

To the commissioners,

The [Australian Library of Things Network](#) (the ALoT Network) is pleased to make a submission in support of a push for a massive investment in community-led resource sharing and repairing initiatives around Australia.

Libraries of Things (LoTs) enable people to borrow items they only need occasionally (such as hand and power tools, camping goods, gardening tools, sporting and lifestyle equipment, as well as many other household items) from a central community hub at low cost. By pooling resources and sharing the stewardship of these items, not only is the consumption of new items reduced, carbon emissions are greatly reduced and community connection is greatly enhanced. Access to quality items is also enabled, increasing social equity by providing access to household goods at a fraction of the cost of purchasing items outright.

In short, LoTs are already making participation in the circular economy possible for communities around Australia. At the time of writing, there are estimated to be at least [30 LoTs in Australia](#), with more planning to open.

In the last 10 years, organised community sharing in Australia has become more sophisticated. Organisations are becoming more professional, more connected to each other and collectively more aware of the barriers that need to be removed in order to scale their impact. Many LoTs are [already measuring their positive impacts](#) in reducing waste and carbon emissions year on year. A significant financial investment coupled with a long term plan would turbo-charge this impact.

We know this because Scotland and Wales are already doing it.

What we want: Long-term investment to scale the sharing and repairing sector in Australia

In 2021, [the Scottish government committed to scaling a new national network](#) of community sharing libraries and repair cafes as part of a drive to reduce consumption and cut waste. The commitment set targets to scale the number of LoTs in the country from 24 to 100 within 3 years.

This initiative was driven by [Circular Communities Scotland](#) which represents LoTs and other community-led circular economy groups, such as Repair Cafes. [The international Repair Cafes movement](#) has gained ground in both Australia and Scotland. Repair Cafes promote practical ways for communities to keep products in use for an extended period of time by teaching people how to make their own repairs. They are a perfect complement to the work done by Libraries of Things and many LoTs in Australia host Repair Cafes for this reason.

In 2021/2022 the Welsh government awarded [Benthyg](#) (the peak body for LoTs in Wales. Benthyg is Welsh for borrowing) £300,000 annual funding for three years enabling them to employ full time staff and develop their network of LoTs from 1 to 24 in three years. This included creating high street repair hubs, Benthyg LoTs and Repair Cafes.

Part of the reason the Welsh government backed this initiative is due to their exemplary recycling rate. The Welsh government greatly increased their recycling rate to be [ranked #2 globally](#), however

they realised they couldn't go much further with reducing waste through this strategy. The government then [shifted their focus to supporting circular economy initiatives](#) that kept waste out of landfill and in circulation for longer. The funding for this project came from the country's waste levy.

Australia's own sharing and repairing eco-system is now at a point where a similarly ambitious project could be realised. We have a critical mass of expertise and evidence to support the work that needs to be done. Libraries of Things have formed a national Network to drive impact and push for greater support, and Repair Cafes are largely represented by the [Australian Repair Network](#), based out of Griffith University. What is needed next is a long term plan supported by financial investment, coupled with structured ongoing collaboration with government, to truly make change happen at scale.

Evidence to support sharing and repairing as high-impact drivers of the circular economy

While the community organisations facilitating circular economy change on the ground have grown in sophistication, so too has the study of their impact and the evidence to support the potential of this sector.

Recently, the Monash University Behaviour Works [Roadmap to Circular Consumption report](#) found eight key behaviours that can reduce material consumption, with three of these having the greatest system impact overall. Of the three behaviours that have the most impact, LoTs are already facilitating change in two:

1. **Borrow/rent item or service:** Focus new behaviour change efforts on enabling and encouraging both individual and organisational consumers to borrow or rent items instead of buying.
2. **Source items second-hand:** Continue and expand behaviour change efforts to mainstream 'buying second-hand instead of new' for individual consumers; and explore scalable practices for organisational consumers. Almost all LoTs prefer to source their inventory from donations of quality second hand goods rather than buying new where possible.

The ALoT Network tracks academic studies and evidence that provide insight into how sharing and repairing is driving change. The Behaviour Works study is just one piece of evidence that supports the business case for investing in LoTs and Repair Cafes at scale. If the Australian Government is truly committed to having people embrace the circular economy, then behaviour change is critical. Radically increasing the number of community sharing and repairing hubs around the country would jump-start this change at the household level.

We invite the commissioners to look into the case studies and evidence coming from the UK and elsewhere in the world for guidance and inspiration. We also wish to start a regular dialogue with those in government circular economy leadership roles to plan our own national approach to scaling the sharing and repairing sector. We thank you for the invitation to submit our views and welcome opportunities to discuss our shared circular economy ambitions with you further.

Yours sincerely,

Nicole Bray

Founder of the [Australian Library of Things Network](#)

Co-Founder of Share Shed, Brisbane.

And

David Paynter

Convenor of the [Australian Library of Things Network](#)

Founder of the [Gold Coast Tool Library](#)