



DISCUSS

Safe, Resilient and Efficient Recycling System in Victoria *The Circular Economy Explained*

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In January 2018, China imposed strict quality standards on the import of recyclable materials, including paper and plastic. This had substantial impacts on global recycling systems and markets including in Victoria.

In July 2018 the Victorian Government released their *Recycling Industry Strategic Plan*, which provides a blueprint for a safe, resilient and efficient recycling system in Victoria.

The implementation of the plan is supported by a \$37 million package of initiatives that will be delivered over three years. The development of a circular economy policy and action plan by 2020 is an action under this plan.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP) also published a public consultation forum focused on [shifting Victoria to a Circular Economy](#).

With ASPIRE working within the Circular Economy space, one of the first questions I ask, is, do you know what a Circular Economy is? The answer is, there is no single definition of Circular Economy, instead there is a series of continuous efforts for everyone to work toward a sustainable future.

The Victorian Government's proposed definition of Circular Economy:

"A circular economy continually seeks to reduce the environmental impacts of production and consumption and gain more productive use from natural resources.

Resource use is minimised, and waste and pollution are avoided with good design and efficient practices. This reduces environmental impacts while maintaining or increasing the value people obtain from goods and services.

Products are designed so that they are durable and can be readily repaired, reused and recycled at the end of their lives.

Business models encourage intense and efficient product use, like sharing products between multiple users or supplying a product as a service that includes maintenance, repair and disposal.

Innovations to increase resource productivity bring a range of benefits including jobs, growth and social inclusion to local, regional and global economies."

As this definition is in line with similar definitions around the globe, Aspire suggests more of a focus needs to be on digital innovations to make recycling easier and more guidance on the "how" for councils and businesses to work towards a Circular Economy and close the loop at a local level.

Every citizen can do their part at home as well as in the workplace, and education for sustainable practices focusing on circular behaviours is an imperative.

If you are not in the waste/ recycling/ repurpose industry, it is fair to assume that the understating of what you can do for a behavioural shift may be limited. This is where education for "best practice" needs to be emphasised and driven through community engagement. Supplying communities with mechanisms as simple as providing multiple bins, that create clean resource streams for minimal contamination.

When it comes to Small to Medium Enterprises (SME's) and their changed waste management practices, we need to supply them with the tools that make the shift easy.

These businesses are massive contributors to the states GDP but they are also a major contributor to Co2 emissions and landfill deposits.

Their needs to be focus on supporting business growth through B2B collaboration and partnerships for positive community outcomes. Looking at digital technologies and innovative tools can assist local councils and states with direct and effective connection with their local businesses.

SME's would welcome incentives like rebates or tax cuts for implementing innovative supply chain solutions rather than using virgin materials. There are Research and Development tax rebates, however, they are getting smaller and harder to obtain.

The state government has made a considerable effort in recognising achievable outcomes through funding for recycling and sorting solutions and deserve credit. However, there is limited finance for projects providing real digital solutions for businesses and for programs that have "new" and innovative ideas for commercialisation.

One on one grants are great, but the matched funding is a barrier for these solutions to ever see the light of day. Innovative ideas need to be capitalised and shared among the SME and local government communities. Looking at a "shared value" approach for outcomes needs to be a key driver for sustainable business practices.

Effort needs to be focused on the redirection of productivity in the value chain to assist with closing the loop and a shift towards a Circular Economy.

It is yet to be seen what the Circular Economy Policy impacts will be for councils and SME's within these regions but one thing that we can bank on is that in years to come we will all be better off with this shift.

An obvious step forward is for councils to review and increase recycled content into their procurement strategies. DEWLP and SV are leading this shift in recycled content in local government procurement. We need to keep a watching brief to see how it is implanted into the local government sector.

The conversation and action on safe, resilient and efficient recycling systems in Victoria is critical as it is Australia and world-wide. Aspire will continue to inform and inspire change.

ASPIRE, in partnership with the VLGA will be running information sessions on the impact of the Circular Economy to councils once the policy is announced later in 2019.

For more information please contact [Cameron McKenzie](#)

ASPIRE was developed by the CSIRO through a pilot program.

ASPIRE (Advisory System for Processing, Innovation & Resource Exchange) is a digital tool supporting a social business network, deployed across a region. ASPIRE extends beyond passive digital systems, where information is posted by 'sellers' online for potential 'buyers'. It goes one step further than a passive waste exchange by actively suggesting business collaborations. ASPIRE has been developed in response to manufacturing companies talking to their local councils about waste disposal costs.

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