

Charitable Recycling Sector Feedback National Waste Policy Paper

The Australian Government is to be commended on its commitment to ensure solutions for Australia's recyclable waste becomes a national priority.

The National Association of Charitable Recycling Organisations (NACRO) shares the Australian Government's vision for recycling sustainability through good stewardship of the environment, the wellbeing of Australian communities – and effective recycling innovation.

NACRO represents all of Australia's leading charitable recycling organisations including The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society, Australian Red Cross, UnitingCare Communities, Lifeline, Mission Australia, The Smith Family, Red Nose, Anglicare, RSPCA, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Good Samaritan Industries, Spine and Limb Foundation, Endeavour Foundation, Diabetes, Asthma Australia, Link Vision, City Mission and many others.

In total, 2,500 charitable op shops extend the life of 285 million products annually through 40 million customer transactions, while diverting over 500,000 tonnes of waste away from Australian landfill through both reuse and recycling initiatives.

These 2,500 charity op shops generate \$500 million in revenue that is channelled back into the social welfare programs of the charities to assist tens of thousands of people in aged care services, education programs, emergency/crisis relief, home visits, hospital and health services, hostel accommodation, mental health services, suicide prevention counselling, medical research, prison visits and migrant/refugee assistance. These charities directly support the work of the Australian Government in protecting the health and vitality of our environment and communities.

However, the waste and recycling crisis in Australia is placing a huge financial burden on these charities because they are a target for illegal dumping at their op shop and charity bin locations.

- Charities spend \$13 million¹ on waste management every year because they are forced to deal with the 60,000 tonnes² of waste they receive annually from the public through illegal dumping and 'donations' that have no value, and cannot be reused or recycled.
- Household waste such as furniture, clothes, mattresses and white goods represents 47% of illegally dumped waste, with a quarter of people choosing charity locations to dump waste³.
- These 2,500 charitable op shop locations also present the Australian Government with a massive opportunity to tackle waste by reducing waste to landfill and accelerating reuse and recycling – while also creating profitable social enterprises that employ disabled or disadvantaged Australians and boost regional development opportunities in regional areas.

Three opportunities for affordable and effective Government interventions and investment are presented for discussion in this feedback from NACRO on behalf of the charitable recycling sector.

Opportunities

Working groups with State Governments and NACRO members have identified the three key areas where Government intervention and investment will maximise national outcomes to directly reduce illegal and unintentional dumping, and accelerate reuse and recycling.

Options for Discussion and Government Support

1. Prevention and Security Infrastructure

Infrastructure Grants Fund Program – Co-funded Interventions to Prevent Illegal Dumping

The installation of infrastructure to prevent illegal dumping (outside of receiving areas/business hours) is an integral component of an effective response. Prevention and security infrastructure has been shown to be effective in previous government trials (Behaviour Works, 2014).

- Installation of infrastructure that deters illegal dumping (e.g. fencing, CCTV, signs, sensor lighting or a combination of measures).
- Interventions that charities identify and develop to address their specific needs, based on specific locations, and targeted dumping hot spots.

Self-selection and co-funding by charities will encourage investment in the sites most likely to benefit from interventions. Local knowledge will also inform the type of infrastructure required.

Prevention infrastructure will provide a return on investment for government through landfill avoidance, and for charities through reduced waste management costs.

2. Technology and Process for Reuse and Recycling

Grant Program – Reuse and Recycling Improvement for 2,500 Charitable Recycling Locations

Charities are investing in recycling innovation to tackle the national waste problem, and two examples include Salvos shredding waste textiles to create ‘new’ products and Vinnies repurposing recycled textiles into ‘designer’ tote bags¹. Both are featured in *ABC News* stories on recycling innovation. This is on top of the day-to-day recycling of many other individual waste streams.

The problem is these are either local initiatives or pilots that need to be scaled nationally. An affordable investment from the Australian Government would leverage 2,500 potential charity locations to reduce waste to landfill, increase recycling and at the same time generate employment for disabled or disadvantaged Australians not only in all capital cities, but regional areas as well.

While recovery rates are significant among the larger charities, some regional areas may have no effective recycling initiatives at all so the opportunity is to scale the efficacy of the larger charities, while supporting hundreds of smaller charity locations to begin recycling in local areas nationally.

3. Consumer Education on Illegal Dumping

Pilot Campaigns – Consumer Education on Illegal Dumping and Responsible Donating

A Queensland Government study entitled ‘Does Your Donation Count or Cost?’ identified that 50% of illegal dumping is conducted by unintentional consumers who are not aware of what makes a quality donation.

Ultimately, consumer education is the key to solving the unintentional dumping problem because these consumers are able to be influenced. NACRO, together with Griffith University and the Department of Environment and Science have submitted an ARC Linkages grant application for a pilot to identify the changes in dumping behaviour following different approaches to consumer education. The data will inform the best communications and education approach for efficacy.

There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to accelerate this by funding preliminary research and communications on driving illegal dumping behaviour change through education.

There are three key stakeholder groups:

- Consumers – Encouraging consumers and making it easier for the community to report incidences of illegal dumping will inform regulation and enforcement approaches.
- Councils – Support and consistent messaging from councils is integral to the efficacy of any communications strategies and campaigns to combat illegal dumping.
- Second Hand Market – Engaging key players in the second hand market to encourage more charitable donations can increase product stewardship and reuse, to reduce dumping.

Partnerships could be formed across Australia to ensure consistency with broader litter and dumping interventions and minimise the risk of displacement of dumping to other sites.

Next Steps

NACRO looks forward to assisting the Australian Government engage with the entire charitable recycling sector, in providing solutions to tackle the current problem of 60,000 tonnes of illegally dumped waste at charities, and to scale the capacity of charities to further improve the 500,000 plus tonnes of waste they already divert from landfill through effective reuse and recycling initiatives across 2,500 charity recycling locations nationally.

NACRO would be pleased to be part of a working group and/or provide the Australian Government with any additional data, feedback and recommendations to maximise the effectiveness of the objectives of the National Waste Policy.

NACRO Contact

Omer Soker, CEO, NACRO

- Tel 0401 099 821
- Email omer.soker@nacro.org.au
- PO Box 311, Five Dock NSW 2046

References

¹ ABC News *Charities spending millions cleaning up fast fashion graveyard*

<http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-04/charities-spending-millions-cleaning-up-fast-fashion-graveyard/10328758?pfmredir=sm>

² Waste levy relief data from selected State Government charitable recycling programs in 2018, extrapolated to all other states based on average annual waste received per op shop location.

³ EPA NSW Illegal Dumping Strategy 2017-21, types of illegally dumped waste, as reported by urban and rural local councils. And the location of illegally dumped waste.

[°]Does Your Donation Count or Cost? Understanding donating and dumping behaviours and their impacts for (Queensland) charities. UnitingCare Community, UnitingCare Queensland and the Department of Environment & Heritage Protection, March 2016.