

# Managing e-waste in Victoria

## Starting the conversation – summary of feedback

### Introduction

On 17 September 2015, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) released the discussion paper, *Managing e-waste in Victoria*. The purpose of the discussion paper was to start the conversation about the Andrews Government's commitment to ban e-waste from landfill and to seek further information from those likely to be interested or affected.

A total of 45 submissions were received during our consultation period, all of which will help to inform the identification and design of possible approaches to the ban. This document is a high level summary of these submissions. The full content of each submission will be considered in designing the ban.

### Key findings

Feedback on the discussion paper reflected the range of complex, interlinked issues associated with keeping e-waste out of landfill.

The majority of submissions reflected strong support for a ban, suggesting that, as per the principle of intergenerational equity, it would ensure responsibilities for future impacts of e-waste do not end up with future generations. Many believed that proper implementation of the ban would reduce waste going into landfill, increase recovery of valuable resources, and support jobs and investment in Victoria's resource recovery industry. Other key findings derived from submissions include:

- There is a need for broad consultation in the development of the ban.
- Clear evidence should be used to support any proposed approach.
- Creation of new regulatory measures that overlap or conflict with existing e-waste measures should be avoided.
- There are a range of issues affecting the viability of recycling e-waste in Victoria.
- There are differing views on responsibilities for managing e-waste and the role of product stewardship.

- There is a range of costs and resource burdens that may be imposed on various parties.
- There is a need for education and clear messaging that is consistent across the state.
- There is a need for mandatory minimum standards for the e-waste collection, transport and recycling industry.
- Cheap and easy access to collection points and alternatives to landfill is important.

### Defining e-waste

Clearly defining the types of e-waste will help us tailor and structure the approach to banning e-waste appropriately. There was a lot of input on the definition of e-waste and some of the categories.

Suggestions included:

- Not including in the definition a reference to whether there is an intention to reuse the item, as it is difficult to prove whether or not there was an intention.
- Capturing other items, such as fixed equipment (e.g. hot water services), power distribution equipment (e.g. capacitors), electric lawnmowers, lighting fittings, cabling and wiring, would be beneficial.
- Excluding 'white goods' from the ban, as these were already adequately managed.
- Excluding small 'invaluable' items (e.g. toasters) as the risks and value of these items are believed to be minimal, compared with the effort required to recycle them.
- Creating new categories to separate out certain types of e-waste, such as batteries and lighting, to ensure their management is more tailored.

Some submissions suggested the ban should be as broad as possible. Regardless of what types of e-waste are included in the ban, many reinforced the need for the ban to be clear and easy to understand, and timed to allow the community and industry to adapt.

### Phasing

There were varying responses to the idea of phasing different types of e-waste into a landfill ban. Some submissions supported it, suggesting it would allow time for industry and community to adapt, thus

# Managing e-waste in Victoria

reducing illegal dumping and the flow of e-waste to other jurisdictions that do not have a ban.

A number of submissions cautioned against a phased approach, suggesting it may cause confusion. Others stated that it was not needed, that industry could easily adapt.

## Alignment

In general, submissions advised against creating new regulatory measures that overlap or conflict with existing national or international e-waste measures.

Submissions advised that Victoria work with other Australian jurisdictions to ensure policies were consistent across borders. Submissions also suggested government ensure alignment with broader international and national actions, such as the *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal* (Basel Convention) and the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme, but that we must avoid relying solely on them for results.

Examples of a range of existing successful programs, regulatory frameworks and communication campaigns were offered to provide a useful basis to learn from.

## Market viability

Some submissions stated the international export of e-waste was one issue affecting the viability of recycling e-waste in Victoria. They acknowledged that Australia's implementation of the Basel Convention ensures regulation of this to some extent, but noted it did not prevent the cheaper option of exporting used electronic goods for disposal in developing nations. A number of submissions suggested that there should be more supervision or control over these exports.

Others stated that the full cost of landfills is not reflected in the current landfill levy. As such, disposal to landfill is often the cheapest option for dealing with e-waste when compared with recycling.

In addition, submissions indicated that the existing market for products from the recycling of e-waste did not facilitate a sustainable industry: over the last 18 months, metals and plastics have significantly decreased in value. They suggested that commodity yields and returns may not be sufficient to cover the costs a ban might bring.

A number of submissions advised that an established, mature market for processing technologies and a clear system for collection and sorting were essential before a

ban is implemented. This is to avoid illegal dumping and other inappropriate management of e-waste that would impact the market.

Many submissions suggested that making e-waste market information publically available would facilitate a better understanding for all those involved, particularly by industry and local government, and better inform their involvement in the market.

## Responsibilities and product stewardship

Many submissions advocated for a shared approach to managing e-waste, from design phase of the item to when it is ready to discard.

Other submissions supported an approach that applied the principles of extended producer responsibility, where the producer was responsible for the cost of recycling the product.

Some submissions emphasised the need to adjust the balance of responsibilities, such as increasing the contribution from those involved in production, sale and use of the products and reducing the contribution that those collecting e-waste currently bear.

In the event of a ban, many submissions strongly encouraged that responsibilities and liabilities were shared proportionally between all stakeholders, including manufacturers and retailers. Specifically, some submitters warned against allowing liability to rest unfairly with the landfill operator.

## Costs

All submissions highlighted costs and resource burdens that may be imposed on various parties, depending on how the ban is implemented and the effectiveness of the market at the time of the ban.

Submissions highlighted that local government is likely to require additional infrastructure to manage the extra waste streams and volumes, such as that for receipt, separation, and storage of e-waste. This may be particularly important in regional areas, where transporting and recycling e-waste already has additional, associated costs due to lower volumes and distances.

Submissions noted that if the market and regulation settings are not right, local government may also need to deal with a potential increase in illegal dumping, and costs associated with clean up.

# Managing e-waste in Victoria

Many submissions strongly communicated that costs should not fall entirely to councils and ratepayers. As outlined in the previous section, consideration could be given to distributing these costs across the supply chain.

While many industry submissions welcomed the stability Victoria's e-waste direction should bring, they also highlighted costs resulting from the inclusion of more types of e-waste, such as those associated with operational and infrastructure expansions, with sorting and separation, or with advancements and improvements in technology to capture e-waste components that would otherwise be disposed to landfill.

In general, submissions emphasised the need for government to consider who may bear the range of additional costs that may arise from the ban and consider directing additional funding to these areas, particularly to build the capacity of local government and industry to manage the extra waste streams and volumes before the ban is implemented.

## Education

Overwhelmingly, feedback indicated that the Victorian community would welcome the e-waste ban, suggesting it would reinforce messaging about the need to recycle and reduce the sentiment of disposability of e-waste - particularly if the impacts, hazards and value of e-waste were well understood.

To ensure this, submissions highlighted the need for education and clear and consistent messaging that is supported through structured marketing campaigns. Education, in its various forms (e.g. training, information sessions and guidance materials), would:

- encourage reuse, repair and recycling in the community
- prevent contamination of other waste streams
- reduce illegal dumping
- improve understanding of hazards of e-waste, both in the environment and in the recycling process

Submissions suggested using previous, successful large-scale regulatory changes as models to ensure any new regulations were understood and embraced by all stakeholders.

## Standards and regulations

Submissions explained that mandatory, minimum standards along with adequate, well-designed regulation would:

- deter dangerous stockpiling
- facilitate best practice recycling
- ensure occupational health and safety standards were met
- facilitate better management of hazardous materials
- prevent formation of businesses that offer recycling services that would not result in positive operational, occupational health and safety, and environmental outcomes

Some submitters believed recyclers should be licensed; others supported mandatory reporting by recyclers to track recycling rate.

While many submitters advocated for clear and enforced regulations and standards, they also highlighted the impacts these may have on compliance costs. Some stakeholders warned that, if compliance costs imposed on electrical and electronics suppliers were too high, suppliers may withdraw from the Victorian or national markets.

In general, many submissions noted that any new legislation would need to be proportional to risk and appropriately enforced.

## Affordable, accessible and easy

Submissions suggested that the cheaper and easier it was to access collection points and alternatives to landfill, the more likely e-waste generators were to recycle their used electronic goods and the less likely they were to store or dispose of them inappropriately. Greater use of recycling alternatives by generators would further support industry and the market.

To encourage and stimulate recycling, many submissions recommended offering financial incentives to households, making recycling alternatives more attractive. They also pointed out that consideration needs to be given to increasing accessibility by providing adequate access to aged consumers, those in multi-dwelling buildings, and those with limited transport options.

For more information, to access individual submissions, and to find out what our next steps are, go to our website at <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/e-waste>.

