

## Yarra's Waste and Recycling Strategy Review

### Waste and Recycling in Yarra – or a Circular Economy?

December 2025

The survey on how Yarra can improve waste management has closed, but it's important that Councillors hear your ideas as they decide on our new Waste Management Plan. Here's some ideas for you to consider – if you agree let your Councillors know! They'll be discussing the proposal before it comes to a formal Council meeting, so keep talking to them.

For years, YCAN has lobbied Council (and state and federal governments) to adopt waste and recycling practices that are in line with evidence-based climate action. Integral to this is working towards a Circular Economy strategy that will include waste and recycling issues, but takes a broader approach, as in Yarra's Climate Emergency Plan 2024-30: **Yarra is transitioning to a circular economy by consuming less, repairing, sharing, and repurposing more, and sending less waste to landfill (Transformation 7).**

Moving to a circular economy is critical to acting on the climate emergency. A circular economy revolutionizes our current 'make-use-dispose' model, instead seeing resources, materials and products as designed to last, and be shared, repaired, reused and recycled. This model mirrors natural systems, reduces emissions, avoids use of unnecessary materials, and reduces waste and new inputs needed.

See here for more on Circular Economy Strategy compared with Waste and Recycling Strategy

**Circular Economy Strategy:** Resources, materials and products are designed to last, be shared, repaired, reused and recycled. This model mirrors natural systems, reduces emissions, avoids use of unnecessary materials, and reduces waste and new inputs needed.

#### Goals:

- Reduce resource consumption and waste generation.
- Promote sustainable practices and innovation.
- Foster economic growth while minimizing environmental impact.

#### Principles:

- Design for longevity: Products are designed to be durable and repairable.
- Resource recovery: Emphasizes the recovery of materials and energy from products at the end of their lifecycle.
- Systems thinking: Considers the entire lifecycle of products, including their impact on the environment and society.
- Business model innovation: Encourages new business models such as product-as-a-service, where products are leased rather than sold.

**Waste and Recycling Strategy:** focuses on managing waste through collection, processing, and recycling to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. It is often a reactive approach to waste management. Primarily concerned with the end-of-life treatment of products and materials, aiming to divert waste from landfills through recycling and composting.

#### Goals:

- Reduce the volume of waste sent to landfills.
- Increase recycling rates and improve waste management practices.
- Ensure compliance with waste management regulations.

## Principles:

- Waste hierarchy: Prioritises waste prevention, followed by reuse, recycling, recovery, and disposal as a last resort.
- Collection and processing: Involves the logistics of collecting waste materials and processing them for recycling.
- Public participation and awareness: Encourages community involvement in recycling efforts and education about waste management.

## Key Differences

**Scope:** Circular economy is a holistic approach encompassing product design, resource management, and business models, while waste and recycling strategy focuses primarily on managing waste at its end-of-life stage.

**Proactivity vs. Reactivity:** Circular economy promotes proactive measures to prevent waste creation, whereas waste and recycling strategy often reacts to existing waste challenges.

**Economic Model:** Circular economy encourages innovation in business practices and economic models, whereas waste and recycling strategies typically operate within existing economic frameworks focused on waste management.

---

**Advocacy:** Local governments have limited opportunity to make many of the changes required to improve waste and consumption issues, but they can and must strongly advocate to federal and state governments to shift policy towards a circular economy. Here's some issues ripe for advocacy:

- **Deposit-return schemes** should be expanded and harmonised nationwide. In Europe these programs routinely recover over 90% of containers, compared with less than 60% for kerbside recycling.
- **Stronger regulation:** Extended producer responsibility laws requiring producers and retailers to fund collection and processing infrastructure, rather than leaving costs to local councils and ratepayers.
- **Regulate production of virgin plastics** to make recycled materials competitive. Without capping output of new plastic, recycling markets will always be flooded with cheaper raw material. That makes it impossible to create a circular economy. See what NSW is doing on plastics: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Your-environment/Plastics/plastics-plan-20>

## Don't Incinerate our waste! it makes things worse.

The Council survey asked whether residents think Yarra City Council should investigate using Waste to Energy (WtE) facilities as an alternative to landfill.

WtE technologies are promoted by the industry as environmentally friendly and a source of 'green renewable energy'. The truth is Waste incinerators are a polluting, expensive and unsustainable technology that undermines zero waste strategies (such as recycling and composting) and stifles innovation in the waste management and energy sectors.

Burning resources and creating toxic pollution, whether for energy generation or waste management disposal, makes no sense if we are serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change.

This link lists 10 reasons why burning waste for energy is a bad idea.

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=EXH-49547220%2120221215T030220.131%20GMT>

**Incentives:**

- make the cost of waste management (collection frequency, volume, type of waste) clear to ratepayers and residents, so they see the benefit in better management
- Include financial incentives to reduce waste in setting charges e.g. a flat charge with options for smaller bins at lower cost, less frequent collections of some bins in some local areas, sharing bins. Rates can be adjusted for low-income households, while retaining incentives e.g. for reducing volume and more recycling/reusing
- Develop incentives for business
- 

**Education** - Continually engage with the community via witty, entertaining communication.

- We still don't know the right thing. "Which bin do I put this in? What do I do with corks?"
- Show us what happens to the stuff in our bins.
- Encourage shopping at markets. Gleadell Street market is plastic free
- Don't say rubbish. 'Landfill' describes it more accurately, which leads to this idea:
- 'War on Waste' was successful in raising awareness.
- 

**Specific ideas:**

Fortnightly general waste collection. Save money, emissions, noise. We don't need weekly collections now we have separate bins for recycling, glass and food and organic waste.

Monthly glass bin collection, and the option for sharing glass bins