



environmental
services
association

Media statement

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Focus on energy recovery ignores the bigger picture

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 alone 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.

The UK currently recycles around 45% of household waste and our industry continues to invest in services to help the UK Government achieve its ambition of 65% recycling by 2035.

The ESA and its members; the wider recycling and waste industry; and government are currently focussed on a generation of new policies which aim to re-invigorate recycling, by stimulating demand for recycled materials; by making packaging easier to recycle; and by helping consumers access more consistent, convenient, recycling infrastructure.

For material that cannot be recycled, our industry's transition away from landfill to energy recovery is acknowledged by the government's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) in its recent *Sixth Carbon Budget*, which points out that efforts to move the nation's general rubbish to energy recovery have resulted in a 63% reduction in the waste sector's carbon emissions since 1990 – a performance matched by few other sectors.

If the measures set out in Defra's Resources and Waste Strategy, and the corresponding recycling and waste strategies of the devolved administrations, are successful they will help householders, businesses and our industry to recycle a greater proportion of the country's waste, thereby reducing the volume of material going to energy recovery.

Furthermore, removing poor quality plastics from the market, and increasing recycling rates for the remaining plastic, will also help to reduce the volume of these materials in the residual waste stream. A number of the ESA's largest members are signatories to the UK Plastics Pact, and are directly involved in helping to influence the way we design, produce, use, re-use, dispose and reprocess plastics in our economy.

Removing plastics from the general waste, coupled with greater use of EfW heat networks and carbon capture and storage, will all help to lower carbon emissions from energy recovery in future and the ESA is imminently due to publish its Net Zero Strategy for the sector, providing a roadmap for our industry to

achieve Net Zero carbon emissions well in advance of the timescales required by UK Government and the CCC. This will require lower carbon solutions across the whole spectrum of our industries activities including collection services, energy recovery and recycling processes.

Executive Director of the ESA, Jacob Hayler, said: “Recycling is our sector’s priority and we support the Government’s emerging new Resources & Waste Strategy (RWS), which should address many of the complex factors currently holding back recycling performance – none of which have any correlation with energy recovery.

By focussing upon upstream interventions we can correct the resource-inefficiencies in our economy, which in turn will help our industry to recycle more. Recycling more plastics instead of treating them in residual waste, coupled with other measures due to be set out in the ESA’s net-zero strategy, will also reduce the carbon emissions associated with energy recovery and our sector’s wider activities.

We welcome dialogue with all stakeholders on these important issues, which is why the ESA participated in today’s *Dispatches* programme, but media coverage like this unfortunately only serves to undermine the public’s confidence in recycling and generates mistrust at a time when we should all be optimistic about the direction of travel towards both a circular economy and net-zero carbon future.

The irony is that the recycling and waste management industry wants the same outcome as many of those opposed to energy recovery. We would like to see a more resource-efficient economy where as many valuable materials are kept in productive use for as long as possible, and we also want to achieve net zero carbon emissions in line with the UK’s global commitment – but taxing or banning energy recovery in the meantime is not going to stimulate recycling markets or make it any easier for consumers to recycle and the focus must therefore remain on other, more targeted, policy interventions.”

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

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