



Wednesday 30 October 2024

Submission to the Productivity Commission
Resource Work Cooperative

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the land on which we stand today, the land of the muwinina people of nipaluna. The land where we work sits in the shadow below kunanyi, and the rivulet where the tip is runs into timtumili minanya, our waterway. This country was, is and always will be aboriginal land and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to today's traditional owners, the muwinina and all the palawa people, and to Elders past and present.

Background

Resource Work Cooperative is a not for profit worker owned cooperative that was formed in 1993 and runs the South Hobart Tipshop at the McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre in South Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania.

Our cooperative has a vision of a future where waste is redefined as a valuable resource. Our core mission is to reduce waste to landfill, create sustainable local employment and educate in waste minimisation.

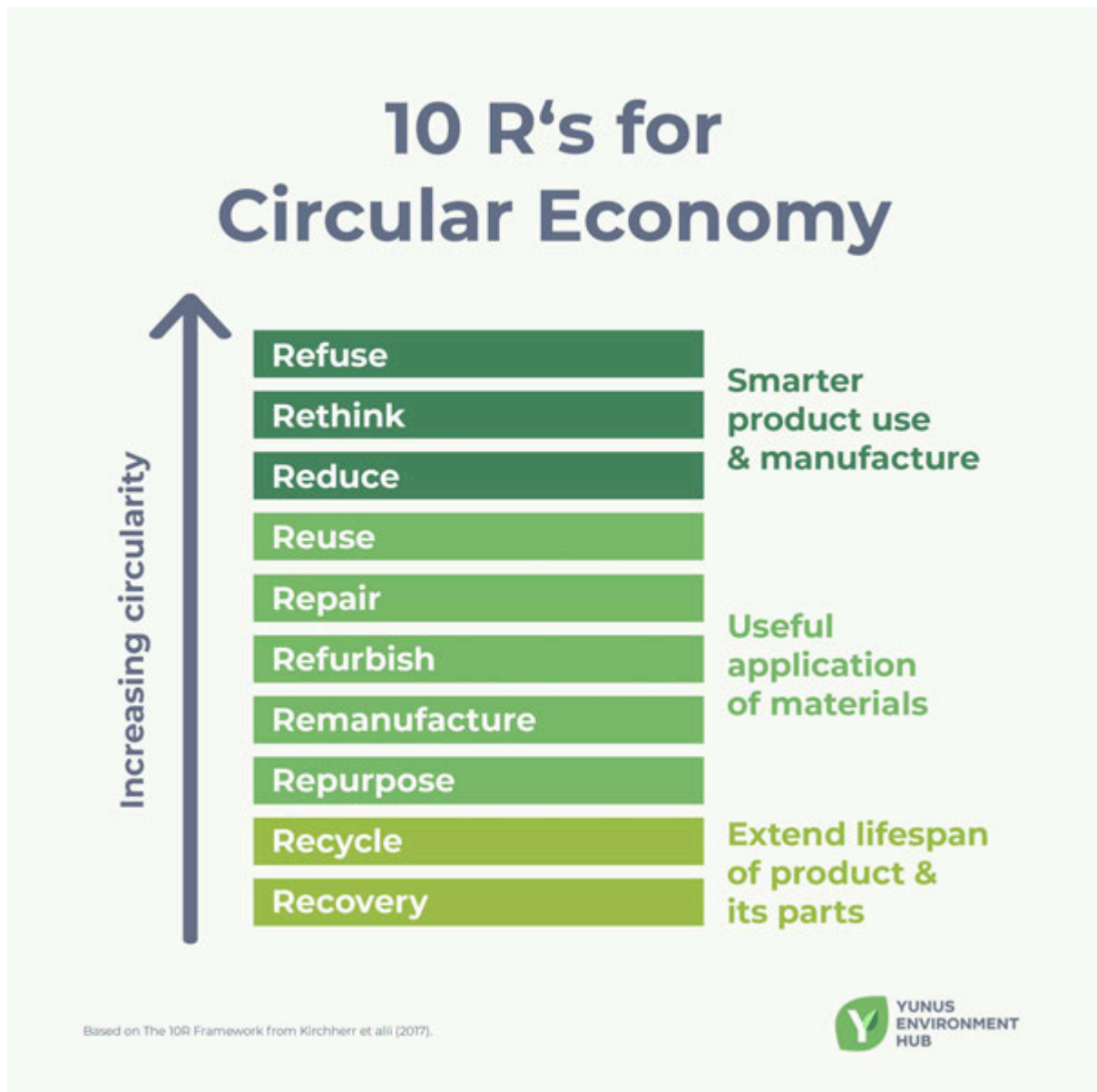
In the past financial year we diverted 983,230kg from landfill, employed 39 people and ran 32 workshops and 15 tours. In terms of education, we had 633 people attend workshops and 283 people attend tours. We also ran Art From Trash, an annual community art exhibition that invites people to create artworks from reused material. In the 2023 exhibition we had 80 artists contribute work, and 2500 people visited the gallery.

Our cooperative runs a diversity of services relating to reuse and recycling. We have 8 different departments operating outside of the Tipshop, not including our administrative team. These include Collectables, Electrical Testing and Sales, Scrap

Metal processing, E-waste processing, Computer Repair and Sales, Timber Reclaim, Online Sales, Education and a Community Pickup Service.

We have over 30 years of experience in the reuse sector, and operate as a key element of resource recovery in southern lutruwita/Tasmania. We have worked in partnership with the City of Hobart, who manage the McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre.

Prioritising Reuse





We believe that there is a huge movement supporting the reuse economy in our community, with a huge amount of support from both donors and shoppers supporting us as well as other operators in the reuse sector. In relation to the waste hierarchy, According to the 10 R Framework from Kirchherr et al (2017), reuse is seen as number four in the pyramid. With our community aims to transition to a circular economy by 2030, we need stronger efforts from all elements within society to manage this transition equitably. Currently there is little effective pressure being put on industry to reduce their waste outputs, and if there is it is directed towards the recycling and recovery effort, which is important, but shouldn't be the prime focus of our efforts as recycling falls at the bottom of this framework. Reuse offers a way for our society to better manage products within our communities to maximise their life and embodied energy.

Behavioural Change in the Community

The upper part of the Waste Hierarchy: Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, are rarely discussed as part of our discussion around the circular economy, as they require a big shift in the paradigm of economic growth and capitalism. But due to our current pressures around climate change, we really need to be investing time and resources into having this conversation as a community and putting steps in place to ensure the circular economy is not just another spin to allow us to continue with a cycle of resource extraction.

In order to encourage this transition, we believe that investment into education in resource recovery and behaviour change can support a shift towards just transition. This must happen throughout our society to be effective. We must include this in our core school curriculum, all college and university training. All businesses need to embed training that relates to increasing resource recovery and better management of resources. It is no longer enough for large institutions to have a sustainability department that ticks their box. We need to integrate this learning throughout organisations, so that each person understands this priority and their behaviour adjusts to this priority.



We are funded independently through sales from reuse and a small proportion of recycling through scrap and e-waste. Our Education Program has been part funded by community, private and government grants, however this funding model is only annual and requires a lot of work to apply, and not guaranteed. From our perspective, to maintain the best education services, our education program would benefit most from continuous funding, so we can focus on the task of education as opposed to grant funding a clearly needed service.

Funding

Councils require resources and legislative power to enact vastly improved resource recovery, with capacity to deliver education, but also to regulate and monitor their communities performance in this space. Our various industries need support to better prioritise resource recovery, seeing it as time well spent, rather than taken away from productive work. The newly established waste levy in lutruwita/Tasmania has been a step in the right direction, and development of new infrastructure has allowed for some waste management centres and transfer stations to improve data collection as well as resource recovery. However this infrastructure spending needs to be elevated significantly in order to increase resource recovery to meet our targets, not to mention further that through investing in localised remanufacture projects.

Redesign & Remanufacture

We see a large gap in our state's capacity to build a future for remanufacturing. However, considering our state's geographic isolation from the rest of Australia, as well as global markets, we have an additional need to focus on how we could be re-processing materials that can be re-manufactured within our state. This will take significant investment, however it could be prioritised. This feeds into the broader argument around product design. Currently the majority of materials being manufactured are using virgin materials, or if using recycled materials, have inherent flaws in their design. We need to legislate to change this and focus its energy on



making the transition away from virgin materials, and focus energy into recovered materials. This needs to happen at the product design stage.

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E-waste Scheme Expansion

Another aspect of our operations which see a great need for support is in electrical goods. Many items currently aren't accepted within the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme (NTCRS), and so often get overlooked and landfilled, possibly if they are more than 50% metal then they might get scrapped for metal recycling. I understand that the Government is planning to extend the E-waste program to more second hand household appliances as well as solar Photo-Voltaics (PVs), and we greatly support this as a priority.

Plastics

Another issue is in relation to plastic. Currently there is no avenue for plastic recycling for materials, other than the commingled recycling. All plastic products contain valuable materials that with the right sorting could effectively be pelletised, melted and re-manufactured into another product, yet so much plastic is still ending up in landfill. We see so much need for investment into infrastructure for plastic recovery.

Construction and Demolition

Construction and Demolition is another sector in lutruwita/Tasmania that could be better targeted for potential increases in resource recovery. Between 2008 - 2019, we ran a Deconstruction Department within our cooperative, that worked with a few smaller builders and architects, gaining contracts to safely deconstruct buildings to maximise salvage of materials. These materials were then either reused by the builders/owners, or would be resold through the Tipshop. This model was challenged by the additional cost and time, compared to the standard model of deconstruction, in which an excavator would destroy a building, then all materials. Some materials can still be salvaged for reuse, for example bricks, and some may be recycled (metal), however the majority gets loaded into one truck which is dumped into landfill under the category of mixed materials. We see a future in which these materials go



through separation, but best practices could be deconstruction which prioritises reuse. Having a way to incentivise this practise would be excellent, either through updated sustainability ratings for buildings. The alternative could be having resource recovery expectations built into planning applications, with a minimum percentage of materials recovered. This would require better oversight of building works. These extends to all building trades, which seem limited to use second hand items in their work, despite being safety tested in good condition.

Planned Obsolescence

We also see huge issues with the quality of products in the market, with so many items broken soon after being manufactured. This could be changed through implementing a levy into the product, or stronger quality testing controls. Money generated through a levy could set up a funding model that supports repair hubs, service centres to fix items that can be, but could also support a quality testing scheme.

Textiles Issues

Textiles is one of the largest issues we face, with the current volume of materials donated being unable to resold through the shop, even by giving materials away for free, we are still left with excess textiles, that can either be exported, at huge cost of emissions, with little clarity on where it goes and what happens to it. Alternatively due to much of this being blended materials, recycling for reuse is almost impossible, as well as the high percentage of fossil fuel based fibres, it becomes a huge issue. We need a huge shift in our behaviour around consumption of textiles as a society. The development through the Federal Government in partnership with the Australian Fashion Council with creation of Seamless is a step in the right direction, however it has questionable influence from the benefactors of the industry, and is currently a voluntary scheme. We would like to see more independence of these initiatives from the leaders of the industry, to allow greater integrity and trust. In order to be effective, this scheme must be mandatory for all textile sellers. The revenue generated by a levy must go towards finding solutions. But priority must go towards reducing our



consumption of new clothing and textiles. We have enough clothing available to people, it is about making it accessible to all.

The Future Could be Amazing

Our cooperative believes that our vision of a world where waste is redefined into a valuable resource. It will take a huge amount of work to get to this point, but we have seen so much progress in many spaces. We want to ensure that the local small to medium businesses and not for profit organisations, are able to maintain a voice in this sector, as we have done so much for it for many years. We have key skills and experience that can contribute valuable perspectives, but we can't keep on doing it without more support. Thanks for this opportunity to contribute to this space.

Tom Crawford,
General Coordinator
Resource Work Cooperative

Resource is a worker owned, worker run, not-for-profit co-operative. All proceeds go towards creating employment, reducing waste and promoting waste minimisation in the community.