



The Hon Reece Whitby, MLA
Minister for Environment, Climate Action, Racing and Gaming
8th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Email: Minister.Whitby@dpc.wa.gov.au

4 April 2024

Dear Minister

**Re: Call for Urgent Action by WA in relation to
Risk of Fires to WARR Industry**

The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia (WMRR) is the national peak body representing Australia's \$17 billion waste and resource recovery (WARR) industry. With more than 2,200 members from over 400 entities nationwide, we represent the breadth and depth of the sector, including representation from business organisations, the three (3) tiers of government, universities, and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), including research bodies.

WMRR is writing to you to request an urgent meeting with the WA Government to discuss the tangible actions we believe the government must take to respond to the dramatic increase in fires we are seeing in both trucks and facilities of the WARR sector.

Industry is increasingly concerned that this emergency situation is not being given the commensurate level of attention necessary to protect both our workers and facilities, as well as the viability of the sector given the cost of insurance. At present, we estimate that there is at least one (1) fire a day due to batteries or products containing batteries being inappropriately disposed of through general waste and recycling bins. Federal Government figures estimate a staggering 90% of used handheld batteries are going to landfill or disposed of incorrectly. This is highly problematic as it means they are being placed in our collection vehicles and possibly moving through our facilities with a real chance of causing fires and creating risk to human health and environmental damage.

The WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services reported a 400% increase in li-ion fires between 2018 and 2022. Unfortunately, each of these incidents result in a financial and time cost to respond and remediate. We strongly believe that this is an economic, environmental and social issue with national implications.

The message is very simple - do not put batteries in the bin, rather they must be delivered to a dedicated B-cycle location. WMRR is also acutely aware this scheme is not comprehensive and does not accept battery powered items or larger battery types such as those for electronic vehicles, to this end we are working with B-cycle and states to either expand the scope of this scheme to include these

WMRR NATIONAL OFFICE
57 ST JOHNS ROAD
GLEBE NSW 2037

(02) 8746 5000
INFO@WMRR.ASN.AU

WMRR.ASN.AU



items or clearly include them in the proposed federal e-waste scheme (wired for change) as a matter of priority.

Regardless, as a matter of priority we need the WA Government to assist with a national campaign promoting safe disposal; not placing batteries in bins and only returning them to dedicated locations. While working with industry and local government to identify alternative, accessible and suitable drop off locations for batteries, embedded battery products and largest battery items to keep them out of the established WARR stream given the hazard and risk they pose. The NSW Government is working towards this by proposing to make additional locations available through community recycling centres, while the product stewardship schemes are being developed and finalised.

The reality is government and community need a safe process for managing battery and electronic items at end-of-life and the WARR industry needs to be able to provide a safe place for its employees to work. While the discussions on who is responsible to fund such schemes are worked through by governments and generators.

We also note a comprehensive extended producer responsibility scheme is required for batteries given the increasing incidence of fires at home and in the community, due to often poorly designed batteries. To this end WMRR has been advocating strongly with others that Australia needs to embrace a comprehensive framework such as the EU Waste Directives in managing these items (and others), we would appreciate your support on such an approach. We have also taken the opportunity to attach a paper that we prepared with B-cycle summarising what we believe could be the solutions to what is increasingly becoming a national emergency.

Please contact the undersigned to arrange a meeting either at gayle@wmrr.asn.au or 0429 076 713. We look forward to discussing this matter with you further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gayle Sloan'.

Gayle Sloan

Chief Executive Officer

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia

WMRR NATIONAL OFFICE
57 ST JOHNS ROAD
GLEBE NSW 2037

(02) 8746 5000
INFO@WMRR.ASN.AU

WMRR.ASN.AU