

Circular Economy Submission

31 10 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to the Productivity Commission Team on the 23rd October at the Reverse Garbage warehouse.

Reverse Garbage is a creative reuse centre making a difference in the world by reducing waste and creating change in the way we look at resources. At Reverse Garbage, our role is to save materials from going to waste in landfill and to renew their value by making them available for reuse by families, students, artists and community groups.

It's one of the most effective ways we can reduce our impact on the natural environment. And it allows us to be more thrifty, more independent, more creative and more responsible in how we live our lives.

Reverse Garbage was established close to 50 years ago by a group of enterprising teachers motivated to reduce their community's impact on the environment, by salvaging discarded industrial resources from local factories and reusing the materials in their classrooms.

Reverse Garbage is the oldest, most iconic and first of its kind reuse centre in Australia with three generations of repeat customers coming through our doors.

Today our not-for-profit organisation has evolved into Australia's largest creative reuse and sustainability education centre, comprising a retail warehouse, which operates 7 days per week in Marrickville, Sydney. The site also includes an Education Hub with two fun and quirky learning spaces, plus an outdoor terrace and edible garden, which is open to community use.

Reverse Garbage attracts a diverse range of customers, including artists, crafters, home renovators, students and educators, with many travelling far and wide for an eclectic and unique shopping experience. In many circles, our organisation has a 'cult-like' following. Through our retail operation we divert close to 60,000 tonnes of waste from landfill per year, and host close to 14,000 participants through our various educational offerings and public programs.

Reverse Garbage has been practicing and advocating for reuse above recycling for 50 years in 2025 and while noticing an increase in the conversations around the circular economy sees gaps that unless addressed will not complete the circle.

Measures to assist the NFP and SE sector include but is not limited to

- An appreciation of existing reuse centres, social enterprises that already exist and have long offered programs that contribute to the circular economy. Too often grant funding is targeted at start ups or new ideas, when we already have proven experience in the field of reuse. Grant funding for “new” projects often excludes NFP’s or SE’s from attracting funding. Untethered funding is what is required for proven existing CE businesses.
- The social sector has a huge social environmental, economic and social impact often working with many government agencies to provide services. Eg RG works with the NSW Dept of Communities and Justice to offer places for people working through their community service.
- Repair is a spoken about as a crucial part of the CE. While this is true unless we have a transfer of knowledge we will loose the ability to repair anything. Education of hands on skills need to be elevated and appreciated and not diluted in not only schools but the tertiary and TAFE systems. We will not be able to repair anything on a domestic or manufacturing scale if we do not have the skills.
- We need to value the arts, crafts, making and creativity as a crucial part of the CE for creating pathways of reuse and innovation
- Education about the difference around reuse and recycling is key – we can’t recycle our way out of this mess