform poorly in recycling contamination, in part because building design, waste collection systems and bin storage is inadequate. The FOGO household mandate introduces new complexity.

² *Community attitudes towards, and understanding of, resource recovery in the SSROC region, with a focus on recovering energy from waste* (2015), SSROC Elton Consulting

Building designs vary widely, and the level and complexity of retrofitting waste infrastructure to facilitate FOGO and FO collection will likewise vary. But for some simpler modifications that do not require structural or building system modification, the State Government should consider a suite of standard conditions and exempt and complying fixes for bin storage and building infrastructure upgrades in MUDs. This could include infrastructure such as bin rooms and storage areas, chutes, ventilation and bin washing areas, and collection truck needs. Currently these upgrades require development applications by developers or councils, and planning approvals. Bulk applicant numbers would bottleneck and be an administrative nuisance for applicants and approval bodies.

The benefits of this include a fast-tracking and standardisation for simple technologies or bin storage upgrades, reduce costs and time for councils, and make organics collections more efficient, hygienic and user-friendly.

Recommendation 7. That DPHI consider standard conditions or exempt and complying development fixes for bin storage and building infrastructure upgrades.

Misconception about How Sydney Got Here

On page 19, *Strategic planning to meet the waste management needs of growing populations*, the Plan states:

*Waste infrastructure in NSW is owned and operated by the private sector or local government. **It is these parties' role to design and deliver waste infrastructure and waste services for the people of NSW. The Government is responsible for ensuring this infrastructure and these waste services are strategically planned to meet the needs of households and businesses across the state, now and in the future.***

This explanation shows a troubling amnesia about the waste sector in metropolitan Sydney and the history of privatisation by the NSW Government. The description also diverts responsibility for private sector management onto councils, who are unable to rectify larger structural problems. Currently, individual councils commercially contract private waste facility operators. There is no legislative requirement for private sector actors to perform this role apart from their time limited, commercial contractual arrangements with local councils and other private and public entities and businesses.

Councils individually and collectively have no legislated powers over the commercial operators to require them to design and deliver waste infrastructure and services for future growth. Councils' purchasing power through garbage and waste fees from ratepayers are constrained by IPART regulations and processes that are focussed on current community needs only.

The State Government/industry hybrid system has not taken responsibility for the flaws and service failures that have emerged over time.

The system conceived in 2010 was based on several assumptions that have proved to be flawed:

- The new system would self-regulate, with IPART keeping user waste charges in check;

- After State Government extracted value from the sale of waste infrastructure at the time of privatisation, there would be little or no call on Treasury for government funds;
- The private sector would be able to grow and adapt to meet demand with the provision of new waste infrastructure over time;
- Councils would be empowered purchasers of services.

Existing features compound the problem:

- The *Essential Service Act 1988 Part 1 Section 4 (1) (g)* identifies “garbage, sanitary cleaning or sewerage services” as essential services but makes no reference to broader waste processing, management and resource recovery and recycling services.
- The lack of appropriate governance for strategic planning, funding, and regulation of these essential public services has resulted in the absence of a strategic, geospatial plan for waste processing and disposal infrastructure or delivery.
- No Minister is accountable for these shortcomings.
- The private sector is made up of multi-national companies that function as almost monopolistic entities, protected by high cost and investment barriers for new entrants. It is at their discretion or limitations to meet new demand and deliver new infrastructure and innovations.
- The private sector cannot ever fill policy, planning and funding voids without new high-level government intervention.
- Councils are not empowered or resourced to achieve wider systems approaches and necessarily focus on cost-effective provision of services for communities.
- In metropolitan Sydney, land prices are high, and community opposition to new facilities stymies any business case.
- The system has no entity to act as a single purchaser of waste infrastructure capable of contracting more effectively with the private sector delivery mechanisms. Individual councils – let alone groups of councils, ROCs or joint organisations – do not have the social licence or investment capital to impose a regionally significant facility in their LGAs.

For this Plan to endure the coming decades, SSROC proposes the recent historical context be acknowledged, and lessons from the past few decades be considered in forward planning. SSROC’s summary is included at Appendix A.

Recommendation 8. That the NSW Government must find structural, financial and governance arrangements to resolve the impending waste crisis in a coordinated way that delivers sustainable environmental and efficient outcomes for NSW citizens and businesses.

Is waste management an essential service, or not?

The Plan indicates that waste and waste infrastructure is essential in several ways. Red lid bin services are an “essential service for everyone” (page 4, Minister’s message); in the event of a disaster (pages 6 and 16); that planning solutions entail “considering ways to designate waste collection services as essential” when releasing or rezoning land for housing (page 23). This is welcome language.

But these are only words; there has not been a good faith effort to understand or convey the implications of changing the Essential Services Act. Recognising waste and recycling collection services and processing infrastructure as essential would broadly ensure their zoning and land use protections, have designation in planning policies, state environmental planning instruments or local controls. It would elevate waste in the same legislated status as water, wastewater and energy.

It is disingenuous to suggest that *waste is an essential service* without the proper designations.

Recommendation 9. That NSW Government use stronger and more appropriate language and commitments to developing the changes needed to designate waste services as essential in the Essential Services Act.

Establish a new agency that has accountability and resourcing to deliver

Australia's large metropolitan areas such as Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth have developed a strategic framework and designated a responsible body to deliver waste infrastructure. Metropolitan Sydney has not.

Furthermore, there are concerns that the current EPA infrastructure delivery mechanism is not adequately resourced. EPA staff and inter-departmental staff who are tasked with facilitating and delivering on these challenges are often doing so in addition to their day-to-day job requirements. Aside from technical, planning and strategic skills and experience, the delivery of a Plan of this scale and nature requires long-term relationship building and a culture of doing things differently.

With responsibilities for the environment, community services and general well-being, Local Government expects to collaborate on the State's strategy and is willing to help de-risk the Plan. A new agency or body could have scope-limited accountability with Ministerial support to deliver a 30-year Plan. This body could also house the inter-agency advisory groups, access the vast experience of Infrastructure NSW and other departments about delivering State capital works projects.

Recommendation 10. That NSW Government establish a scope-limited body to be accountable to appropriate Ministers for delivery of the whole-of-Government response to waste and circular infrastructure.

No circular infrastructure here

As a sector, we should avoid 'circularity washing' wherever possible. The Plan's title and intention should be changed accordingly; we are seeking to change behaviours and mindsets. Circularity is a complete economic and material/nutrient transformation that is much bigger than sustainable waste management. This Plan facilitates action at the bottom half of the waste hierarchy, which is important but not transformative.

The term '*waste infrastructure*' should be reserved for disposal (landfill) and energy from waste (recovery of energy), as these terms align the waste hierarchy and objective with the waste hierarchy. The Plan identifies actions and expectations toward residual landfill, Energy from Waste, and organics transfer and processing infrastructure, and relevant planning

processes. Correspondingly, resource recovery infrastructure and precincts require their own 'chapter'.

Furthermore, planning controls, development assessment requirements and licences for circular precincts may be different than for traditional waste infrastructure. A Circular Infrastructure Plan and planning regime should have its own 'chapter.'

Recommendation 11. Remove 'Circular' in the title of this Plan and reinforce what it is likely to be: a Waste Processing and Disposal Infrastructure Plan, or similar. NSW and Local Government need to be honest brokers and reduce conflation between 'waste' and 'circular economy', which represents a massive and fundamental economic, industrial and social shift.'

Recommendation 12. That a separate Circular Infrastructure Plan identify the needs, opportunities and master planning required for circular infrastructure or circular precincts. Local Government will be looking for

- strategies to drive change throughout the supply chain, aiming to design reusability into materials and products and increasingly eliminate the need for end-of-life disposal,
- local opportunities to incentivise and scale the reuse and repair of products,
- enablers for local community drop-off and reuse/repair centres, 'pop-up' opportunities, and online services

Recommendation 13. Provide cohesive infrastructure planning for second-hand and downstream re-processing in material and nutrient markets:

- bulky waste triage or transfer, optimising opportunities for reuse and repair of household products like furniture, electrical appliances, textiles, bikes, toys and exercise equipment.
- advanced recycling, including anaerobic digestion
- specialised precincts for re-processing and re-manufacturing
- co-location of re-manufacturing/re-processing onsite with commercial waste facilities.
- hazardous, metal and electronic waste processing
- biological and medical waste processing
- retail space for vendors to showcase and sell products that are repurposed, upcycled, or made with recycled or re-processed materials. This could be co-located with vendors selling second-hand bulky items or repair centres for consumer goods. A modern example is Sweden's [Re-tuna Aterbruksgalleria](#) which looks like a modern shopping mall. This may require developer incentives or subsidised leasing and to be located in a highly visible and popular location.

Funding Is Required for Infrastructure

It is stated on page 23 that The NSW Government will facilitate "investment in strategic waste infrastructure such as new transfer stations". More detailed information is required on how investment will be facilitated by the NSW government.

In metropolitan Sydney, suitable land is limited, land prices are high, and community opposition is great. This is not an attractive proposition to the private sector, which, by developing waste infrastructure outside of metropolitan Sydney, is exposed to less risk and receives higher profits, but which leaves communities bearing increased transport costs. Joint investment between industry and the NSW Government **may be required in areas where waste infrastructure is less profitable for the private sector**. If there are insufficient transfer station options close to councils and processors, councils are not only locked into prices, but potentially lower quality beneficial products being produced from their waste streams. Areas identified as potential waste infrastructure sites in metropolitan Sydney require an investment strategy that includes financial incentives to attract private industry – even if profits cannot be maximised.

The NSW government should explore a wider variety of alternative funding and assistance models as part of this plan, including the Waste Levy legislated in section 88 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997. Over 80% of the Levy goes into consolidated revenue instead of being reinvested in waste, with the result that the objects of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001 are not being met. Reinvestment of the NSW Waste Levy has been a consistent request from councils across the state for many years and would greatly assist the development of a circular economy in NSW.

Recommendation 14. That substantial and reliable funding for joint and commercial ventures must be released and allocated for strong business cases. The Government should seriously consider the section 88 Waste Levy for this purpose; and if the levy is not reinvested in the sector, then other sources of funding are needed.

Achieving Net Zero in waste infrastructure planning

The NSW Productivity and Equality Commission report *Decarbonising buildings, industry and waste: Achieving Net Zero* (March 2025)³ acknowledges the technologies available in the organics sector that are proven to lower methane and other waste emissions. These include:

- protein farming and larvae technology – insect protein substituted for other protein in animal feed, and frass can be mixed with organic composts as a nutrient additive;
- off-site, closed anaerobic digestion produces near-net zero replacement for fossil fuel;
- onsite dehydration and bio-dehydration – outputs require offsite stabilisation;
- Off-site composting;
- On-site aerobic vermicomposting such as worm farms with optimised oxygenation.

It is understood that in-vessel and windrow composting technologies are favoured to scale up the FOGO processing capacity from a waste materials perspective. But this is only part of the picture.

Other material streams such as textiles have significant potential to contribute towards net zero emissions, where investment in infrastructure such as fibre-to-fibre sorting and end markets for recycled textiles could be prioritised. For other material streams such as household furniture, electrical appliances, toys and homewares, state agencies have funded

³ <https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/Achieving-net-zero-paper-2-decarbonising-buildings-industry-and-waste.pdf>

large scale reuse hubs and tip shops to divert these materials, reduce carbon and provide opportunities for households to purchase second hand. In Sydney, the biggest barrier to these initiatives is the cost of renting space, and there is a role for state in supporting these initiatives either through leasing suitable state land, subsidising rents, and grants. ACT for example has subsidised The Green Shed since 1988 which was recently re-tendered to Vinnies and renamed the [Goodies Junction](#). There has been a history of investing in recycling infrastructure through grants, but often these grants focus on packaging rather than targeting products and material streams that would help achieve NSW Net Zero ambitions.

The same report from the Productivity Commission warns that the waste hierarchy may be an outdated method for actualising economic benefit. Investment business cases evaluated through traditional cost-benefit criteria do not present a strong Net Zero case. Carbon values and emissions abatement would generate superior outcomes compared to the waste hierarchy. The exception to this, according to the Commission, is a scenario where inert waste meets abundant landfill – in this case straight disposal may achieve the highest net economic and carbon abatement outcomes. The Commission goes further to recommend expansion of the Commonwealth Safeguard Mechanism to cover up to 90 percent of waste facilities emissions through carbon pricing, or load-based licensing administered by the NSW EPA.

Recommendation 15. NSW EPA provides clear and unambiguous support for essential and proven technology solutions that decarbonise or significantly capture waste emissions. Work with Infrastructure NSW and other departments with experience in Net Zero ambitions to deliver this infrastructure.

That NSW EPA consider investigating or standardising methods and criteria to understand the economic and commercial implications that carbon pricing or other abatement schemes may have that prioritise Net Zero outcomes. This may represent an evolution away from traditional waste hierarchy methods.

Inter-agency representation

The Plan identifies a working group, established by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) to provide a whole-of-government approach to planning assessment of landfill expansion, priority landfills and new priority waste infrastructure. There is concern that no department and no statutory instrument has the power to compel other agencies to deliver this Plan. However, NSW Premier's Department, Cabinet Office and Treasury could exhibit critical influence and leadership over a crisis involving multi-sector investment in a timely manner.

Councils are central partners that can provide insights based on operational services experience, which no state government agency can, as well as local strategic planning.

Recommendation 16. That Local Government (either councils or groups) be invited to participate in intergovernmental working groups.

Recommendation 17. That the Premier's Department, Cabinet Office and Treasury lead the delivery of the waste and circular infrastructure plan.

Timelines but without a bigger strategic picture

SSROC commends the NSW EPA on building the case for urgency, identifying some planning pathways and the establishment of a concierge to assist with planning approvals. Unfortunately, most of the deliverable actions are high-level and focused on residual waste and extending the life of existing landfills.

In addition, **the delivery timeframes speak only to start dates and are not time-bound, with little understanding about how the sequence of actions informs dependencies.** For example, regarding the land audit, the Plan states (page 23): “If new landfills are necessary to avoid capacity shortfalls for non-putrescible waste in Greater Sydney from 2035, we will work with industry to conduct a land audit and seek expressions of interest for possible new non-putrescible waste infrastructure.”

A land audit is achievable within the first 6 months and would greatly assist in the realisation of this Plan in terms of identifying State-owned sites that could be prioritised for new infrastructure or for land use protection.

A larger point about timelines is the risk of added pressure on existing or planned landfill capacity if one or more EfW facilities does not get approval, does not get built, does not have adequate transport links, or is not operational on time. The optimistic timeframes given for delivery of EfW infrastructure are not consistent with current trends.

Recommendation 18. That the EPA lay out a time-bound breakdown of the activities suggested in the workplan, with end dates included and delivery times not left open-ended. Commit to the projects such as a land audit, rather than express them as conditional statements.

Responses to Survey Questions:

Theme 1: Streamlining planning processes to fast-track expansion of existing landfills

1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following proposed actions?

I. Establish a streamlined planning pathway for modifications to priority existing landfills

SSROC agrees but cautions that this streamlining must not be at the cost of legitimate and necessary checks and consultation.

II. Rapidly assess proposed modifications to existing priority landfills

SSROC disagrees as described at this stage, because it is unclear if this would compromise the quality of the assessment or compliance or have perverse outcomes for community or the environment. Rapid assessments should seek to align and co-design the consultation timelines with local governments because these accelerations meet Council’s own compliance and consultation expectations.

III. Consider reopening closed landfills to unlock waste capacity for red lidded bins

SSROC disagrees. If this option were to be actualised, it should not be part of a future-focused State infrastructure plan, and instead should be optioned for consideration by the relevant local council and community located near the specific site.

IV. Establish a waste infrastructure concierge to provide planning advice and support to applicants

SSROC agrees. The concierge should include staff that have expertise in planning and waste management and potentially include staff with experience and background in other State infrastructure delivery, not just contaminated lands and landfill management or compliance.

V. Investigate alleviating pressures on existing landfills by diverting Virgin Excavated Natural Material and Excavated Natural Material from disposal and storing them for future reuse

SSROC agrees in principle, but not enough information has been provided.

2. What are your thoughts on these actions? Are there any potential benefits or risks you'd like to provide?

See comments above.

3. Are there other ideas or approaches you think we should consider?

Theme 2: Building resilience by enabling planning for energy from waste

1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I. Energy from waste can build the resilience of our waste management system
- II. Energy from waste can reduce our reliance on landfills

SSROC remains technology agnostic but understands that once all efforts to recover resources has been made, the portion of residual waste remaining currently has two options: energy from waste or landfill.

For a fully rational and modern circular economy to thrive, energy from waste solutions would need to be incentivised economically to ensure that volumes are source separated and recycled before they reach the gate. This is a responsibility at all levels of government, but not enough attention has been given in this chapter of the Plan.

Randwick Council strongly objects to the change in the definition of “thermal treatment”, as it would allow future proposals to replace liquefied petroleum gas, natural gas and liquefied natural gas with energy recovery from waste with what Council considers to be a less environmentally-sound processed fuel. A small-scale facility’s proposal, close to an urban residential area, was previously withdrawn following the introduction of the current Regulation which prohibits such use. The proposed change would exclude such a facility and allow the prohibited development to go ahead. The implication is that “like for like” is too vague, and that criteria specified in the regulation may not be technical enough to capture the suitability of any processed outputs, especially in densely populated areas.

2. What are your thoughts on this theme?

Please see SSROC's submission on Energy from Waste Options from April 2025 (attached, for ease of reference).

Theme 3: Strategic planning to meet the waste management needs of growth populations

1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following proposed actions?

I. Establish lead NSW Government agencies for strategic waste planning

SSROC agrees this is a critical need. Whilst we commend the NSW EPA for taking an interest in this role, we are unclear that this body has the necessary resources, expertise in strategic planning, infrastructure delivery, relationship with market development, or the required authority to deliver this substantial undertaking.

Furthermore there are potential conflicts with the EPA's regulatory role. The EPA is a large organisation with teams in regulation and licensing, site assessment and land mitigation, environmental and public health compliance, and strategy/policy. It is also involved in strategic and statutory planning processes. The EPA may not be the correct body because:

- It is beyond the scope of the EPA to oversee or facilitate the delivery of infrastructure; there are other agencies resourced with explicit expertise responsible for delivering and/or managing site identification, preparatory works, and build;
- The EPA may be in conflict because it would be responsible for regulating itself;
- EPA involvement may increase time and efficiency risks.

A separate body with Ministerial directive should be tasked with responsibility to deliver this Plan. The EPA should have an advisory and support role to deliver upon planning and regulatory responses.

II. Establish an accelerated planning pathway for new priority waste infrastructure

- The DPHI, in consultation with councils and other relevant stakeholders, should consider preparing a waste industry-specific SEARs for new non-putrescible waste landfills as part of their Rapid Assessment Framework if they intend to include them as SSD. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/planning-reforms/rapid-assessment-framework/streamlining-major-project-assessment> .
- The Environmental Planning and Assessment (Statement of Expectations) Order 2024 requires councils to complete DA assessments within 115 days on average for the 2024-2025 FY. This will be reduced to 105 days in the 2025-26 FY, 95 days for 2026-27 FY and 85 days from 1 July 2027. The time taken to complete DAs is related to the quality of the information provided by the developer, the complexity of the project (e.g. number of referrals required), the priority of the DA relative to other projects (including the number of other DAs before council approaching their deadline). Increasing the priority of waste infrastructure DAs at council could expedite DA approvals, rather than "streamlining processes".

- More detail is required regarding how Council's community consultation timeframes fit into the proposed 80-day assessment period. SSROC suggests that the Departments co-design with Local Government or develop a timeframe that satisfies the intention of rapid assessment as well as Council's consultation requirements and expectations.

III. Plan for long-term waste infrastructure needs

SSROC agrees this is critical, and it has provided at least 10 years of advocacy on this position. Leaving infrastructure placement to the market has left Sydney metropolitan networks and disaster resilience in a very vulnerable position, illustrated by limited competition and a lack of infrastructure and transfer station capacity.

IV. Facilitate transfer station upgrades

SSROC agrees, but notes that this is only a partial solution since it does not address the issues of where transfer stations are located relative to an LGA and the processing facility. This Plan should go further and identify where additional transfer facilities are needed and proximate suitable sites could be located.

Transfer stations are run by commercial providers – and in some cases the processor. Councils cannot choose which one they use as that transport pathways are part of gate fee pricing during the tender process. The capacity-driven approach to planning ignores the spatial need and rising costs to community.

- V. Clarify planning assessment requirements and update the assessment pathways for waste infrastructure

SSROC agrees.

VI. Enhance the strategic protection of new and existing waste infrastructure assets

SSROC agrees.

VII. Enable Local Government's strategic planning

More detail is required before SSROC can comment.

- 2. What are your thoughts on these actions? Are there any potential benefits or risks you'd like to raise?**

See SSROC comments above.

- 3. Are there other ideas or approaches you think we should consider?**

See SSROC comments above.

- 4. Lastly, do you have any other feedback you would like to share about the draft NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan?**



See SSROC comments above.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the discussion. For any enquiries, please contact me by email: ssroc@ssroc.nsw.gov.au, or 02 8396 3800. Please note that although Member Councils have provided information for this submission, it has not yet been endorsed at a formal meeting of SSROC. I will contact you should any issues arise as a result.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'H Sloan'.

Helen Sloan
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils

Appendix A

A short history of waste infrastructure and assets ownership, management and off-loading in metropolitan Sydney should be provided as context. This history is critical to understanding the role of State Government in fulfilling its statutory role in intervening in a dynamic but essential marketplace.

From 2001 to 2010 waste recycling and processing infrastructure was owned and operated by the Waste Assets Management Corporation (the Corporation), which in turn was owned by the NSW Government. Local councils also administered some local waste collections and services, such as landfill and small resource recovery centres. The Corporation was introduced to replace the State Government's Waste and Recovery Service.

In 2010, the State Government privatised its transfer waste stations and disposal centres by selling them to private operators under an act of NSW Parliament - originally called Waste Recycling and Processing Corporation (Authorised Transaction) Act 2010, No 8. Under the *Waste Assets Management Corporation Act 2010, No 8* (the Act's current name) waste assets were transferred to the private sector by the then Keneally Government. The proceeds of the transfer of WSN⁴ assets to the private sector were paid directly to NSW Treasury.

The objectives of the former Corporation were as follows:

- a) to be a successful business and, to this end:
 - (i) to operate at least as efficiently as any comparable businesses, and
 - (ii) to maximise the net worth of the State's investment in it, and
 - (iii) to exhibit a sense of social responsibility by having regard to the interests of the community in which it operates,
- b) to protect the environment by conducting its operations in compliance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development contained in section 6 (2) of the [Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991](#),
- c) to exhibit a sense of responsibility towards regional development and decentralisation in the way in which it operates,
- d) to provide and manage efficient, safe and reliable waste facilities, secondary resource facilities and related facilities,
- e) to be an efficient and responsible provider of waste management services, secondary resource recovery services and related services,
- f) to minimise any adverse health and environmental impacts of its activities and services relating to waste management and secondary resource recovery.

However, these functions were not meaningfully transferred from the old legislation to the new hybrid system of local government and private contractors.

Waste infrastructure in NSW is now owned and operated by the private sector, or in rare cases in metropolitan Sydney, by local government. Within this deregulated commercial framework, it is "these parties' role to design and deliver waste infrastructure and waste services for the people of NSW" by default rather than by strategic design.

⁴ **WSN** means the Waste Recycling and Processing Corporation constituted by the [Waste Recycling and Processing Corporation Act 2001](#).



Attachment:

SSROC submission on *NSW Energy from Waste Options Paper*

16 May 2025:



SSROC submission on the
NSW Energy from Waste Options Paper
16 May 2025

Submitted to the NSW Environment Protection Authority
by email: energyfromwaste@epa.nsw.gov.au

Introduction

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) is an association of 12 councils spanning Sydney's southern suburbs, eastern suburbs, CBD, and inner west and covering a third of the Greater Sydney's population, over 1.8 million people.

SSROC provides a forum through which our member councils can interact, exchange ideas and work collaboratively to solve regional issues and contribute to the future sustainability of the region. We advocate on behalf of our region for major issues to be addressed by all levels of government. Waste and resource recovery have been a major focus for us for many years.

Member Councils manage around 655,000 tonnes of household waste each year, which is about 20 per cent of all NSW household waste. Municipal waste generation in the SSROC region is expected to increase by 24 per cent over the next 20 years to 805,000 tonnes in 2039/2040.¹ Residual mixed waste is expected to grow to 435,000 tonnes in 2040. SSROC infrastructure and waste material analysis (2021) indicated that out of all the treatment scenarios (after the revocation of the mixed waste organic output exemption), thermal energy from waste (EfW) treatment facilities – either with or without a separate FOGO/FO system – rated the highest treatment scenario in terms of affordability, reliability, social benefit and environmental concerns. However, EfW was perceived by council representatives to have the lowest community acceptance although many such facilities operate safely around the world.

SSROC and Member Councils have an acute stake in the outcome of these policies and are eager to see an integrated, whole-of-government commitment to fast-tracking residual waste solutions. Given the long lead time and capital costs of securing land, the NSW Government has an imperative – and a short window of time – to lead the public dialogue in a social licence discussion.

Whilst every effort should be made to transition to a circular economy and to keeping materials in circulation, this will take a long time, and we will continue to need solutions for residual waste well into the future. Most modern societies in Europe and Asia that utilise EfW have a thriving recycling and reuse sector, through policy settings that prioritise source separation and product stewardship. Australian society today has two choices to deal with its rising residual waste at scale: landfill or thermal energy recovery. Analysis by NSW EPA has concluded that greater Sydney will exhaust its landfill capacity by 2030. In November 2024, Minister for the Environment, Penny Sharpe called the situation a crisis. Currently NSW has no suitable EfW facilities. SSROC acknowledges the actions in the draft NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan to extend or expand existing landfills, which would alleviate the immediate problem.

It is neither proven nor expected that reducing consumption, reusing and recycling will achieve a solution to this crisis. SSROC is considering EfW as a

¹ Sydney Waste Infrastructure Planning, Arcadis (2021)

possible part of a *limited suite* of sustainable waste management options in NSW. The residual waste disposal/processing capacity gap is a critical financial, environmental, resilience and public health risk.

1. SSROC acknowledges the NSW Government's effort to clarify criteria and justification for the proposed sites, and to protect the required zoning, transport links and re-purposing of retired/retiring power stations for Australia's sustainable waste management future.
2. The EPA can enhance the conversation in NSW and greater Sydney by clarifying its criteria for nominating sites for these facilities. EfW on its own can be polarising and conflated with misinformation or unsavoury experiences from previous incineration facilities. SSROC remains technology agnostic, but seeks to identify the best solutions for residual waste treatment under Australian and NSW public and environmental health standards.
3. Thermal EfW has a proven stronger net carbon emissions performance than landfill, and is known to displace fossil fuel needs in domestic energy use. Landfills must capture 81% or higher in order to perform better than EfW technologies, which often depends on the amount of plastics in the stream and the degree of carbon sequestration.² In 2024, about 42% of methane generated in Australian landfills was captured – and in NSW it was 32%.³ Landfill emissions have declined substantially over 25 years primarily due to increasing methane capture and combustion. However, the data suggests that in recent years emission rates have flattened and may have started to rise. Emissions from collecting and transporting waste, on the other hand, are relatively low. National accounting methods suggest that depositing 20 tonnes of municipal waste in a landfill with no gas capture would produce more emissions than driving that same load 14,000 km.⁴ These trends are not well understood in the public.
4. Research from the UK (Eunomia 2020⁵) found that using modern EfW technology, incineration can perform better than landfill in terms of carbon emissions, if the feedstock is pre-treated to remove significant proportions of fossil carbon, mostly plastics. In considering EfW for disposal of residual, the need for pre-treatment should be taken into account.
5. The Options Paper, and the NSW government position generally, appears to be apprehensive to acknowledge that modern EfW plants have strict emissions standards, odour control and minimised ecological footprint. SSROC understands best available technology EfW facilities can co-exist with recycling, product stewardship and waste minimisation (re-use/repair) and

² Anshassi M, Smallwood T, Townsend, T. *Life cycle GHG emissions of MSW landfilling versus Incineration: Expected outcomes based on US landfill gas collection regulations*, Science Direct (2022)

³ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/publications/national-waste-resource-recovery-reporting/energy-recovery-2024>

⁴ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/publications/national-waste-resource-recovery-reporting/energy-recovery-2024>

⁵ <https://eunomia.eco/reports/greenhouse-gas-and-air-quality-impacts-of-incineration-and-landfill/>

support re-manufacturing efforts using treatment residues such as bottom ash.

6. NSW can seize the multi-pronged approach adopted by Europe and enable as much pre-sorting and processing of clean streams in addition to sustainable residual waste treatment. Billions of forecast dollars must be committed on reuse and avoidance, composting, anaerobic digestion, a raft of product stewardship schemes, recycling and re-manufacturing, and realistic bans or heavy penalties for disposing untreated or problematic wastes through any EfW stream.
7. Align EfW within a 15–20-year waste infrastructure Delivery Plan and assign an accountable task force. A task force can consist of elected representatives, as well as executive officers from Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), Treasury NSW, Infrastructure NSW (INSW), Transport for NSW (TfNSW), Department of Climate Change Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and NSW Premier and Cabinet. A Delivery Plan should be funded by the waste levy and measured by a certainty of outcomes, job creation and environmental protection.
8. The European EfW regulatory framework is a useful model, and there are national examples whereby EfW is supported through government policy settings:
 - a. South Korea implemented Extended Producer Responsibility systems alongside EfW infrastructure, shifting financial responsibility for waste management to producers.
 - b. Germany's "Circular Economy Act" mandates pre-sorting of waste before incineration.
 - c. Denmark's incineration levy system creates economic incentives favouring recycling while still supporting EfW for non-recyclable materials.
 - d. Sweden developed sophisticated district heating networks connected to EfW plants, providing heating to over 50 per cent of Swedish households.
 - e. Netherlands pioneered "Chicken Manure to Energy" facilities that process agricultural waste while recovering nutrients from ash for fertilizer production.
 - f. Japan's "Sound Material-Cycle Society" facilities requirements for metals recovery from bottom ash.
 - g. Singapore's Tuas Nexus facility combines wastewater treatment and waste-to-energy in a single integrated plant to minimise land use.

Do you have any comments about the proposed changes?

Proposed changes to precincts

SSROC recommends that the NSW Government undertakes to clarify criteria and justification for the proposed sites, and to protect the required zoning, transport links

and re-purposing of retired/retiring power stations for Australia's sustainable waste management future.

There has been an effort to emphasise and deliver upon employment and activation potential in relation to these precincts. This approach is welcomed; a transition for the local workforce, and an enhanced local economy may be needed as new facilities come online.

There are concerns about road network upgrades needed to operationalise these precincts. Roads can be vulnerable to landslips, forest fires or flooding down in the valley, and frequent heavy trucks or trains will be required. The West Lithgow precinct, and Bells Line of Road, may be particularly vulnerable.

Proposed change to the definition of thermal treatment

On page 5 of the EPA's Options Paper, the proposed changes to the definition of 'thermal treatment' are meant to:

- Expand the exclusions to allow processes that treat waste to produce 'like for like' products or inputs for those products, not only for plastic.
- Expand the exclusions to allow for processes that make a product that has a clear environmental benefit in line with criteria specified in the regulation or guidelines.

SSROC notes that one of its member councils provided strong objections to the change of definition, contending that it would allow future proposals to replace liquefied petroleum gas, natural gas and liquefied natural gas with energy recovery from waste with a less environmentally-sound processed fuel. A small-scale facility's proposal, close to an urban residential area, was previously withdrawn following the introduction of the current Regulation which prohibits such use. The proposed change, the council argues, would exclude such a facility and allow the prohibited development to go ahead.

The implication here is that 'like for like' is too vague, and that criteria specified in the regulation may not be technical enough to capture the suitability of any processed outputs, especially in densely populated areas.

SSROC stresses that this is the view of one council only, and that the Regional Organisation of Councils has no agreed position on the proposed change to the definition of thermal treatment.

We encourage the NSW EPA to speak with SSROC further for more information on the council's strong objection.

Changes to exemptions for powering onsite industrial or manufacturing processes

The proposed adjustment to allow proposals to replace liquefied petroleum gas, natural gas, and liquefied natural gas with energy recovery from waste, should be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure environmental outcomes are not

compromised. Greening the gas supply with waste-derived fuels is a logical step since it has lower carbon intensity than conventional natural gas, and would be an improvement provided that it is safe for the public and a better environmental outcome.

Strategic approaches and the role of EfW

The objective of the NSW Energy from Waste Infrastructure Plan released in 2021⁶ was to “guide strategic planning for future thermal energy from waste facilities to ensure infrastructure is located in areas that best address the state’s waste management needs until 2041”. In the Plan, the NSW Government principles guiding energy from waste infrastructure were to ensure that EfW must:

1. “Improve certainty for communities and industry around acceptable locations and facilities
2. “Adhere to the precautionary principle where there is a greater risk of harm to human health due to proximity to high population areas (now and in the future), and in areas where there are regular exceedances of air quality standards from existing sources
3. “Maximise efficiency in infrastructure, waste management, innovation and energy recovery, and like Germany require pre-sorting of waste before incineration.”

SSROC continues to advocate for a 30-year geo-spatial plan for waste infrastructure in Greater Sydney including transfer stations, circular hubs, re-manufacturing plants and the associated transport links and intermodals. The EfW Options Paper does not reference the pending NSW Waste Infrastructure Plan, which might be understood to indicate that these strategies and planned outcomes are being developed in isolation and are not part of a cohesive and coordinated approach.

There are other State-led infrastructure and innovation strategies or planning instruments where waste infrastructure or sustainable waste management is not a focus:

- [NSW Dept of Planning Industrial Lands Action Plan](#) (2025)
- [NSW State Infrastructure Strategy](#) (update 2022) and [Plan](#) (2025)
- [NSW Innovation System Assessment](#), the “Pounder Review” (2025)
- [NSW Housing Strategy 2041](#) (2021)
- [NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap](#) to transition to renewable energy (2020)
- [Greater Sydney Region Plan](#) (2018)

This list shows the NSW Government has missed an opportunity to genuinely appreciate the full arc of City planning across several Departments, or to share infrastructure delivery approaches and give priority to waste infrastructure.

⁶ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Publications/waste/Energy-from-Waste-Infrastructure-Plan>

SSROC and Member Councils have the following reflections about why the NSW Government's approach has not translated into successful residual waste management solutions:

- A principles-based approach to site selection would be more appropriate, and transparency about why these sites were chosen.
- NSW may be far from achieving social tolerance or acceptance of EfW facilities, but if EfW is to be part of the solution for the waste crisis, adequate EfW capacity is required very soon. The NSW Government must lead the discussion and prioritise the delivery of sufficient capacity in the four identified locations, or to identify and prioritise additional suitable locations.
- The Options Paper identifies that thermal treatment of waste is “prohibited in NSW” and any locations that are exempted must “adhere to the precautionary principle where there is greater risk of harm to human health”. Combined with the locations of exempted precincts, this clearly implies low population areas. These statements are reasonable to those who understand the NSW Resource Recovery Framework and the necessary regulation of the sector. But the impact of such statements taken in isolation by the community in general is likely to be concern about the safety of energy recovery facilities, and feeds scepticism from entrenched opposed groups.
- There is a lack of clear communication about trade-offs and transition. If NSW Government is serious about a waste-to-energy future coinciding with – in fact thriving alongside – step changes in circular solutions and sustainable waste management, it must communicate the inter-dependence and resourcing to deliver these commitments. If the waste levy were hypothecated, even partially, to help develop waste and circularity infrastructure, the messaging would be more easily understood by the public and could provide long-term assurance for investment partners.
- Strategically, an EfW solution for residual waste triggers the need for a solution for the management of bottom ash. There has not been a resource recovery order and exemption (RROE) for bottom ash. We understand this may change through the RROE framework review.
- The waste industry is not persuaded that there is a ‘landfill cliff’ or residual waste treatment crisis, and landfill airspace capacity will continue to be approved *just in time*.

Although SSROC supports the right of Council for Richmond Valley to ‘pause its efforts’, as noted in the Options Paper, it is unclear why the withdrawal of the State Significant Development Application should trigger the revocation of the Richmond Valley Jobs Precinct map. If the site is suitable, another proponent should be sought. Revoking the map implies that the site is not suitable, in which case the risk and assessment should be clearly stated so that industry is not led to repeat these missteps. Removing previously-assessed precincts without explanation risks undermining investor confidence.

SSROC 'Community attitudes to EfW' social research (2015)

SSROC conducted social research on community attitudes towards recovering energy from waste⁷ which was a combination of survey and focus groups with communities around the region. The study found that the community understood that landfilling is a non-productive, environmentally harmful waste management practice. The study also found that while the public held itself responsible for waste minimisation, it was open to energy recovery technologies in proximity to the Sydney region.

Findings concluded that the public was generally supportive of paying slightly more for an EfW solution, provided it had assurances about the following:

- Public health and environmental safety protections around the technology.
- Operational efficiency (landfill diversion, odour control, local traffic impacts, beneficial use and recovery of outputs such as bottom ash).
- How EfW fits into the broader waste hierarchy.
- How EfW fits into NSW energy future, and cost control for power bills.
- Whether rebates or financial incentives for communities adjacent to an EfW plant would be available. Rebates were strongly favoured.
- Whether community had access to the EfW site for tours and waste education. Public access to information and site would reassure the community regarding safety and amenity.

The public trusted a small and select cohort to communicate these impacts and assurances. Public figure scientists or academics were 'most trusted' whereas politicians were 'least trusted'. Reviews were mixed on trust for local government or waste industry leaders.

Community ownership in the planning process emerged as an important factor in the study. The public trust would be strengthened if there was a community reference or liaison group, supported by independent experts.

In conclusion, SSROC recommends that if the NSW Government is determined to develop EfW markets, it must develop clear public communications for communities that EfW is a serious consideration to manage waste sustainably without sacrificing the good jobs, businesses and environmental impact of the waste avoidance, reuse and recycling sectors. Public discourse should not be left to Local Government – whether it is supported locally or not – as it is a serious reputational and political risk. In this era of false information and fear, both the National and State communications campaigns could lead a serious conversation reinforced by evidence and experiences overseas.

SSROC encourages the State Government to continue to work across sectors and Departments to prioritise residual waste management as an urgent and critical need,

⁷ *Community attitudes towards, and understanding of, resource recovery in the SSROC region, with a focus on recovering energy from waste* (2015), SSROC Elton Consulting

and to deploy a task force with the commitment and will to deliver. As always, the Local Government sector seeks to be a partner in precinct planning – but will be cautious of cost-shifting or being left out of best practice planning approaches.

SSROC and Member Councils continue to closely follow developments and urge the NSW Government to continue to include Local Government in its public and non-public consultations processes. Please note that although Member Councils have provided information for this submission, it has not yet been endorsed at a formal meeting of SSROC. I will contact you should any issues arise as a result.

If your teams would like a confidential copy of SSROC's *Community Attitudes to EfW* social research (2015), do not hesitate to request a copy.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the discussion. For any enquiries, please contact me by email: ssroc@ssroc.nsw.gov.au, or 02 8396 3800.

Yours sincerely



Helen Sloan
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils