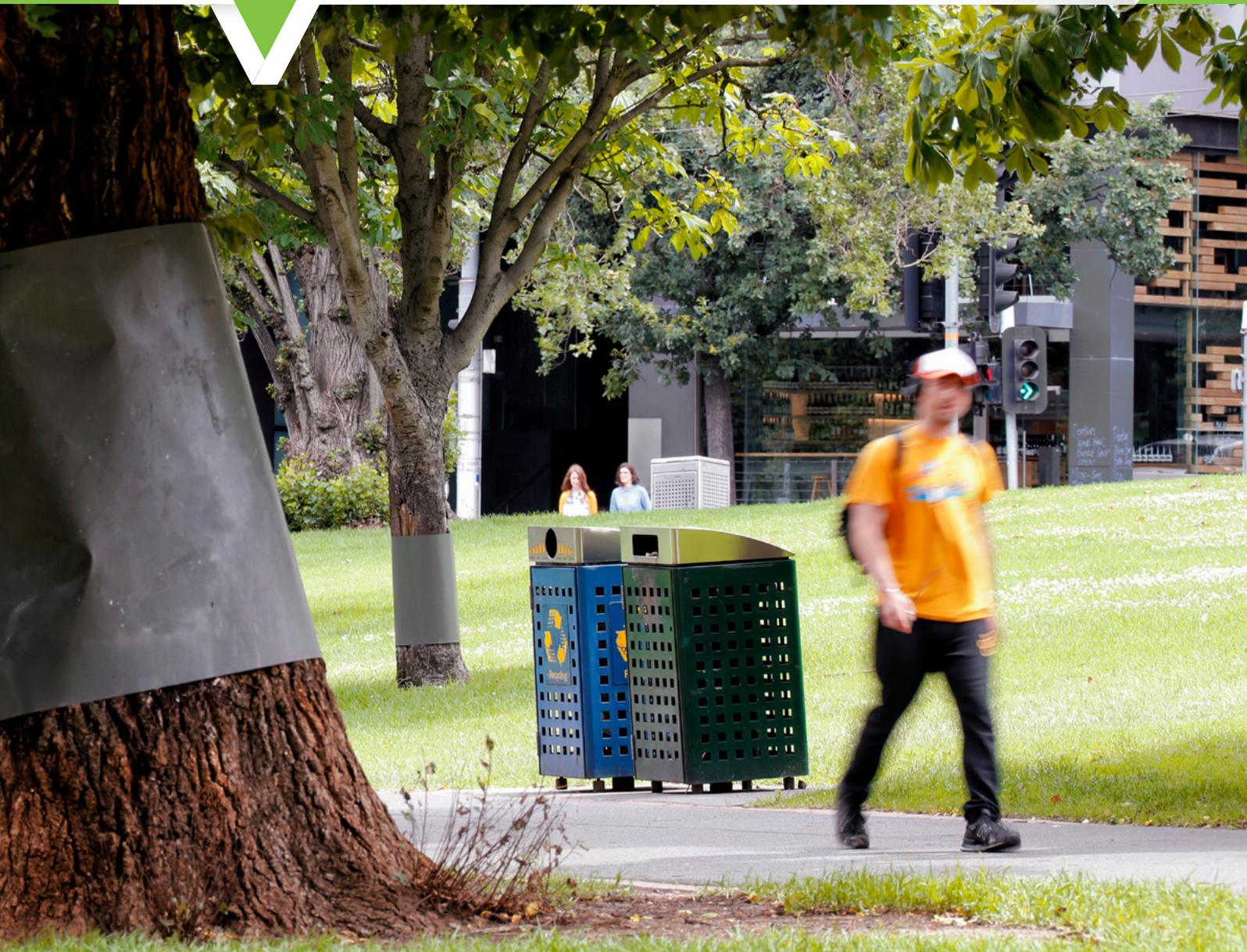


# Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan

Evaluation Report (Executive Summary)



Prepared for Sustainability Victoria  
31 July 2020

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#### Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan Evaluation Report

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## Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ACOR	Australian Council of Recycling
CDS	Container Deposit Scheme
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
FOGO	Food Organics Garden Organics
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
HDPE	High-density polyethylene
IFS	Investment Facilitation Service
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
LG	Local Government
LGA	Local Government Area
LUP	Land Use Planning
MRF	Material recovery facility
MSW	Municipal Solid Waste
MUD	Multi Unit Development

Acronym	Definition
MWRRG	Metro Waste and Resource Recovery Group
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate
RRIF	Resource Recovery Infrastructure Fund
SLTO	Social Licence to Operate
SV	Sustainability Victoria
SWRRIP	Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VCAT	Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
VLGAWs	Victorian Local Government Annual Waste Services
VORRS	Victorian Organics Resource and Recovery Strategy
VPA	Victorian Planning Authority
VPP	Victorian Planning Provisions
VRIAS	Victorian Recycling Industry Annual Waste Services
WRR	Waste and Resource Recovery
WRRG	Waste and Resource Recovery Group

## Definitions

Group	Description
LG WRR Planners	Local government waste and resource recovery staff (e.g. managers and decision makers)
LG LUP	Local government land use planner (strategic or statutory)
Industry	Waste and resource recovery businesses including reprocessors, material recovery facilities operators, resource recovery / transfer station operators, landfill operators and industry associations

# Executive Summary

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This report presents the evaluation of the Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan (SWRRIP). The objective of the SWRRIP is to "provide strategic direction for the management of waste and resource recovery infrastructure in Victoria for a period of 30 years: (Environment Protection Act, 1970<sup>1</sup>). The SWRRIP was prepared by Sustainability Victoria (SV) to provide the strategic direction for the management of waste and resource recovery (WRR) infrastructure in Victoria for 30 years (2015- 2045). The SWRRIP is a component of the statutory Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Planning Framework. It is complemented by seven Regional Implementation Plans, which include more detailed infrastructure planning (including Schedules) and actions for implementation at the regional and local level. Actions are delivered across the Waste and Resource Recovery Portfolio (Portfolio), which comprises of SV, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) Victoria and seven regional Waste and Resource Recovery Groups (WRRGs or Regional Groups).

The SWRRIP was updated and republished in April 2018. The amendments made in 2018 included the Regional Waste and Resource Recovery Implementation Plans (Regional Plans), updates in government policy and better guidance for decision making including land-use planning information.

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1 Environment Protection Act 1970 (Environment Protection and Sustainability Victoria Amendment Act 2014)

## Evaluation approach

The evaluation was informed by SV's existing SWRRIP Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan (September 2019). Clear Horizon Consulting was contracted to deliver an evaluation of the SWRRIP with six aims: to assess the progress and impact of the SWRRIP; understand if it is addressing the needs of stakeholders; inform the next review of the SWRRIP; provide an evidence base for future planning and investment; provide transparency to stakeholders and the community; and to test the evaluation plan. The evaluation covers the time-period since the SWRRIP was first published in July 2015, and adopted a mixed methods approach, including a desktop review of existing data, two online surveys and 32 interviews with 40 participants across Portfolio members, local government (LG), and industry. This report details the evaluation findings and presents recommendations for improving the SWRRIP.

## Key findings

The key findings and recommendations are summarised below, starting with the overall SWRRIP design, delivery, followed by a discussion of the effectiveness of the SWRRIP against the expected actions and outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.

### KEQ1 To what extent is the SWRRIP design appropriate?

The SWRRIP sets the strategic direction for the waste sector in the absence of a formal policy and provides useful contextual information and data regarding Victoria's waste and resource recovery (WRR) infrastructure. However, in attempting to address the gap in Victoria's waste policy and provide a cohesive outline of government interventions, the SWRRIP's purpose and application was considered confused, with many of the SWRRIP's actions and outcomes beyond the scope of a WRR infrastructure plan.

The SWRRIP's length and ambiguity were raised as issues by evaluation respondents. Although the SWRRIP provides useful contextual information regarding Victoria's WRR infrastructure, the SWRRIP's design is not considered effective in terms of providing clear direction on the WRR infrastructure needs of Victoria and how to address those needs. Another major issue raised by evaluation respondents was the lack of detailed information and data required by stakeholders to inform their WRR infrastructure planning and investment decisions.

The 'Hubs of state importance' were considered by several evaluation respondents as a valuable concept that brings WRR infrastructure considerations into land-use planning. However, thirteen interviewees from across all the stakeholder groups described how the Hubs of state importance do not have the legislative backing or detail required to inform local government (LG) land-use planning decisions. Four interviewees also felt that being nominated a hub of state importance had not led to any changes in WRR infrastructure decision making or the protection of sites within buffers.

As a document with a 30-year timeline and a five-year review cycle, the SWRRIP was seen by some evaluation participants as not flexible or adaptable enough to respond to the changing WRR context and infrastructure needs of the state. Other issues with the design of the SWRRIP raised by evaluation participants were the lack of consideration of end-markets for reprocessed material, and insufficient funding and resources allocated to delivering the SWRRIP's actions.

While the evaluation found there was a broader lack of clarity in the legislative context regarding the roles of government stakeholders in the waste sector, Portfolio members considered there to be sufficient clarity regarding their specific roles and responsibilities relating to the implementation of SWRRIP actions. However, both Portfolio and Sector evaluation respondents agreed that the roles of non-government stakeholders, such as industry and local government, were not clear.

### KEQ2 How well is the SWRRIP being delivered?

Overall, Portfolio members who participated in the evaluation felt they had been sufficiently engaged in the implementation of the SWRRIP. While the majority of LG evaluation participants were aware of the SWRRIP, there was mixed evidence on whether LG stakeholder engagement had been sufficient. Two LG interviewees highlighted that they had been sufficiently engaged by their WRRGS. However, several LG interviewees expressed a need for SV to improve engagement with LG regarding the SWRRIP.

A high proportion of industry survey respondents were aware of the SWRRIP and Regional Plans. However, 'better engagement from government' was one of the most frequently cited areas for improvement by industry survey respondents. Insufficient engagement with industry was raised as an issue by several industry and LG interviewees.

Progress on implementation of actions was mixed. Of the 20 actions under the SWRRIP, nine are considered 'well progressed', seven have made 'some progress', and four were considered to have had 'no or minimal progress'. Relative progress across the actions suggests that the Portfolio was able to effectively deliver internal actions within SV; however, faced more challenges in delivering actions that required engagement with local government and other external stakeholders. Relevant Portfolio interviewees considered that three of the actions, although relevant to the broader waste policy area, were no longer relevant to the SWRRIP.

Although there had been one amendment of the SWRRIP (the 2018 amendment), two evaluations of the SWRRIP and two SWRRIP progress reports produced, several evaluation participants expressed that insufficient changes or improvements had been made to the SWRRIP as a result of the various 'reviews'.

### **KEQ3 How effective has the SWRRIP been at achieving its outcomes and goals?**

The evaluation found that use of the SWRRIP by relevant stakeholders reduced based on their relative legislative connection to it. SV and the WRRGs use and align with the SWRRIP and Regional Plans in accordance with their legislative obligations. However, due to the broad nature of the SWRRIP, determining the 'degree of alignment' of Regional Plans to the SWRRIP can be ambiguous.

While LG waste strategies are largely in alignment with the strategic directions of the SWRRIP, its use in informing local WRR decisions is considered limited. Almost all WRR planner survey respondents were aware of the SWRRIP, and two thirds use it. However, the evaluation found that LG WRR planners' use of the SWRRIP or Regional Plans beyond high-level alignment is limited and where it does occur, is ad-hoc.

There were only scattered examples of the SWRRIP being used by DEWLP and the EPA; however, more than half (57%) of the industry survey respondents indicated that they had used the SWRRIP. Industry survey respondents reported that they primarily used the SWRRIP to inform their future planning for investment, and to understand context and opportunities.

Although achievement against the SWRRIP's short-term outcomes was moderate, progress against the expected mid-term outcomes was low. In the absence of clear targets or performance standards articulated against each of the outcomes, a subjective rating was made against the short and mid-term outcomes based on the available evidence. After five years of implementation, two of the four short-term outcomes were considered to have been achieved and one was considered 'partially achieved'. None of the mid-term outcomes (expected to be achieved within 10 years) were considered 'achieved' or 'partially' achieved. Although change against the SWRRIP's 30-year goals would not be expected within five years of implementation, a small change was reported against one of these long-term outcomes.

The current lack of progress towards the SWRRIP's 10-year mid-term outcomes is likely to impact progress towards SWRRIP's 30-year goals.

The barriers to achieving the SWRRIP goals have been identified, however this evaluation found little evidence of progress to address the barriers. Of the four barriers considered to be specific to the SWRRIP, 'some progress' was considered to have been made against the barrier 'access to finance'. 'Minimal progress' was considered to have been made against the barrier 'availability of suitable land'. Evaluation participants reported 'no progress' in addressing the following two barriers: 'Government policy and processes' and 'encroachment into facility buffers'.

### **KEQ4 What are the opportunities for improving the SWRRIP, including the actions and delivery mechanisms?**

Eight recommendations have been developed to address the most raised issues and opportunities to address them. The design and implementation challenges identified in this evaluation must be overcome for the SWRRIP to become effective. The recent publication of the Recycle Victoria policy and the upcoming five-year review create the perfect opportunity for the SWRRIP to be significantly revised.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations recognise the successes of the SWRRIP, and address the issues raised in the evaluation:

## Recommendation 1

### Clarify the purpose and scope for Victoria's WRR infrastructure plan

With the Victorian State Government's Recycling Victoria policy now established, the SWRRIP no longer needs to play the role of a waste policy and can focus on SV's legislated mandate regarding WRR infrastructure. The next iteration of Victoria's WRR Infrastructure Plan should have a clear purpose, scope and role that focuses on Victoria's WRR infrastructure. The next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan should only include actions and outcomes that clearly align with this clarified purpose and scope.

## Recommendation 2

### Develop a holistic understanding of Victoria's WRR infrastructure needs

The next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan should be built from first principles, with a foundational and holistic understanding of statewide WRR infrastructure needs. The next iteration could consider:

- ▶ Developing an overarching, statewide Schedule for WRR infrastructure that aligns with each of the Schedules under the Regional Plans
- ▶ Providing additional information about end-markets to meet stakeholders' needs
- ▶ Providing information about transport implications to support decisions about the location of WRR infrastructure
- ▶ Including of a wider range of waste types and infrastructure options

This foundational understanding should then inform a strategic and thorough analysis of where the 'hubs of state importance' should be.

## Recommendation 3

### Meet the WRR infrastructure data needs of stakeholders

Establish new or improved processes for providing useful data that fits within the clarified purpose and scope of Victoria's WRR Infrastructure Plan and is fit-for-purpose for stakeholders' WRR infrastructure investment and planning needs.

## Recommendation 4

### Clarify the roles of key stakeholders and strengthen stakeholder engagement

The roles of key state and local government stakeholders in delivering the plan need to be clearly articulated in alignment with the revised purpose and scope. This includes well-articulated implementation plans that clearly link priority actions to priority outcomes for each of the stakeholders. Key stakeholders should also be meaningfully engaged in the design, implementation and any reviews of the iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan.

# Recommendations continued

## Recommendation 5

### **Strengthen land-use planning and regulatory mechanisms**

Informed by the clarified purpose of Victoria's WRR Infrastructure Plan, establish and formalise the land-use planning and regulatory mechanisms required to inform WRR infrastructure decisions. This includes ensuring it is clear and fit-for-purpose, presenting the information decision makers need in a useable way.

## Recommendation 6

### **Assign adequate funding and resources to deliver actions and outcomes**

Secure the funding required to implement the next iteration of Victoria's WRR Infrastructure Plan. As well as funding for implementing actions and achieving outcomes, sufficient funding also needs to be assigned to ensure appropriate monitoring and evaluation to inform reporting and adaptive management.

## Recommendation 7

### **Develop clear performance standards for determining progress of the actions, outcomes and goals**

Assign clear and measurable performance standards to any actions, outcomes and goals detailed in the next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan to assist in assessing progress and informing continuous improvement. Consideration should be made of having a range of both quantitative and qualitative performance standards, for example as well as having clear targets and indicators (quantitative), also including qualitative measures such as rubrics, and stakeholder feedback on whether the action or output has met their needs.

## Recommendation 8

### **Improve the responsiveness and flexibility of the next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan by developing effective adaptive management mechanisms**

To ensure the next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan remains flexible and relevant, sufficient mechanisms and review processes should be built into it, to inform continuous improvement and adaptive management. The next iteration of the WRR Infrastructure Plan needs to not only be designed to respond to recent changes in Victoria's WRR context, but also be designed to be adaptable to future changes in the waste sector's context and needs.