

Media release

Tackling plastic waste – The Packaging Forum backs the Minister’s call for change

One of the country’s biggest packaging industry groups is backing the announcement today from Associate Minister for the Environment, Eugenie Sage, with the plans to investigate product stewardship and improved recyclability of plastic packaging and public education to ‘recycle right’.

The Packaging Forum welcomes the Minister’s intention to support the packaging industry to come up with a solution for plastic packaging.

“We absolutely agree - the time for talk is over – we need action. The Forum currently operates the only government accredited product stewardship programmes for glass bottles and jars and for soft plastics alongside delivering the Litter Less Recycle More project. We are also in the early stages of developing a stewardship programme for rigid food and beverage plastics, so we are 100% with the Minister in wanting to take the lead on improving outcomes for food and beverage packaging which is often recycled at kerbside in New Zealand,” says Forum Chair Rob Langford.

The Packaging Forum last year made a pledge on behalf of its members, including manufacturers, brand owners and retailers, to make all their packaging recyclable or compostable by 2025.

“In order to do this, we need to use product stewardship as a tool for putting practical solutions in place to tackle plastic waste, and we welcome the Minister’s backing to achieve this,” Rob says.

Product stewardship sees manufacturers and retailers take responsibility for the products they make and sell at the end of their useful life, so that these products are recycled, reused or repurposed.

“This means all players working together – essentially those that manufacture, fill, sell, collect and recycle plastic food and beverage plastic containers.

“Careful consideration must be given to creating a balanced recovery / re-use solution for materials onshore that will deliver world class results without simply burdening the consumer with costs.

“Only product stewardship will deliver a fair outcome.”

The world is undoubtedly facing a plastic crisis due to low recycling rates, excessive packaging and improper disposal, Rob says. Resource recovery markets in particular are struggling since the enforcement of China’s National Sword policy saw the collapse of global markets for mixed plastics (predominantly types 3-7) and mixed paper and cardboard.

“Addressing these issues is key but also complex, with many aspects to consider, such as the different types of plastic and the role plastic packaging plays in food safety and preventing food waste.”

“Our current rigid food and beverage plastic project will be looking at all aspects, such as packaging design, alternative technologies and investment in onshore processing,” he says.

“It will be fully inclusive and all options for tackling plastic packaging waste will be on the table, as we create practical solutions which will address the key issues and support the growth of a circular economy in New Zealand.”

Significant investment will undoubtedly be required in new and leading technologies, Rob says. “We consider this should be a focus of future funding rounds of the Waste Minimisation Fund.”

“The Packaging Forum welcomes the opportunity to work with the Minister’s office, Ministry for the Environment, local government and the resource recovery sector, as well as other interested groups from industry and the wider community.”

“We invite anyone interested in taking practical steps to tackle food and beverage container waste to join us,” Rob says.

For more information about The Packaging Forum visit www.recycling.kiwi.nz

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