

**Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Circular Economy
Bill 2021**

Opening Statement

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

Introduction

- Today's global economy is overwhelmingly based on a linear model of production and consumption – we take, make, waste.
- This linear economic model is environmentally and economically unsustainable.
- However, the circular economy offers an alternative, where waste and resource use can be minimised, and the value of products and materials maintained for as long as possible. In this scenario, when a product has reached the end of its life, its parts can then be used again and again to create further useful products.
- The circular economy has the potential to significantly reduce dependency on primary resource extraction and complex global supply chains, thereby strengthening state and business resilience in the face of supply shocks.
- Meeting our climate targets also requires a transformation in the way we produce and use goods. Therefore, making less - or making with fewer resources – will play a key role in climate action.
- In line with the evolution of EU and UN environmental policy, the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy was published in September 2020. This far-reaching plan reconfirms the link between the circular economy

and climate action and mandates a whole-of-government approach to ensure Ireland's successful transition to a circular economy.

- The Circular Economy Bill 2021 is a key step in this transition and will provide a robust statutory framework for moving from a focus on managing waste, to a much greater focus on adapting patterns of production and consumption.

- **Circular Economy Provisions**

- The Bill will provide the necessary legislative basis for several key measures including the Circular Economy Strategy and the Circular Economy Programme.
- The adoption of a high-level, whole-of-government, Circular Economy Strategy will play a fundamental role and provide an overarching policy framework that works for the public, private and voluntary sectors. The first version of that strategy, which is due to be published shortly, will set out the first high level steps we need to take to make the transition possible.
- The Circular Economy Programme, which will be implemented by the EPA, will provide critical evidence-led support to achieving the objectives of the strategy.
- Food waste is a global problem that has environmental, social, and economic consequences. Worldwide, more than one quarter of food that is produced is wasted. Through the National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap, Ireland will provide a pathway to achieving the goal of reducing food waste by 50% by 2030.
- Placing the Strategy, Programme, and Roadmap on a statutory footing will ensure that the circular economy transition remains a national policy priority.
- The Bill will also give the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the power to introduce new environmental levies on single use items and in due course to prohibit the placing on the market

of certain environmentally harmful products, replacing and building on existing powers currently set out in waste legislation.

- Recognising the role played by the Environment Fund since its inception, and the need to align its objectives more closely with the promotion of the Circular Economy, a new Circular Economy Fund will replace the Environment Fund.

Amendments to the Waste Management Acts

- The Bill will also make important amendments to the Waste Management Acts to support the delivery of further actions in the Waste Action Plan.
- In the context of waste enforcement, the Bill will advance a number of priority provisions, including the GDPR-compliant use of technologies such as CCTV, for waste enforcement purposes.
- This will support on-going efforts by local authorities to tackle illegal dumping and littering. Provision will also be made for the use of Fixed Penalty Notices for additional waste streams, including under the Extended Producer Responsibility model for dealing with waste tyres.
- The changes proposed have the general aim of providing for more proportionate and more focused enforcement. A combination of legislation, guidance, and the use of mandatory Codes of Practice will ensure that the processing of personal data may be carried out by local authorities tasked with enforcing litter and waste law, thus providing an important deterrent in order to protect our environment from the scourge of littering and illegal dumping, while at the same time respecting the privacy rights of citizens.
- Further provisions in Part 3 of the Bill will help drive better segregation of waste in the commercial sector, where EPA statistics indicate that 70% of the material placed in the general waste bin should be in recycling or organic bins. This in turn will help us to attain our EU targets for recycling and landfill.

- The Bill will also help streamline and improve the End of Waste and By-product application processes. These measures will help drive higher quality applications, and ultimately tailor the level of regulatory scrutiny of applications relative to their environmental risk.
- Finally, Part V of the Bill will end the issuing of new licences for the exploration and mining of coal, lignite, and oil shale. This will consolidate our policy of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Conclusion

- A transition to a circular economy offers the possibility of a sustainable alternative future and is a fundamental step towards achieving climate targets. Through increased awareness, better-informed consumption decisions and appropriate incentives, Ireland can become a leader in this field, delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits. The Circular Economy Bill is a key step in that process.
- I wish to thank the Committee for the opportunity to share the Department's vision for our transition to a circular economy and we look forward to considering the Report of the Committee and to taking part in the pre-legislative scrutiny process.