



# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF RECYCLING PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION, 2024–25

25 January 2024

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## About the Australian Council of Recycling

The Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR) is the peak industry body for the resource recovery, recycling, and remanufacturing sector in Australia. The Australian recycling industry contributes almost \$19 billion in economic value, while delivering environmental benefits such as resource efficiency and diversion of material from landfill. One job is supported for every 430 tonnes of material recycled in Australia.

Our membership is represented across the recycling value chain, and includes leading organisations in advanced chemical recycling processes, CDS operations, kerbside recycling, recovered metal, glass, plastics, paper, textiles and e-product reprocessing and remanufacturing, road recycling and construction and demolition recovery. Our mission is to lead the transition to a circular economy through the recycling supply chain.

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## Executive Summary

The Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2024-25 Budget. Key budget measures should include:

1. A National Resource Recovery Framework
2. Strong markets for Australian recycled commodities
3. National action to address the hazard of batteries in waste and recycling streams
4. Product stewardship schemes that deliver genuine recycling outcomes
5. Accreditation for Australian recyclers
6. Building community confidence and knowledge base to 'recycling right'

Recycling is an integral gear within the circular economy, delivering significant social, economic and environmental value. The Australian recycling industry contributes almost \$19 billion in economic value, while delivering environmental benefits such as resource efficiency and diversion of material from landfill. One job is supported for every 431 tonnes of material recycled in Australia. The industry operates across our homes, businesses, factories and construction sites. It collects, sorts and reprocesses material, and makes new products with recycled content, creating more jobs for Australians.

The Australian Government's 2023 wellbeing framework, [Measuring What Matters](#), identified resource use and waste generation as a key parameter for a more healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia. This priority is reflected in the recent, unprecedented investment by government and industry in recycling infrastructure, and the overwhelming public support for resource recovery, recycling, and local remanufacturing.

In the previous financial year, the recycling industry:

- contributed almost \$19 billion to the Australian economy and provided nearly 95,000 jobs;
- delivered a 63.1 per cent recycling rate, processing 40.6 million tonnes of material;
- provided higher average employee livelihoods of \$82,618, compared to the Australian average weekly earnings of \$69,103; and
- grew by 68.8 per cent, compared to Australia's nationwide employment growth of 17.4 per cent.

It is important to distinguish waste management from recycling. While historically, the two sectors were tied as many prominent businesses integrated waste and recycling, in fact these sectors are distinct: waste management is a logistical enterprise, whereas the recycling value chain is production, comprising aggregation and sorting, reprocessing and remanufacturing. These processes are often dependent on effective logistics provided by the waste management sector, which transports and disposes of waste and unwanted materials. But, fundamentally, waste entails pollution and risk, whereas recycling entails resource efficiency, value creation, economic opportunity and circular outcomes.

The right regulatory balance has not yet been struck between mitigating the risks of waste and unleashing the benefits of recovered resources. A national resource recovery framework is required to define and support an 'end of waste', and ensure an efficient, consistent and productive regulatory environment for recycling.

Additionally, it must be recognised that the recycling system is essentially comprised of three key elements: collection, processing, and end markets. Each of these elements is vital for real recycling outcomes—and each must be economically viable. A most pressing priority for recyclers is access to dynamic markets, without which the entire recycling system cannot be viable.

There is much potential for our industry to grow and thrive, supported by a range of very modest Federal budget measures that will not only unlock barriers to recycling, but also deliver jobs, advance resource efficiency and unleash innovation and productivity around the country.

# 1 A National Resource Recovery Framework

**Recommendation 1. Establish an Australian Resource Recovery Board—co-funded by the States and Territories—to deliver an efficient, consistent and effective National Resource Recovery Framework, essential to the transition to a circular economy.**

Right now, there is a groundswell of support for resource recovery and recycling across Australia, with the commitment by all Australian Governments to achieve a circular economy by 2030. Many sectors are actively exploring how they can support progress towards this target, including (but not limited to) food and grocery, packaging, building and construction, fashion, electronic products and agriculture.

This has led to an increasing interest in Australia in the procurement of domestically recycled material; however, reliable supply of such material, at scale, is significantly inhibited by the current regulatory regime for resource recovery and recycling. The main challenges are as follows:

- While the waste management hierarchy objectives are enshrined in legislation across Australian States and Territories to encourage resource recovery and recycling, the mechanisms to lawfully implement such opportunities are the regulatory exception rather than the rule.
- There is a misalignment between environmental protection objectives on the one hand, and circular economy objectives on the other, whereby many recoverable resources are regulated as industrial or regulated wastes that present a contamination risk, rather than prioritised as resource that, with appropriate de-contamination management, presents an economic opportunity and a necessary part of the circular economy supply chain.
- There is a focus on regulation of materials at the ‘end of use’ to address resource recovery and recycling requirements, rather than working across the full supply chain.
- Policy priorities and settings for resource recovery and recycling across Australia are fragmented and uncertain, particularly across industry sectors.
- Industry is not consistently at the table in regulatory decision-making processes, undermining investment confidence and practical solutions.
- Voluntary and regulated product stewardship models are not progressing efficiently or effectively to meaningfully support circular economy objectives.
- Regulatory processes for resource recovery and recycling are not aligned and opportunities to address this via regulatory impact assessments are often not available where this process is not followed. In turn, this creates uncertainty in the regulatory settings which discourages large-scale investment.
- The regulatory imbalance between raw/virgin materials and recovered/recycled materials has stifled circular economy outcomes for waste material. Exploring opportunities to facilitate broader circular economy outcomes would encourage greater investment in the resource recovery and recycling sector.
- The uncertainty and long timeframes associated with the development/redevelopment of resource recovery and recycling facilities has suppressed innovation, increased costs and created significant barriers to entry.
- Inconsistent waste levies across different jurisdictions and between regions result in landfill often being more economical than resource recovery or recycling. The opportunity exists to reform waste levies to more effectively incentivise resource recovery and recycling.

Substantive and structural reform is required to achieve broadly shared circular economy objectives and also unlock the deep decarbonisation opportunities within a well-functioning circular economy.

A necessary step in national reform is the establishment of an Australian Resource Recovery Code Board (ARRCB), based on the model of the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB), to deliver a nationally harmonised framework for resource recovery and recycling.

The proposed ARRCB’s work would be underpinned by a nationally applied definition of ‘end of waste’, to provide certainty about when a material is a resource versus a waste. The proposed ARRCB would also oversee an aligned and consistent approach to product stewardship, including container deposit schemes, with the priority of advancing circular economy outcomes.

The existing ABCB provides a relevant governance model for the proposed ARRCB, as it incorporates several key elements that will be essential in delivering a nationally harmonised, sustainable, economically viable and whole-of-supply-chain approach to resource recovery and recycling. For example, this governance model will:

- provide a stable, nationally harmonised resource recovery and recycling framework to improve investment confidence and growth in the sector, while building community trust and ultimately supporting a balanced regulatory playing field between recovered and raw/virgin materials;
- enable the development of consistent definitions for waste and resource recovery, and incentivise the creation of Australian Standards, which can be reflected into State and Territory legislation;
- appoint industry representatives to the Board to ensure a broad range of perspectives, resulting in practical, economically viable and sustainable measures;
- ensure that regulatory processes for resource recovery and recycling are aligned with best-practice regulation, to support policy stability and encourage innovation and scaled investment;
- inform decision making relating to resource recovery and recycling infrastructure to address approval timeframes for development/redevelopment of facilities;
- determine the application of waste levies across jurisdictions and between regions to incentivise resource recovery;
- operate in parallel with other national bodies, including the ABCB and the National Environment Protection Council, to coordinate management and reuse of construction and demolition waste and waste impacted by contaminants; and
- work with industry, across supply chains, to address circular economy issues and inform product stewardship regulation, as well as strong markets for recycled content.

## 2 Support strong markets for Australian recycled commodities

**Recommendation 2. Urgently intervene to enact a further deferral of the commencement of cost recovery for the waste exports scheme, pending a holistic review of the RAWR Act and its underpinning rules.**

**Recommendation 3. Create economic incentives to support domestic markets for Australian recycled materials, such as tax incentives, subsidies, grants, or differentiated regulatory fees, which can offset the cost difference between recycled and virgin/imported materials.**

Australia’s recyclers are gearing up for a new era of productivity and innovation. There are, however, significant barriers to strong market uptake of recycled material, including cost competitiveness with virgin materials and willingness within the supply chain to embrace change. At the same time, recent regulatory interventions have also impeded access to markets for recycled commodities.

Australia is the only country in the world to have enacted legislation on the export of recycled commodities, through the [Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020](#) (RAWR Act). ACOR supports the objective of promoting waste management in an environmentally sound way, while building Australia’s capacity to turn waste materials into high-value, recycled commodities. However, there are lessons to be learned from Australia’s leadership position relating to waste export.

As it turns out, the [rules](#) that underpin the RAWR Act—particularly as they relate to licensing for the export of processed recycled material—are not fit for purpose. The current approach results in the treatment of manufactured materials as waste, adding cost and delay to the trade of recycled commodities and fundamentally undermining investment in domestic recycling infrastructure, including nearly \$230 million contributed by government through the Recycling Modernisation Fund.

In particular, the current export licensing process is unclear and inefficient, and restricts the trade of Australian recycled polymer commodities. This is a perverse situation, given the unprecedented investment into recycling capability to produce this material, while, at the same time, there are no restrictions on the import of virgin and recycled polymers into Australia.

Furthermore, [the Government’s proposal to introduce fees and levies for exported recycled commodities](#), as a mechanism to recover costs for overseeing the export ban regulations, is in effect an export tax on recycled material.

In 2023, the Australian Government advised that it would delay the commencement of cost recovery for the waste exports scheme until the 2024–25 financial year. ACOR is concerned that the Government has still not clarified the quantum of these costs, which are apparently intended to be applied by 1 July 2024—in less than six months’ time.

Our industry is concerned about the regulatory conflation of waste and recycled commodities, the uneven regulatory playing field between Australian recycled commodities and imported materials, and the prospect of further disrupting the international trade of Australian recycled materials through the imposition of additional fees and charges. All of these elements undermine the recycling sector’s ability to deliver strong circular economy outcomes in a globally connected marketplace.

The RAWR Act is currently under review in the context of product stewardship. A more holistic review must be undertaken, in particular to more clearly define ‘end of waste’ and ensure that recycled commodities are distinguished from waste.

We urge the Australian Government to urgently review regulation relating to the export of high-value recycled commodities, and ensure that no further barriers to the international trade of Australian recycled materials are introduced, specifically no new tax on recycled commodity exports.

### 3 National action to address the hazard of batteries in waste and recycling streams

**Recommendation 4. Support urgent action to address the issue of batteries in waste and recycling streams by:**

- **Developing a catalogue of all items on market known to be causing, or capable of causing, fires in waste and recycling streams, as a first step in redesigning a national e-stewardship scheme.**
- **Launching a comprehensive national awareness-raising and education campaign for all battery formats, led by Recycle Mate, to ensure the public understands the risks of batteries in bins, how to access safe disposal options, and how batteries and e-products can be recycled when disposed of in the right place.**

Batteries—in loose or embedded form—are an increasingly alarming hazard in both kerbside and commercial waste and recycling streams. The recycling and resource recovery sector is overwhelmingly concerned about increasing incidents involving batteries causing property damage, serious injury and death—and resulting in skyrocketing insurance fees and financial assurance requirements.

The rapid digitisation of everyday items, the increasing number of ‘smart’ and ‘disposable’ items such as vapes containing embedded and sealed batteries, and a lack of safe disposal options and poor consumer education, have all contributed to the steep rise in batteries in inappropriate waste streams.

Fires caused by batteries are now widespread across mixed recycling facilities (MRFs), in waste and recycling trucks, and in depots—in short, at every point across collection, disposal and recovery streams. These fires pose great dangers to human health and life and are also damaging to the environment through smoke and polluted runoff. The economic impact of these incidents is being borne by the community through rising rates, by councils through truck fires and future risk, and by industry in the loss of critical infrastructure.

In the year ending 30 June 2023, there were over one thousand [battery-related fire incidents reported](#) in the waste and recycling sectors nationwide, amounting to over three per day. It is unlikely that this figure even begins to reveal the true extent of the battery crisis for recyclers: a lack of accurate data and information on e-waste fires can be traced to under-reporting—as colossal insurance premiums disincentivise operators to report—along with the fragmented regulatory landscape, with eight environmental regulators, eight fire and rescue organisations and almost 550 local councils nationwide.

While the damage caused by batteries is critical, current volumes are only the beginning. The generation of lithium-ion battery waste is projected to grow exponentially over the next 20 years. The Australian Government has identified that lithium-ion, sodium-ion, vanadium flow batteries and others will support the transition to a net zero emissions economy. Batteries are now part of our energy arsenal and everyday lives—and so is their waste. According to [a 2016 report](#) commissioned by the Australian Government’s then-Department of the Environment, lithium-ion battery waste alone is projected to increase exponentially from 3,340 tonnes in 2016 to 137,618 tonnes in 2036.

While issues relating to battery safety reach broadly across society, pointing to an urgent need for battery quality standards, the principal focus of the recycling sector is to address the risks at end of use.

A full account of the challenges and priorities relating to batteries in recycling is outlined in [‘A Burning Issue: Navigating the battery crisis in Australia’s recycling sector’](#), released by ACOR in December 2023.

The Australian Government must work with State and Territory Governments to address safe battery disposal through the following steps:

- Ensuring comprehensive safe collection
- A community education campaign
- E-stewardship reform, including a deposit scheme
- Regulatory harmonisation and enforcement.



The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is currently redesigning the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme (NCRS) with a view to widening the scope of included products, determined by UN codes and HS codes. This aggregation of UN codes and HS codes does not assess whether or not the products listed contain batteries, and does not capture illegal imports, such as vapes.

The potential product scope provided by DCCEEW during consultation in 2023 also did not include e-bikes, [which are posing an increasing risk not only in recycling streams but throughout the community](#).

In assessing the drawbacks of including a larger scope of products in the NCRS, an early issues paper noted that including more products in the scheme 'is likely to increase the amount of embedded batteries at collection sites and increase associated safety (e.g. fire) risks'. However, these products are *already* causing safety risks and fire risks, and the waste and recycling sector is already paying, in danger to workers, and damage to, and loss of, vehicles and infrastructure.

ACOR strongly supports an education campaign to raise necessary awareness around battery and e-waste disposal, however, this will be ineffective without first assessing the scope of products on market and in the community, and ensuring a comprehensive network of collection points exists for their safe disposal.

There is no comprehensive catalogue of items that contain batteries, which pose a hazard in conventional waste and recycling streams: essentially, anything that is a battery, or has a battery, or is powered by a battery, to produce any movement, noise, light or process.

A comprehensive catalogue of these items must be developed to support a sufficiently robust form of categorisation and inform the delivery of a safe disposal network.

Such items include:

- E-cigarettes/vapes
- Household loose batteries, i.e. cylinder, 9volt, lantern and coin
- Household appliances with rechargeable batteries
- Products with removable batteries
- LiPo pouch cells
- Lipo and NCID battery packs
- Emergency locator beacons
- Products with integrated batteries, e.g. flashing toys, Christmas decorations, digital thermometers, musical greeting cards
- Smoke detectors
- Vehicle lead acid batteries: car and boat

The Recycle Mate item catalogue currently lists over 250 different items that are either batteries or products that contain batteries. This catalogue is continually expanding as new community queries arise. A more proactive approach is necessary to identify and list all problematic items, ensuring a more effective means of guiding the community toward safe disposal options.

Once the scope of problematic materials on market is known, these items must be diverted away from conventional waste and recycling streams, collected in a safe manner, and directed towards facilities equipped to process them.

There must be a well-funded and comprehensive public awareness-raising and education campaign, coordinated at a Federal level and co-funded by States and Territories.

ACOR has built a national recycling data hub, Recycle Mate, a first-of-its-kind initiative, created with funding from the Australian Government's Environment Restoration Fund program, and currently supported by the Queensland Government.

The Recycle Mate data hub has been developed as a free resource for every local government, recycling program and charitable organisation across Australia to more easily share information about their recycling programs, disposal locations and product stewardship schemes, and contribute better recycling information for all. Councils and recycling organisations are able to update their recycling information in real-time, as new

collection points and recycling capabilities are introduced. The data contributed through the hub by local councils, the recycling and resource management sector, and private businesses, helps deliver accurate recycling and waste disposal information to the community, specific to their local area and right to their phone.

Recycle Mate has already catalogued recycling information for all Australian local councils, major product stewardship schemes, CDS schemes and over 2,000 community recycling centres, transfer stations and landfills.

The language surrounding battery disposal must also be addressed. The emphasis needs to be on 'safe disposal', rather than 'recycling' of batteries and e-waste. 'Safe disposal' helps emphasise that batteries can be dangerous, whereas people think of 'recycling' as optional. Although not all varieties of batteries can be recycled, it is essential that all batteries are kept out of household and commercial bins and diverted to safe disposal locations.

Furthermore, Recycle Mate's research shows that many members of the community associate the term 'recycling' with their household bins—and are likely not aware of alternative disposal options. To the community, promoting a product as being 'recyclable' can give rise to the expectation that it can be recycled in household bins, where batteries become a major problem.

ACOR joins with the National Waste and Recycling Industry Council [in calling](#) on the Federal Government to pursue a nationwide education campaign for the safe disposal of batteries. Recycle Mate should be the delivery partner for an education campaign and for recycling advice, to avoid duplication of effort assist in making sure different battery formats are directed to the correct locations, and build our collective understanding about community knowledge . With Recycle Mate's data, a targeted, cost-effective, evidence-based education campaign could be rolled out across Australia, in collaboration with the relevant schemes with up-to-date information on collection points and particular focus on areas with high incorrect disposal rates.

## 4 Product stewardship schemes that deliver genuine recycling outcomes

**Recommendation 5. Ensure that mandatory, co-regulated and voluntary product stewardship schemes deliver genuine recycling outcomes through the establishment and resourcing of a convener to facilitate engagement between product stewardship schemes and the recycling sector.**

The introduction of the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020* provided for the establishment of voluntary, co-regulatory and mandatory product stewardship schemes.

Supported by a strong consumer interest, the Australian Government has since prioritised both mandatory and co-regulatory product stewardship schemes, and allowed the use of the Government logo to further the recognition and credibility that government accreditation affords. The establishment of many government-accredited schemes has been spurred by the [Minister’s product stewardship priority list](#), which identifies products lacking circular or recycling solutions at their end of use.

Recyclers strongly support moves to place greater responsibility on producers and distributors for the lifecycle of their goods. Product stewardship and extended producer responsibility can be an effective way to ensure recyclability and proper funding for recycling efforts.

Many product stewardship schemes outline general objectives relating to circularity, such as sustainable materials, designing out waste, research and development, and education. However, eventually, all products produced or imported into Australia end up in the Australian waste stream—including those materials banned from export over the last few years. Onshore recycling and the creation of markets for recycled materials must therefore be an overarching priority across all product stewardship initiatives.

Given the volume of material currently diverted to landfill, a more concerted effort is required to support investment in genuine recycling outcomes. Furthermore, the recycling sector is concerned that some existing product stewardship schemes are not delivering robust recycling outcomes, while future schemes are being established without the correct drivers in place to deliver effective resource recovery.

Common issues which serve to undermine recycling investment include:

- underfunding for recycling (or the assumption that recycling is cheap or free),
- lack of prioritisation and meaningful support for end markets for recycled materials,
- prioritisation of scheme administration over resource recovery and recycling outcomes,
- prioritisation of product stewardship schemes over other effective policy and regulatory levers,
- the proliferation of multiple schemes, with diverse governance structures, operations, priorities and outcomes, resulting in inefficiency and consumer confusion,
- lack of accountability and transparency, and
- conflicts of interest in governance and a lack of representation across the entire supply chain—with a focus on brand owners rather than collectors, recyclers or purchasers of recycled products.

Poorly designed product stewardship schemes can enable greenwashing and do more harm than good by slowing momentum, with strong marketing concealing ineffectual activities. All too often, schemes fail to deliver effective and transparent outcomes for the communities that essentially fund them, and drive down resource recovery outcomes by prioritising cost reduction over performance.

Scheme administrators often prioritise the establishment of a scheme as an end in itself, with the bulk or entirety of the funding dedicated to administration, rather than recycling. This emphasis leads to inefficiencies in collection, aggregation, and overall administration, particularly in crossover markets, by focusing on advancing producer priorities over those of the entire supply chain. In treating schemes as standalone objectives, administrators can also create duplicative systems.

The priority of genuine recycling outcomes must be more strongly established in the stewardship conversation, to enable more inclusive, effective and efficient implementation of product stewardship in

Australia, delivering value to brand owners, government, community and recyclers—and supporting genuinely positive environmental outcomes.

The recycling industry takes on market risk, legislative risk, investment risk and operating risk to achieve recycling outcomes, within product stewardship schemes that often do not sufficiently address these risks, leading to sub-optimal recycling outcomes. When schemes do engage with recycling activities, the focus is overwhelmingly on processing, and collection—the public-facing, marketable element. Schemes generally underinvest in, or ignore, demand generation for recycled material. It is essential that the focus is shifted from supply-side to demand-side outcomes.

Many schemes frustrate higher-order recycling outcomes by compounding a disconnect between manufacturers and recyclers, rather than fostering partnership. This divide persists partly because manufacturers are hesitant to bear the entire expense of recycling, especially considering the higher costs of recycling within Australia, where manufacturing itself faces significant cost challenges. This hesitation impedes the symbiotic relationship crucial for effective recycling practices.

As product stewardship schemes proliferate there is an urgent need for a framework to establish best practice and minimum standards, that incorporates the recycling value chain, and which supports strong end markets for recycled content. Product stewardship schemes must establish robust governance that encompasses the entire recycling supply chain, with a central inclusion of recyclers.

Scheme Boards must include representatives and expertise from all stages of a circular supply chain, with equal decision-making powers and formal channels to provide expertise. After all, recyclers—rather than product manufacturers—are the unequivocal experts in the field of recycling. Recycling industry Board representation should be proportionate to the operational costs borne for the actual recycling of the waste stream.

To accomplish this, funding should be made available for a recycling sector expert convenor to engage with product stewardship schemes and ensure that genuine outcomes are achieved through government accredited schemes. As the peak body for resource recovery, recycling and remanufacturing in Australia, ACOR is best positioned to facilitate engagement with subject matter experts and leaders in the sector and provide guidance and board directors to schemes.

## 5 Accreditation for Australian recyclers

### **Recommendation 6. Fund the implementation of an independent Australian Recyclers Accreditation Program (ARAP).**

Australia's recycling sector is undergoing a transformation, with unprecedented government and industry investment and overwhelming public support for resource recovery, recycling and local remanufacturing.

The [National Waste Policy Action Plan](#), which aims to support Australia's circular economy, has spurred momentum in the sector by implementing bans on the export of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres; targeting an increased resource recovery rate; and committing governments and industry to significantly increase the use of recycled content.

As recyclers evolve and transition to a more circular economy, there is a need to support better practice across industry and improve confidence in recycling outcomes. Recyclers have a very broad range of capabilities and practices across the sector, and those engaged in poor practices can affect the reputation of the entire industry.

At the same time, it can be difficult for stakeholders to distinguish waste operations from recycling activities, or good from poor practices, leading to increasing demand for generic third-party performance and outcome verification.

Additionally, amid the growing suite of mandatory and voluntary product stewardship initiatives rolling out across Australia, schemes can prioritise cost reduction over recycling outcomes, contracting with cheap and non-compliant operators. Recyclers striving for full compliance operate at a competitive disadvantage to these operators, creating an uneven playing field.

Conflicts of interest also arise when product stewardship schemes create their own accreditation systems. These accreditation systems sometimes involve self-reports, which can go unchallenged, even when issues are flagged by the ACCC.

An accreditation program for recyclers will deliver value to industry, government, and the community by providing confidence to stakeholders that accredited recyclers are operating legitimately; are at, or moving towards, best practice; and are proactively meeting appropriate quality outcomes suitable for the recycling sector.

Therefore, a key priority for the recycling sector is the delivery of an Australian Recyclers Accreditation Program (ARAP), a national accreditation program available to all recyclers.

The ARAP will establish an objective, consistent and efficient process for assessing a recycling operator's performance, providing assurance around the legitimacy of recycling operations.

The ARAP would be an independently governed program, ensuring transparency and accountability. As a site-based accreditation program, it will offer confidence and reassurance to the community.

In 2021, the Australian Government supported a feasibility study into the establishment of the ARAP, which identified that the implementation phase should be federally funded, after which it would be self-sustained through a user-pays approach. This development to date means the ARAP could be implemented within a short timeframe of 6-12 months.

## 6 Build community confidence and knowledge base to ‘recycling right’

**Recommendation 7. Provide appropriate funding to foster collaboration and restore community confidence to ‘recycle right’ through the national education tool Recycle Mate, generating higher recycling participation nationally, and delivering more data to Government on the recycling capabilities and community behaviours across Australia.**

The Australian recycling industry is dynamic as investment and innovations are creating new opportunities, or in some instances as programs are discontinued. However, community recycling knowledge can remain static when people do not know where to look for new information or if they lack motivation because they have become sceptical of the process or are uncertain about the value of recycling. People often exhibit the behaviour they first learnt about recycling or make a snap decision at the bin, which can result in contamination or lost resources.

Australia has a complex array of kerbside and away from home resource recovery systems, influenced by various factors such as geography, demographics, council resources, infrastructure discrepancies, access to markets and the growth in product stewardship and other social enterprise schemes. Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach does not accommodate the current complexities of recycling and circular economy efforts in Australia.

Different recycling information and rules are being delivered to the community by over 500 local councils, state governments, professional recyclers, product stewardship schemes, state container deposit schemes (CDS), charities and social enterprises, environmental organisations, community groups and more. This results in enormous duplication of effort, mixed messages and often incorrect information, which can fuel recycling myths. Blanket statements and ill-positioned advertising that are not reflective of local recycling practices or not responsive enough to address community queries can also contribute to confusion and poor recycling behaviours.

Recycle Mate is an ACOR initiative, which commenced with the development of a first-of-its-kind recycling app, supported by the Federal Government under the [National Waste Policy Action Plan](#), action 2.17–‘Develop and launch a recyclability app to support community participation and reduce contamination rates in municipal solid waste’. It has now grown to be a national recycling (and broader resource recovery) database and education platform, that allows every organisation involved in resource recovery to collaborate in providing the community with the best possible information anywhere in Australia—including all levels of government, professional recyclers, charitable organisations, social enterprises, community repair cafés, brands and more.

The Recycle Mate national recycling data hub allows all participating organisations to update their recycling information in real-time, as new collection points, and recycling capabilities are established. The Australian community is then able to access this information accurate to their location via the Recycle Mate app and linked platforms to quickly learn how best to dispose of an item—whether that is reuse, recycling, safe disposal or landfill.

Recycle Mate has already catalogued recycling information for 7,500+ searchable items, across all Australian local council areas, over 30,000 away from home disposal locations, major product stewardship schemes including CDS and over 2,000 community recycling centres, transfer stations and landfills. Plans for QR code and barcode scanning capabilities are currently under development to further enhance item identification and user experience.

With initial funding support from the Australian Government’s *Environment Restoration Fund* program, and currently supported by the Queensland Government and the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO), Recycle Mate provides one collaborative, national platform to which everyone can contribute information and data to help get the community the best possible recycling information—for free.

In the two years since the national roll-out of Recycle Mate, it is becoming increasingly evident that the real value in the program is the collaborative platform and the data. Recycle Mate has meticulously curated Australia's largest resource recovery and recycling dataset, focusing on a granular level of data collection with a goal to answer any community recycling question, anywhere in Australia.

With the solid base and extensive stakeholder involvement now established, additional resourcing would allow the Recycle Mate initiative to be expanded to support recycling education beyond household waste. There is keen interest in rolling out the program to different organisation's waste and recycling systems, for use in commercial and government buildings, public places, multi-unit dwellings, aged-care facilities, schools and more.

With appropriate resources, Recycle Mate has the data to build interactive heat maps against population density to illustrate community access to safe disposal and recycling options for items either not suitable for kerbside collection or which have more positive away from home recovery options—like soft plastics. The data when mapped identifies where there are gaps in community access to recovery options to help inform future federal and state policy and legislative considerations.

The data collected through the Recycle Mate data and user analytics presents an opportunity for the Australian Government to be at the forefront of national data collection on recycling behaviours and capabilities.