



Building Canberra's Circular Economy: draft ACT Circular Economy Strategy 2022-25

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

The ACT Government aspires to be a thriving and equitable city that respects the limits of our planet. This requires us to transition from our current linear system of 'take, make, dispose' towards a circular economy where resources remain within the economy for as long as possible.

Through the draft *ACT Circular Economy Strategy 2022-25*, we consulted with the community on the environmental, social and economic benefits of a circular economy. We also sought feedback on how government, business and the community can take the first steps toward a more circular economy, with a focus on five key areas:

1. Food and organics
2. Built environment
3. Consumer goods
4. Emerging and problematic waste streams
5. Creating space to showcase our commitment to the circular economy.

The consultation shows there is support and momentum for a circular economy in the ACT and both the community and local businesses want the ACT Government to support future circular initiatives through the development of appropriate legislation, policy, and funding initiatives.

THE CONVERSATION

For six weeks between 27 October and 8 December 2022, we asked the community to comment on the draft *ACT Circular Economy Strategy 2022-25*.

We shared information online through YourSay, conducted an online survey and engaged with the community through social media posts and publications in the Canberra Business Update e-newsletter. We also received 35 written submissions from the community, industry and business groups.

WHO WE ENGAGED

Industry bodies, businesses, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups and ACT residents engaged with the draft strategy.

There were good levels of engagement online through the YourSay survey, including over 160 responses from both the community and business, as well as through written submissions.



Key insights from the consultation

Key overarching themes

1. The ACT community and businesses are already actively participating in activities consistent with a circular economy and want further opportunities to reduce waste and live more sustainably but need support from the ACT Government.
2. The community noted any increase in circular economy activities needs to be supported by the ACT Government through the development of appropriate legislation, policy and funding initiatives. Businesses and industry need support to reduce financial and logistical barriers and ensure participation of relevant community and business sectors.
3. Respondents noted it was necessary to champion and create end markets for recycled products to encourage industry participation. It is important to focus on ensuring products are recycled as many times as possible, with an emphasis on recycling to a high-value end product (which has market demand) rather than producing reduced quality products (i.e., 'downcycling').
4. The community expressed that circular economy initiatives including education campaigns need to be informed by appropriate data and metrics. Respondents indicated this is a role for government and includes a Territory wide audit to identify what recycling technology exists (i.e. what can and cannot currently be recycled) to inform industry innovation and investment in new technologies.
5. Improved transparency around how items are recycled was noted as a way to increase consumer confidence.

Theme one: Food and organics

1. Community and industry highlighted a need to focus on waste reduction practices, rather than only addressing end-of-life waste streams.
2. The community expressed strong support for mandating food waste reduction targets for supermarkets, food producers and other ACT businesses. Sustainability awards or grants were raised as ways to incentivise circular behaviour and initiatives.
3. It was noted that reliance on volunteers and community groups to reduce food waste is a key challenge. Greater collaboration between businesses and community groups is needed to ensure that appropriate food (still within its use by date) is being provided to relevant community groups such as food pantries.
4. Packaging terms such as 'Use By' and 'Best Before' were identified as creating confusion which has follow-on effects to the volume within food waste streams in the ACT. Some submissions acknowledged this is a broader nation-wide issue.
5. The community expressed strong support for the wider roll out of the ACT Government's Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) scheme. However, concerns remain about the demand for the end product (i.e., the compost created from FOGO) and whether the scheme is the best composting model for the ACT. Proposed alternatives and/or additions to the FOGO scheme include community composting hubs, worm farms, and mandatory composting schemes in schools.

Theme two: Built environment

1. The community would like the ACT Government to use its buying power to set minimum quotas for recycled material in procurement of infrastructure and material. Greater transparency on the ACT Government's use of recycled material in their infrastructure and broader ACT Public Service procurement activities would increase community confidence.
2. Circular economy opportunities within the building sector highlighted by respondents include promoting renovation of existing buildings over demolition, and updates to building and planning codes to support circular economy initiatives (i.e., making the salvage and reuse of demolition materials easier for residential and commercial developments).



3. The community highlighted that support for green building materials would assist in bringing the products to market through research and trialling innovative products. Scaling is needed to make these products cost competitive.

Theme three: Consumer goods

1. Extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes are strongly supported by the community, business and industry bodies when supported by legislation to ensure compliance and certainty for ongoing funding. Industry demand alone may be insufficient to shift producers towards greater responsibility for the end-of-life waste generated by their products.
2. The community considered that ACT Government support for community initiatives like tool libraries, buy-nothing groups and reusable facilities could help shift consumer behaviour and business models towards purchasing, gifting or borrowing refurbished and recycled products over purchasing new items.
3. Concern was expressed that existing community initiatives like tool libraries and buy-nothing groups are reliant upon volunteers. This is a key barrier for these organisations, and if funding was made available it could present an employment opportunity for community members that traditionally struggle to find permanent employment, including people living with disabilities.
4. The right of consumers to repair and reuse of consumer goods was strongly expressed. There were strong calls for manufacturers and producers to reduce 'planned obsolescence' (designing products with a limited lifespan to encourage more frequent purchasing), design out waste, provide instructions for how to disassemble products, and provide accessible and affordable spare parts.

Theme four: Emerging and problematic waste streams

1. The ACT Government leadership in progressing initiatives to foster a sustainable, zero emission economy is strongly supported, however the new waste streams many of the technologies create is a major community concern.
2. There is a concern that the transition to renewable technologies results in challenges for managing waste streams, in particular, photovoltaic (PV) cells, electric vehicle (EV) batteries and other products containing rare-earth minerals. Developing recycling or disposal methods for these products will be a key focus area including consideration of 'waste management in design' to ensure safe disassembly is possible and utilisations of lower risk components is prioritised.
3. The community highlighted the logistical costs involved in transporting problematic waste streams to facilities outside of the ACT. The community is supportive of economic and employment opportunities resulting from investment in suitable recycling infrastructure within the ACT.

Theme five: Creating space to showcase our commitment to the circular economy

1. Industry bodies are generally supportive of a circular economy hub, although providing suitable incentives for businesses to participate and ensuring a market for end products is a key consideration.
2. There is concern amongst the community about the environmental impact of a circular economy hub, and the potential for it to divert land from high-value agricultural purposes.
3. The community thinks circular economy initiatives need to be available locally within communities and suburbs to ensure that facilities are easy for people to use and access. There is an opportunity to increase community involvement and education by co-locating repair and re-use initiatives with existing community gardens and composting initiatives.
4. The community wants the ACT Government to play a role in helping bring together like-minded businesses and groups, as well as promoting initiatives through marketing, expos, events, grants and awards.



WHAT'S NEXT?

The ACT Government is considering all contributions received during the consultation, before finalising the Strategy and Action Plan. The action plan will outline a series of commitments that advance a circular economy rapidly over the next few years, from areas across the ACT Government, business, and industry.

To find out more about the circular economy and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra visit [our website](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).

Key Timings

Step 1 – October 2022 consultation on the draft Circular Economy Strategy commences.

Step 2 – December 2022 consultation on the draft Circular Economy Strategy closes.

Step 3 – February 2023 workshops held with industry and business groups to inform development of the final ACT Circular Economy Strategy and an Action Plan.

Step 4 – April 2023 share what we heard with the community (*we are here*).

Step 5 – Quarter 3 2023 the final *ACT Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan 2025* is planned for release.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

161

We reached 161 people via YourSay

17

We received 17 YourSay responses from local businesses across Canberra

35

We received 35 written submissions

10

We made ten posts on social media to an audience of over 48,000

3

We featured articles in three issues of Canberra Business Update electronic newsletter which reaches 8,192 subscribers

>80%

people engaged were satisfied with the engagement process