

Reiterating the roadmap to rescue our recycling system

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The latest challenges facing SKM again highlight the ongoing vulnerability of Victoria's recycling industry, which has faced three crises in the past 18 months.

In March the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) released a Rescue Our Recycling Action Plan identifying solutions and actions needed by all three levels of government. We stand by this plan as a roadmap to stabilise and strengthen Victoria's waste and resource system.

At the Federal level, we need the introduction of mandatory product stewardship for all products that generate waste – to influence and encourage designers and manufacturers to create products that generate no or minimal waste.

The Commonwealth also has the power to regulate or ban production and importation of hard-to-recycle materials, standardise package labelling and adopt a certification system for use of recycled content.

At the State level, we acknowledge the work the Victorian Government is leading to identify longer-term solutions and welcome the release of a circular economy issues paper, as well as the series of State reviews underway.

Victoria has three large recycling providers. Consideration must also be given as to how the State can improve transparency and accountability of industry, particularly through greater oversight and regulation.

The MAV Action Plan also commits councils to support market development by purchasing recycled content and investigating collaborative procurement opportunities with the Victorian Government for kerbside recycling.

If well-managed, collaborative procurement has the potential to facilitate new private investment in our recycling system, but this fix is at least 18 months away and only time will tell if this outcome is realised.

Cr Coral Ross, MAV President said Victoria's recycling system had limited spare capacity to support the system in case of a single point of failure.

"The current situation has little to do with council contracts and a lot to do with an industry player not meeting its obligations, and not operating with accountability and transparency.

"The failure of SKM to manage its business interests and communicate with its customers (including councils) is disappointing and points to the need for greater oversight and regulation of the industry.

"In the immediate short-term, we need the State to work with industry to bolster sorting capacity at various facilities so that we don't lurch from one crisis to the next.

"Councils also seek access to data on Victoria's recycling facilities, such as their processing and storage capacity, and their markets for recycled materials to help to inform contract decision-making.

"Collection of this data requires stronger independent oversight of the recycling industry – so they operate with more transparency and accountability – rather than relying on the word of individual operators.

"Our focus remains on building partnerships between all levels of government, industry, businesses and the community to deliver solutions and actions that strengthen our recycling system.

"We all have a role to play. First and foremost we must avoid generating waste. Then we need to reduce, reuse and recycle – in that order – rather than just focus on recycling," she said.

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