



## **Advisory Group on a ‘Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy’**

### **Eighth Meeting - Thursday 21 May 2020 – Waste Actions for a Circular Economy**

#### **Virtual meeting via Zoom**

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Philip Nugent opened the meeting and welcomed all those attending this meeting the topic for which was waste actions for a Circular Economy.

He informed the participants that this was the final meeting in this phase of the policy development with the Department now moving on to the drafting phase with a view to having a draft document available by the end of Q2 and that the role of this group would evolve from advisory to implementation. He reminded the participants of the wide range of topics which had been discussed and thanked everyone for their collaboration and flexibility throughout the changed brought about by Covid-19.

The purpose of this final meeting is to bring together the various strands discussed thus far which can be summarised into three broad questions.

- a) The new policy/ action plan needs to focus much higher up the product life cycle and away from the traditional viewpoint of managing waste. How do we encourage more sustainable production and consumption behaviours by both consumers and commercial enterprises?

- b) How do we embed sustainable practices and circular economy considerations in our efforts to contribute to the national recovery?
- c) As this is something which cannot be achieved by the Government or public sector alone how can stakeholders play an active part and contribute to our transition to a circular economy?

## **2. Presentation**

The following presentations were given on the day;

- Shane Colgan of the EPA's National Waste Prevention Programme with an overview of the Circular Economy.
- Geraldine Brennan of Irish Manufacturing Research providing details on the Circuléire.ie programme.
- Sarah Miller of the Rediscovery Centre on the challenges posed by the Circular Economy, potential impacts, the Circular Economy Action Plan etc.
- Claire Downey on the work of the Community Resource Network Ireland.

## **3. Discussion highlights and comments**

- The current PRI schemes primarily focus on recycling, can this structure be changed/enhanced to allow for a greater focus on re-use? The issue of liability around repair and re-use must also be addressed while the perception that repairing is more costly than making a new purchase must be changed. The current system for preparing for re-use has not worked and should be re-examined to see how it can be improved before any new systems or processes are developed as it has already addressed issues such as liability etc.
- While textiles have been identified as a priority waste stream they have yet to be fully quantified as in many cases they are not classified as waste and are therefore not included in figures. There is a need to regulate the waste textile sector as a matter of urgency. Charity shops have noted changing consumption patterns with the quantity of textiles received increasing while quality decreases as a result of fast fashion. This lower quality material is more difficult to re-use and has increased the amount which must go to textile recyclers.
- The language and messaging we use is important, rather than discussing waste we need to focus on materials/resources and we need to ensure the

messaging is clear. Education and awareness campaigns must ensure they work to bridge the gap in language used by experts when discussing circular economy and language used by the ordinary citizen. How do we break the concept of circular economy down into meaningful actions and results for the citizen?

- There is a need to ensure that “recyclability” is not brought down to local level in ongoing EU level discussions. It will continue to be necessary to tap into infrastructure in the EU/UK when trying to close the loop as the economic and practical considerations will not allow all necessary infrastructure to be located within Ireland. A distinction needs to be made when discussing export of waste between that going to the EU/UK and that exported to third countries.
- A better resourced and functioning end-of-waste and by-products process would greatly assist in unlocking potential resources for recovery and recycling in the economy.
- There is a need to ensure that a clear framework is put in place between the various overarching strategies and policies for example the Circular Economy Action Plan, the Waste Action Plan, the National Waste Prevention Plan etc. There is also a need to develop specific sectoral plans for priority areas such as C&D.
- While trying to focus higher up the product life cycle we must ensure we continue to stress the importance of managing waste correctly through awareness and education. We still have high contamination rates and confusion by the public on what goes in what bin.
- Due to a concern that some retailers are using the Covid-19 situation as an excuse to try to move away from re-usable coffee cups the Department will raise the issue at next European Expert Group to try to establish what is happening in other Member States in this regard.

Philip Nugent brought the meeting to a close by thanking all participants again for their commitment throughout this process.

As always any submissions regarding matters discussed should be emailed to [Paula.OTOole@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:Paula.OTOole@dccae.gov.ie) or to [Denis.Dunne@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:Denis.Dunne@dccae.gov.ie)