

# Public Consultation Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy

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Submissions for sections:

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## 7.7 Consultation Questions – Circular Economy

What are the areas with the greatest potential for transformation in Ireland under the Circular Economy?

The deciding factors for many people when it comes to finalising a purchase are price and convenience. Often it is cheaper to buy something new than to repair or repurpose an item. This applies across all household items from jacket zips to washing machines.

The first thing that is required is increased awareness and education. Once people are aware of the impact of their choices most will take more time to make their decisions and will make choices that are better for the planet.

The next aspect is convenience. People live busy lives and are time poor. Any initiatives introduced must be convenient.

One of the areas with great potential (and need) for transformation is the supermarket and grocery stores and their suppliers. Food is double and triple packed in non-recyclable materials. There must be a push back on the manufacturers of these products to reduce the packaging and where possible to replace wrappings with recyclable or reusable packaging.

As an example, in the case of fruits and vegetables, let's stop wrapping them in plastic and putting them in boxes when we could easily be selling them by the unit, and consumers would place the required quantity of units into reusable bags.

Another area with great potential for waste reduction is household appliances. While it is good that the price of household appliances are more affordable, it is not right that it is cheaper to replace an appliance than it is to repair it. Again there needs to be an onus on the manufacturer to provide appliances with extended warranties and to make replacement parts available for reasonable prices. There could also be a requirement for manufacturers of these goods to use a set portion of recycled or repurposed materials in their new products.

In addition, the government can take other actions to make fixing an appliance the better option, and that is to reduce the VAT charged to businesses that do that. The main reason we don't fix things it's because it's more expensive than buying a new one, so let's significantly reduce the VAT charged to businesses that promote the reuse of appliances and hardware, so that they can charge less, enough to make us go to them to fix instead of buying a new one.

Clothing is another major contributor to waste in Ireland. People aren't aware what kind of textiles can be recycled and some don't realise that any textiles can be recycled. As with the reduction in cost of household appliances clothing has also reduced considerably in price. However so has the quality and many items are discarded after only one or two wears. Most

clothes discarded end up in landfill when they could have been mended and reused. If a zipper breaks on a jacket it can cost €25 to repair it and in some stores it's possible to buy a new jacket for that price or less. Just as the government provides and staff recycling centres they could operate and staff repairs stores for clothing items. Certain items such as school uniforms, nurses uniforms, etc would be repaired at no cost and others at a highly subsidised rate.

In addition, the government can take other actions to make fixing clothes the better option, and that is to reduce the VAT charged to garment alteration businesses. The main reason we don't fix things it's because it's more expensive than buying a new one, so let's significantly reduce the VAT charged to businesses that promote the reuse of clothes and fashion, so that they can charge less, enough to make us go to them to fix instead of buying a new one.

## What measures are required to increase understanding of Circular Economy principles and their uptake by relevant actors?

The idea of "take, make, use, bin" is deeply embedded in the Irish psyche and to initiate a change in this will require a fundamental mind-set change.

There is also a misconception that the main sectors responsible for generating waste is industry and farming when it is in fact individual households. People have become very quick to complain, but are very reticent to take accountability. This is a problem of our own doing, that is of each and every member of this society. And it is going to require the involvement of each and every member of this society to remedy it.

Awareness initiatives similar to the Road Safety Authority campaign and the Good Food Campaign would be a good start.

- Roadshows with interactive projects to tour schools, colleges, sports clubs and workplaces across the country.
- Billboard, radio and tv-advertising
- Better broadcasting of incentive schemes and grants available to companies trying to make a difference.
- Include Circular Economy as a subject into our education curriculum, so that in all schools around the country we are teaching kids, from a very young age, what circular economy, why it's important and how to achieve it.
- Just like with tax incentives when companies make donations, the same concept could be applied to companies that take measurable actions to become more circular. Give them significant tax benefits for becoming more circular.
- Learn from what other countries are doing. The Netherlands is already way ahead of most countries. Let's talk to them!

## What might be a meaningful national waste reduction target and how could it be achieved?

Based on figures from EU countries it should be possible to halve our waste and we should set a target of achieving this in 5 years.

As outlined above;

- Increased awareness and education = better decisions by everybody
- Reduction in packaging on goods in supermarkets = less waste in household bins
- Affordable repairing of appliances = less appliances leaving houses
- Affordable clothing repairs = less clothes discarded

There should also be higher costs on removal of general waste. Illegal dumping must carry stricter penalties and these must be enforced.

Touching again on what the Netherlands are doing, they have set a target to have a full circular economy by 2050. Only a hard target will make us move!

## Have you any other comments or suggestions on how you would like to see Ireland transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy by improving our waste management practices?

It would be remiss if there was no learning taken from the fiasco that was the roll-out of Water Charges. I personally believe water charges are a good idea as the water network is in a dire condition and investment is needed to repair it and to provide every household with a clean reliable source of drinking water.

Water charges were originally implemented without any explanation to the general public of how this money was going to be used. People were told residents in countries around the world pay for their water and so should you, basically shut up and pay. As a nation our natural response to such authoritarian, condescending orders is to rebel. Therefore in order to minimise the push back on any legislation brought in to help with the transition to a circular economy it is imperative that there is a high degree of transparency.

Meaning, we have to start with the why. Why is it important? Why are we doing this? Why now? Why these actions? Why these measurements? We need to provide proper explanations, context and set proper expectations.

## 10.7 Consultation Questions – Textiles

What measures would best support the successful collection of household textiles?

The waste collection company we use, collect household textiles once a quarter. This is a system that works well. In fact there are many outlets for textile recycling, the bigger issue is that people don't know how to segregate the different types of textiles and what can be reused and what can be recycled.

We go back then to education. Let's educate our people properly on this subject and how fashion impacts our planet's health, and why it's important for us to be conscious about how we use fashion.

Personally, I don't believe this is a valuable question because it implies that collection of household textiles is a solution, when it's not. We need to change our mindset about fashion. We need to make it so that fixing and altering clothes is cheaper than buying new. We need to reduce taxes on services and companies that promote the circular economy and therefore reduce the waste.

What measures would best support sustainable consumption of textiles by the general public?

Again education – people need to be re-educated in the life cycle of textiles. People seem to either hoard or dump clothes. Some place clothing in the general waste when they feel it is no longer good enough to wear. They don't donate to charity, even to clothing banks for reuse as rags or to be recycled. While others hold onto items in the hope of getting another wear out of them, but in reality they lie unused in the back of a closet.

Clothing stores should highlight where the clothes were made and whether or not the textiles and fabrication process was ethical and sustainable.

The word circular implies sharing. Visiting local swap-shop events is one way of refreshing your wardrobes. Another form of sharing is renting. Peer to peer clothing rental is a form of sharing that will get the 70-80% of clothes hidden in wardrobes back out in circulation, reducing the need to purchase something new, and in this particular case, we are already doing our part with [www.sharedrobes.com](http://www.sharedrobes.com). You are invited to join us.

Have you any other comments or suggestions on how you would like to see Ireland transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy by improving our waste management practices?

Not at this time.