



National Textiles Reuse Policy Briefing Paper: A Coordinated Approach to Textiles Reuse

Key Points:

Charitable Recycling Australia (formerly NACRO) is calling for a Federal Government endorsed national policy approach to the reuse of textiles, to ensure that reuse of this precious resource is prioritised in the emerging circular economy.

Charitable Recycling Australia's vision is an Australia that champions the circular economy, sends zero waste to landfill, and, in doing so, creates a better future for all Australians. As the peak body that drives and supports a collective network of 3,000+ charity and social enterprise retailers as leaders in reuse, recycling and circularity, Charitable Recycling Australia is uniquely positioned to offer the Government a scalable and highly effective solution to increasing textiles reuse – with a focus on clothing.

Our recommendations are for the Government to invest in the following areas:

1. Collaboration on national data collection initiatives
2. Prioritisation of reuse within existing government policy
3. Support for market initiatives to increase reuse
4. Support for public education initiatives to improve the quality and quantity of textiles reuse in Australia

Background:

Charitable reuse and recycling enterprises have been the pioneers of the Circular Economy for 140 years, since the first Australian op shop launched in 1880 with the then progressive name of a 'Recycling Depot'. Since then, 285 million products a year are given a second life through reuse in op shops through 40 million consumer transactions to underpin Australia's second-hand economy.

3,000+ charity and social enterprise outlets with a 10,000 strong charity donation bin network, already divert more than 643,000 tonnes away from landfill, including an estimated 48% of this being textiles through reuse, recycling and resource recovery. Charitable Recycling Australia members work with commercial exporters to divert 73,000 tonnes of clothing, toys and bric-a-brac for reuse and resale in export markets every year, and in achieving exceedingly high resource recovery rates (anecdotally of up to 70-90%). Members also play an important role in supporting community-led initiatives to repair, upcycle and refurbish second-hand items through repair cafes.

However, outside of the charitable reuse and recycling sector, between 300,000 and 600,000 tonnes of clothing and textiles are still sent to landfill each year by Australian consumers and businesses, with only 88,000 being reused for a resource recovery rate of just 12% .

The charitable reuse sector presents the Government with a massive scalable opportunity to:

- Extend the life cycle of clothing textiles through reuse in charitable op shops and the second hand economy.
- Divert clothing textile waste from landfill by encouraging donations into the charitable sector system through the national collection network of stores and charity bins.
- Collect a critical mass of raw material suitable for recycling.
- Leverage the existing sorting and logistics capabilities of the sector.

We welcome the opportunity to present the Minister with our recommendations below and look forward to working closely on their development and implementation.

Recommendations:

1. Data Collection

Data collection is of critical importance to developing effective resource recovery initiatives. Charitable Recycling Australia is already working to ensure up-to-date and accurate data can be collected about reuse activity in Australia. We are currently working on an Australian Research Council project to measure the contribution of charitable reuse to the circular economy. We are also engaging with a waste-management consultancy to gather detailed information on the social, environmental and economic impacts of textile reuse and recycling in Australia. We would welcome Federal government involvement in our data collection initiatives and invite the Minister to work in collaboration with Charitable Recycling Australia to ensure that government is able to accurately capture the scale, impact and value-for-money of reuse.

Our key recommendations are:

- Prioritise the collection of reuse data in upcoming versions of the National Waste Account and National Waste Report .
- Support the collection of national-level textiles reuse data through Charitable Recycling Australia by collaborating on, and co-funding, a national reuse reporting portal.
- Ensure that adequate support and resourcing is provided to enable reuse facilities (including op shops and tip shops) to collect and provide reuse data as recommended in Expansion 3 of the report 'Improving National Waste Data and Reporting' (30 March, 2018).

2. Policy Settings

There are a number of Federal Government policies and initiatives that have benefited the charitable reuse and recycling sector, and Charitable Recycling Australia commends the recent efforts to develop a comprehensive and nationally harmonised direction for resource recovery policy, including the Waste & Recycling Inquiry Roundtable on Textiles, the Product Stewardship Investment Fund and the Centre of Excellence initiatives.

We believe that there are a number of amendments and updates to existing policy frameworks that, if implemented, will drive an increase in textiles reuse and recovery across Australia.

Our key recommendations are:

- For the Government to endorse a multi-stakeholder national policy to get textiles out of landfill and extract the maximum value from the reuse of clothing textiles in Australia.
- Extend the exemption of donated second-hand goods from Goods and Services Tax (GST) to include circumstances where the goods have been altered through repair, upcycling and other processing methods intended to maximise landfill diversion.
- Update the National Waste Policy Action Plan to target a national textile reuse rate of 50% by 2030, with charitable reuse being the primary vehicle for achieving this target. Consider creating specific targets for item reuse to support overall resource recovery rates following the waste hierarchy.
- Building on action 2.7 in the National Waste Policy Action Plan, engage community-based reuse, repair and recycling centres as partners in achieving the goals of the National Waste Policy. Support the scaling-up of existing initiatives and the piloting of new initiatives through a dedicated grant-funding program.

3. Market Initiatives

Charitable Recycling Australia believes that the Product Stewardship Act is the ideal vehicle for instituting national-scale reuse of consumer textiles, and that Federal Government support for a collaborative scheme is the best way to achieve an increase in textiles reuse. Such support and guidance was instrumental in the development of previous successful schemes.

As such, we invite the Minister to provide support and resources for the development of a product stewardship approach for textiles with reuse as a fundamental priority.

Our key recommendations are:

- List clothing and post-consumer textiles as a priority product class under the Product Stewardship Act in the 2021-2022 review.
- Investigate the potential for product labelling information on reusability and average useful life for imported and domestically manufactured textiles.
- Investigate the creation of additional textile donation points on government land, Container Deposit Scheme locations, commercial shopping centres, and on public rail transport networks for Charitable Recycling Australia's initiatives with the commercial reuse sector.
- Flag fast fashion and workwear/uniforms as priority areas where big quick wins can be made.
- Amend Division 3 of the Product Stewardship Act to require that projects and initiatives subject to regulation under the Act, including Voluntary schemes, prioritise waste avoidance and reuse, followed by recycling and energy recovery.
- Support NACRO's collaboration between the charitable (and commercial) textile reuse sector, clothing retailers and importers, the domestic fashion industry, and international stakeholders to design and implement a Clothing Textiles Product Stewardship Scheme under an application to the Product Stewardship Investment Fund.

- Consider placing a ban on the destruction of new, unsold and returned clothing by retailers and importers.

4. Education

Charitable Recycling Australia is supportive of the shift in government policy and language that has occurred in recent years, from treating post-consumer goods and materials as waste, to treating them as a resource.

We also note the ongoing success of consumer-education initiatives to reduce litter and waste and believe that the expansion of such initiatives could significantly increase the volume of consumer textiles being reused.

Our key recommendations are:

- Use clothing as a unique opportunity to educate Australians on circular economy principals in terms they can easily understand and engage with.
- Encourage consumers and fashion brands to donate excess stock to the charitable reuse sector, and to Charitable Recycling Australia endorsed collaborations with selected organisations in the commercial reuse sector.
- Ensure that textiles donated to charities are consistently defined in Government policy and communications as a 'resource' as opposed to 'waste'.
- Ensure that donation activity is consistently defined in Government policy and communications as 'reuse' as opposed to 'recycling'.
- Provide material support for nationally coordinated consumer education programs on the impacts of domestic and international textiles reuse
- Provide material support for additional consumer education targeting donation quality and responsible reuse practices.

Next Steps:

Through a combination of data collection, policy settings, market initiatives and education, NACRO is confident in the charitable reuse sector's ability to dramatically increase the scale of textiles reuse.

Our proposed approach will contribute significantly to waste reduction targets, while generating funds to provide much-needed social and environmental programs across Australia.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional details on any of our recommendations, including initial costings for national reuse data collection and consumer education initiatives.

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