



environmental  
services  
association

## PRESS RELEASE

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# ESA responds to Westminster Hall “incineration” debate

The Environmental Services Association (ESA) has today (Wednesday 13 January 2021) responded to yesterday’s Westminster Hall parliamentary debate on “waste incineration and recycling rates” secured by Elliot Colburn MP.

**Following the debate, Executive Director of the ESA, Jacob Hayler, said:** “The recycling and waste management sector has played a leading role in significantly improving national recycling performance over the past two decades and ESA members have invested billions in the UK’s circular economy during that time – helping the British public not only to recycle more than ever, but also to divert millions of tonnes of non-recyclable waste from landfill, avoiding significant greenhouse gas emissions.

The ESA supports the Government’s emerging Resources and Waste Strategy (RWS) which, if implemented correctly, will help us all to drive even more material further up the waste hierarchy, and our members stand ready to help the government deliver on its recycling ambitions. However, as the minister pointed out during the debate yesterday, even if the UK achieves its target of sixty-five per cent recycling by 2035, a proportion of residual waste will remain and will require an energy-recovery treatment solution if the Government also wishes to hit its target of sending less than ten per cent of residual waste to landfill over the same time period. The capacity of the residual waste treatment system of course needs to be balanced against the country’s needs in the context of future policy drivers – which is why long-term policy clarity is important - but for now the UK remains heavily reliant on landfill and waste exports to meet our national residual waste treatment needs.

We were pleased to hear the minister confirm once more that Government will only consider a tax on energy recovery if the wider policy interventions under the RWS fail to deliver the intended outcomes. The ESA supports this approach and believes that a more sophisticated set of tools are required to stimulate recycling and markets for recycled materials. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), deposit-return schemes; greater consistency among waste collection services and the tax on virgin plastics will all help to drive more material towards recycling and strengthen, what can be, volatile and constrained markets for some materials. Without these measures in place, a new tax on energy recovery would simply make residual waste treatment more expensive without stimulating alternative market capacity – locking tax-payers and businesses into increased costs without any environmental benefit.

Energy recovery facilities serve a vital public function and are a complementary component of the waste hierarchy. Their environmental performance is monitored closely by UK regulators and, in the majority of cases, local communities are directly involved in the process of determining planning consent for new facilities, which receive significant public scrutiny. As the minister pointed out yesterday, the Environment Agency consults with Public Health England, among other consultees, when considering new plants and will only permit new facilities where there is no risk to public health.

The role of energy recovery in the UK's waste management system has been well debated for many years and we believe that consideration is best now given to upstream interventions that seek to limit the volume and type of materials entering the residual waste stream in the first place – particularly those which could and should be recycled. If we can get these upstream interventions right, which includes getting consumers to play their essential role in this system too, the debate around energy from waste becomes moot.”

## ENDS

### Notes to editors:

- A. The Environmental Services Association (ESA) is the trade association representing the UK's resource and waste management industry. Our members are directly transforming the way the UK's waste is managed in pursuit of a circular economy and are leading the sector in an effort to decarbonise recycling and waste management operations.
- B. The ESA works with all levels of government, regulators and the public to deliver a more sustainable waste and resource management solution for the UK. You can find out more about us and our members in our [Annual report](#) for 2019/20.

For further details please visit [www.esauk.org](http://www.esauk.org)

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