

SESA Manifesto: Making a success of the circular economy



The waste and recycling industry is at the heart of the circular economy. This concept, which is gaining political traction at both the national and EU level, is focused on keeping as many materials and products within the economy for as long as possible.

Progress towards the circular economy will push the recycling industry beyond its traditional spheres of operations, opening up new business opportunities and requiring much closer working with a host of new partners, and engaging further 'upstream' in material supply chains than perhaps done so in the past. In practice, progress towards a circular economy means more efficient use of materials, creating greater value from customer supply chains and ensuring more material is reused, recycled, and with energy generated from any residual, non-recyclable wastes.

Considerable progress has been made over this current Parliament, with Scotland's recycling rate increasing to 43%. However, Scotland remains somewhat off its mandatory recycling targets and a re-think is required to ensure Scotland is more closely aligned with the circular economy. The recent publication of the Scottish Government's circular economy strategy is undoubtedly a welcome step in the right direction. Over the course of the new Scottish Parliament we call upon Members to help deliver an enabling policy framework around the following key objectives, which together would help Scotland make a success of the circular economy and fully realise the associated environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Use public procurement to boost demand for recycled materials

While householders and businesses are recycling more than ever before, more needs to be done to boost demand for re-used or recycled material if Scotland is ever to meet its ambitious 70% recycling target. A clear policy objective that seeks to integrate sustainable, circular economy outcomes through mandated recycled content levels in public contracts would help incentivise demand for secondary raw materials.

Help householders to reduce contamination in recycling bins

Scotland's recyclable material is sold on domestic and global commodity markets, and in the face of persistently challenging market conditions the quality of material presented for collection takes on ever greater significance. Contamination within the recycling bin (the wrong type of material placed in the recycling container) reduces the efficiency of the post-collection sorting and treatment process and can make it more challenging to provide supply chains with the desired quality of material. Better information to householders of the range of materials that should and shouldn't be presented for recycling would help reduce contamination and improve confidence in the system.

Recognise the role of energy from waste in the waste hierarchy

While the policy framework should of course support all efforts to drive waste up the waste hierarchy, it should be recognised that *all* parts of the waste hierarchy have a

role to play in the management of Scotland’s wastes. Some materials simply cannot be re-used or recycled and therefore energy from waste has an integral role to play in Scotland’s circular economy. Scotland should extract the maximum value from any residual waste that cannot be recycled.

Make Scotland an open circular economy operating in a globalised world

Rather than examining the circular economy on a geographic or territorial basis, we should instead focus on “closing the loop” of supply chains, some of which operate perfectly efficiently at the global scale. Any policy measures designed to exclusively retain waste or secondary raw materials within the domestic market would be harmful to the longer term development of a circular economy, raising costs across the economy and harming jobs and inward investment.

Give SEPA the resources to stamp out waste crime

Serious and organised crime groups are known to have gained a foothold within the Scottish waste management industry. Waste diverted from the legitimate and responsible industry, as represented by SESA’s Members, to illegal waste operations undermines both Scotland’s ambitious recycling targets and the industry’s confidence to invest in new infrastructure and services. SEPA should be adequately equipped to target resources on shutting down illegal waste sites, those operations doing most harm to Scotland’s environment and local communities.



SESA

- represents Scotland's managers of waste and secondary resources
- wants to make Scotland's economy and environment more sustainable by significantly increasing recycling of resources in waste
- the services delivered by SESA's Members are vital to ensure Scotland's compliance with EU waste law and can help Scotland to lead the fight against climate change



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