

NSW EPA Resource Recovery Innovation Pathway Consultation Report

The Resource Recovery Innovation Pathway work program is an outcome of the independent review of the state's resource recovery framework. The review was led by Dr Cathy Wilkinson and was followed by the *Towards a Circular Economy: enhancing the NSW resource recovery framework* (the delivery plan).

The EPA has committed to investigating an innovation pathway to support the development, demonstration and assessment of new and innovative technology and processes. The pathway is intended to achieve outcomes for the circular economy. It also supports the EPA's strategic goal of improving the use and reuse of recovered materials.

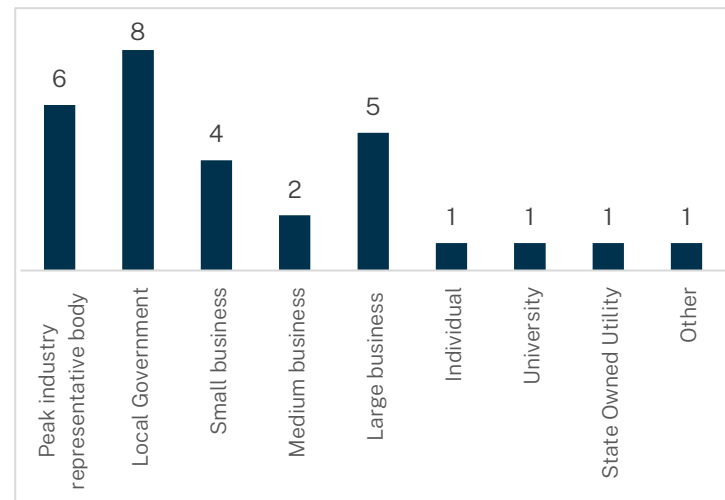
The EPA has undertaken consultation on the *Resource Recovery Innovation Pathway – Concept Paper* and *Innovation Position Statement* to hear from industry and other interested stakeholders. We wanted to hear their experiences with innovation and explore opportunities to address common challenges and barriers in the current systems.

This report shares the main things we learned from this feedback.

Who did we hear from?

We received 29 submissions. They mainly represented industry bodies, individual businesses, and local government. We also received feedback from individuals, academia, and state-owned utilities.

Figure 1 – consultation submissions received by stakeholder group



What we heard

We have heard that there are obstacles to circular economy innovation in NSW. The EPA aims to guide stakeholders to effectively navigate our existing pathways. We understand that clear communication and tailored guidance is important to support innovators. The following is our analysis of the valuable feedback we received:

Feedback was broadly supportive of position on innovation

Respondents were broadly supportive of our *Innovation Position Statement* and the eligibility criteria for the innovation pathway we published as part of consultation.

We heard that we should review our definition of innovation regularly since new technologies and ways of working are always emerging.

We understand that this is an emerging space and will continue to adapt along with new developments and input from stakeholders.

Industry is looking for immediate support

Many respondents identified that they are currently engaging with the EPA on projects that align with resource recovery principles.

Almost all respondents identified current projects that they believe align with the innovation pathway to some degree.

Industry identified the need for immediate support to navigate existing application and approval processes such as Resource Recovery Orders and Exemptions and planning pathways.

We understand that coordination between consent authorities, including local councils, is also key to supporting the growing circular economy.

Tailored, direct communication to address many challenges and concerns

Respondents raised questions about how they could effectively interact with existing EPA processes.

Stakeholders expressed value in having a single point of contact at the EPA who can provide clear, timely and consistent information.

Structural barriers impact industry's ability to recover resources

We heard that the main issues are assessment timeframes, risk appetite, and interactions between EPA requirements and the planning framework.

The EPA is working to address these structural barriers to resource recovery through the collective actions in our Towards a Circular Economy Delivery Plan including clarifications to the *Resource Recovery Order and Exemption Framework and Application*

Guide and investigating pathways to enable an end-of-waste outcome.

We heard that there is significant interest in partnerships between Council, industry, and the EPA. There is also considerable interest from certain Councils to host innovation and trials and continue to play a significant role in resource recovery and the circular economy.

There are opportunities for us to continue working with local Government to promote innovation within NSW.

Streamlining Circular Economy assessments and determinations

We heard that to support innovation in the resource recovery sector; there needs to be greater clarity and collaboration regarding the legislative requirements of the EPA and other NSW regulatory/planning authorities.

Based on feedback, we recognise that we can leverage significant benefit by optimisation of existing processes. We recognise that optimising these relationships can provide more immediate benefits than changing legislative settings.

However, as the needs of innovative projects grow with the circular economy, projects may benefit from legislative changes such as an Innovation Trial License.

Aspects these changes may address include:

- flexible licence conditions and amendments
- a streamlined approval process.

What are we doing

We're excited to help innovators, whether they're working with us for the first time or continuing an existing project.

We'll keep reviewing the feedback from this consultation to help deliver better and more efficient results.

Current actions

We are beta-testing with innovators to improve the existing pathways available for stakeholders working in the circular economy.

Our testing has highlighted the advantages of a central facilitator for innovation at the EPA overcome existing challenges.

The success of any innovation pathway is contingent on the outcomes of other work occurring as part of the Towards a Circular Economy Delivery Plan.

For example, clarifications to the *Resource Recovery Order and Exemption Framework* and *Application Guide* will enable proponents, investors, and the EPA to reach a common understanding on timeframes and deliverables.

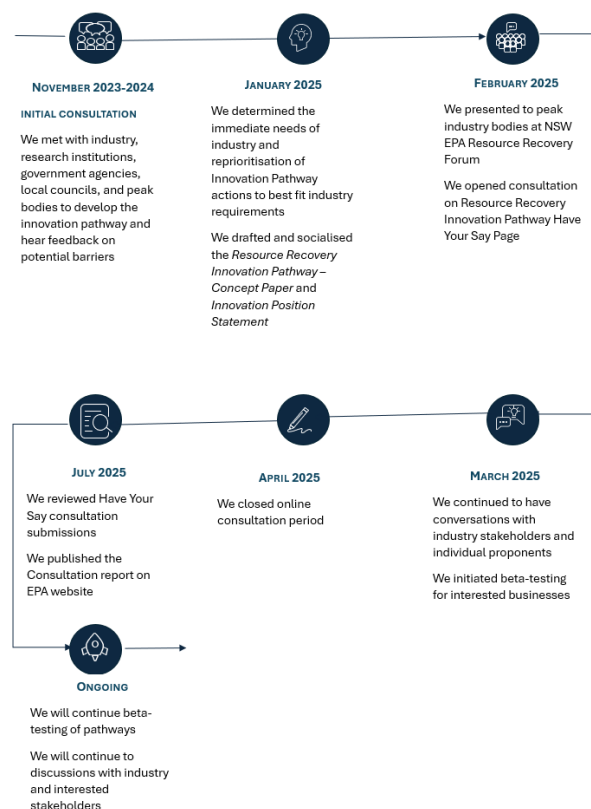
We are also working to improve the waste regulatory framework, including investigating pathways to enable an end-of-waste outcome.

Opportunities in a growing circular economy will require data to support decision making. The Guide to Planning and Designing Trials in NSW helps fill the gap in knowledge about how to run effective trials, and answers common questions from our stakeholders.

Energy from Waste (EfW)

During this consultation, we received some feedback on EfW and thermal treatment. The EPA is currently reviewing its EfW framework and held public consultation between 25 February and 16 May 2025. Any relevant comments from this consultation will be considered as part of that review.

Appendix A: Timeline and contact information



We are continuing to beta-test our innovation pathways and supports but are reliant on real world examples and experiences.

If you have a project that you think would benefit from the innovation pathway and would like to be involved in beta-testing, please contact us at resource.recovery@epa.nsw.gov.au