

CIRCULAR ECONOMY MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

COMMUNIQUÉ

13 October 2023

The Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group met on 14 August 2023 in Melbourne to consider the built environment and how a circular economy will support Australia's net zero commitments.

The Chair welcomed the Minister for the Environment and Water, the Honourable Tanya Plibersek MP, and the Minister for Climate Change, the Honourable Chris Bowen MP, and all group members.

Minister Plibersek provided an update on the recent Environment Ministers Meeting, the development of the National Circular Economy Framework, and reinforced the importance of the circular economy in supporting Australia's net zero transition.

The group heard from Davina Rooney, CEO of the Green Building Council of Australia, and Mike Zorbas, CEO of the Property Council of Australia, about practical examples of circularity in the built environment. This included a special focus on re-use and refurbishment.

Minister Bowen joined the group remotely and spoke about the net zero sector plans. The group discussed the interactions between the circular economy and net zero, and the importance of using the circular economy to achieve a sustainable net zero transition.

The Advisory Group made several recommendations, including:

1. Circular economy principles and actions should be embedded across key climate policies, including all net zero sector plans.
2. Determine the key circular economy measures in the Australian economy that will support net zero and quantify emissions benefits where possible.
3. Consider how the circular economy can be adopted to manage the waste from the net zero transition.
4. The built environment net zero sector plan should prioritise refurbishment, designing for modularity and disassembly, inclusion of recycled content and waste diversion from landfill as key strategies that can support both the circular economy and net zero.
5. The Commonwealth should embed circular economy principles and requirements in building and infrastructure procurements and consider the role of the National Construction Code in supporting circular economy practices.
6. The Commonwealth should work with jurisdictions to agree a central coordination and support point to guide the construction industry's transition to circularity.

7. Further work is required to consider the economic incentives needed to encourage longer use of infrastructure, buildings and fit-outs as well as uptake of circular materials.

In the lead up to the meeting, the Advisory Group conducted a survey and roundtable to canvas industry views on the biggest opportunities and challenges to the built environment going circular. This engagement informed the recommendations of the Advisory Group. The group also considered a stand-alone submission provided by the Australian Council of Recycling.

The Chair thanks the 60+ individuals and organisations that contributed to the submissions that the Advisory Group considered, with special thanks to Davina Rooney, Mike Zorbas and Suzanne Toumbourou.