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June 19, 2018

Plastics Consultation  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
351 St. Joseph Blvd., Place Vincent Massey, 9-064  
Gatineau, QC K1A 0H3

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on a National Zero Plastic Waste Strategy for Canada. We are pleased to support your efforts on this comprehensive federal-provincial-territorial approach to keep plastic within the economy and out of disposal and the environment. We applaud your leadership on this issue in Canada and on the international stage.

We are writing to you on behalf of the Municipal Resource Recovery & Research Collaborative (M3RC). M3RC is comprised of representatives from:

- Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO),
- City of Toronto,
- Regional Public Works Commissioners of Ontario (RPWCO), and
- Municipal Waste Association (MWA).

The purpose of M3RC is to develop and promote policies and programs on behalf of all municipalities in Ontario to support the transition to a circular economy. We understand the importance of this transition to protect our environment and support economic growth. M3RC does not usurp or replace the autonomy of individual municipalities, but provides advice and recommendations to staff and municipal councils for consideration and action.

### **Ontario's Municipal Waste Diversion Programs:**

A common focus of all of our organizations is the establishment and effective operation of programs to reduce waste generation and ensure materials (products, packaging and organics) are recaptured at the end-of-life and reutilized. Municipal governments understand both the economic and environmental opportunities associated with driving Ontario towards a circular economy. One of the most significant challenges that we face today is the recycling of plastic and plastic composite products and packaging. We continue to see exponential growth in plastic materials, many of which do not have viable end markets and which often displace recyclable paper, metal and glass packaging that have long been the backbone of the internationally renowned Ontario municipal Blue Box recycling system.

Even with one of the best waste collection and management systems in the world, Canada only recycles 11%<sup>1</sup> of its plastic waste, leaving almost 90% sent to disposal and in some cases reaching our lakes, rivers and ocean basins.<sup>2</sup> This is a critical problem for Ontario and indeed for the country as a whole. Your government is uniquely positioned to set Canada on a path to sustainable use of plastics and to set an inspiring example for other countries which face the very same challenges.

### **A Solution is Available - Producer Responsibility:**

The producers of plastics products and packaging (commonly the brand holder or the first importer into Canada) exert the greatest influence on product design and material selection. The critical mechanism for establishing a circular economy for plastics is regulating full producer responsibility for products and packaging distributed in Canada. International experience has demonstrated a clear linkage between making producers responsible for recovering and managing their used products and creating the necessary market conditions to reduce pollution of the environment and to return valuable resources to the economy.<sup>3</sup> We are asking your support for wider implementation of producer policies and regulations to address growing public demand for more effective management of plastics and other product and packaging materials.

### **The Rationale for Action:**

There are a number of key factors at play that illustrate the need for producers to take the lead responsibility to address pollution from plastics and other materials as we move to a circular economy:

#### **1. More Complex Packaging Stream with Less Value**

Plastics use has increased 620% over the last 40 years, resulting in 8.3 billion metric tonnes produced globally.<sup>4</sup> This significant shift to plastics from other traditional packaging materials has meant substantial cost increases to Canadian municipalities who are forced to pay for the costs of properly managing these materials. The rapid growth of difficult to recycle plastic packaging specifically has led to a \$33 million cost premium to the Ontario Blue Box system compared to the traditional packaging materials and has reduced the value of other recycled commodities. While many new plastic packaging types such as laminates may have other appealing attributes, they

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<sup>1</sup> Includes both residential and IC&I sources.

<sup>2</sup> Jambeck, Jenna. "Identifying Our Main Challenges." Lecture, Informing Canada's G7 Presidency – A Workshop on Global Marine Plastics Solutions, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, April 25, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> OECD, *Extended Producer Responsibility: Updated Guidance for Efficient Waste Management*, 2016. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/development/extended-producer-responsibility-9789264256385-en.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Jambeck, Jenna. "Identifying Our Main Challenges." Lecture, Informing Canada's G7 Presidency – A Workshop on Global Marine Plastics Solutions, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, April 25, 2018.

do not have commercially viable end recycling markets and end up either as pollution in the environment or in over-burdened disposal sites.

## **2. More Waste Products and Packaging Leaking into Our Environment**

Increasing amounts of plastic waste products and packaging are ending up in our oceans, lakes, rivers and other bodies of water and pose a dire threat to sensitive ecosystems, wildlife, communities, and individuals. This is a growing public health and safety issue as well as an environmental concern. It is of particular concern to municipal governments who are forced to deal with plastics at the “end of the pipe” as litter, in the waste stream, through recycling programs, or at wastewater treatment facilities. Recent studies estimate 8 million tonnes of plastics are ending up in our oceans annually.<sup>5</sup> An additional 10,000 tonnes per year is estimated to be entering the Great Lakes.<sup>6</sup> This has profound impacts on marine mammals, fish and birds. In addition, microplastics are increasingly being found in our drinking water with uncertain health impacts.

## **3. Weak End Markets**

The problem with current commodity markets is it is often cheaper to purchase virgin materials than recycled materials. This is especially relevant for plastics which are the fastest growing component of the waste stream. The external costs associated with extracting new resources or properly managing these materials at end of life are currently not taken into account. As a result, a vicious cycle is created whereby more and more virgin materials are used to make products or packaging that end up in our environment and the economics to properly manage them are not there. Commodity markets for recycled materials are exceptionally weak currently. This is putting substantial financial pressure on municipal governments and increasing system costs while they have no ability to affect the necessary change.

## **4. A Level Playing Field Needed for Brand Holders**

Some large brand holders are demonstrating leadership in promoting responsible stewardship of their products and packaging, however many others are not. This produces an unlevel playing field on which these companies compete. Some producers improperly label and advertise about the recyclability and compostability of their products, which undermines the legitimate efforts being made by other companies. These products add unnecessary costs to municipal recycling programs and can degrade the value of recovered materials that have been designed for

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<sup>5</sup> J. R. Jambeck et al., *Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean* (Science, 13 February 2015).

<sup>6</sup> M. J. Hoffman and E. Hittinger, *Inventory and transport of plastic debris in the Laurentian Great Lakes* (Marine Pollution Bulletin, Vol 115, 15 February 2017).

recycling. This practice also confuses consumers and erodes citizen confidence that the efforts that they have put into separating materials for recycling is helping to protect the environment. The Competition Bureau did release guidance on environmental claims on recycling.<sup>7</sup> The guide notes that to claim recyclability there needs to be accessible collection systems and facilities to process the materials and a market to reutilize them. However, this guidance does not appear to be having its intended impact. Perhaps regulation should be considered to ensure compliance.

## **5. Lack of Disposal Capacity**

The capacity to dispose of wastes in Ontario is shrinking. A 2010 Ontario Auditor General's report stated that one in five municipalities surveyed stated that they had insufficient disposal capacity to meet their community's needs. Similar concerns are also being raised in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Ensuring more of these materials are reutilized will help to reduce the need for new disposal sites.

## **6. Municipalities cannot drive systematic change in product design**

Municipalities do not have the ability to influence the design of products and packaging nor the material they are made of. These are decisions made solely by producers. Municipalities, however, are forced to plan, manage, operate and help fund the collection and management of the products and packaging that producers choose to sell, usually without any prior consultation or coordination.

## **National Zero Plastic Waste Strategy**

The key components of a national zero plastic waste strategy developed in partnership with provinces, territories, municipal governments, and Indigenous peoples, would include the following:

1. A focus on making producers fiscally responsible to manage their products and packaging at their end-of-life. Jurisdictions around the world are introducing policies and regulations to require all producers to take full responsibility for the end-of-life management of the products and packaging they introduce into the market. Ontario, through the *Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016* is a leading example of this trend. Many elements of this legislation are relevant to all regions of Canada.

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Standards Association, *Environmental claims: A guide for industry and advertisers*, 2008. Available at [http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/vwapj/guide-for-industry-and-advertisers-en.pdf/\\$FILE/guide-for-industry-and-advertisers-en.pdf](http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/vwapj/guide-for-industry-and-advertisers-en.pdf/$FILE/guide-for-industry-and-advertisers-en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Waste Dive, *US landfill capacity to drop 15% over next 5 years*, May 8, 2018. Available at <https://www.wastedive.com/news/us-landfill-capacity-decrease-SWEEP/523027/>.

2. Establishment of consistent national definitions (e.g. circular economy, resource recovery, recycling), performance standards, and measurement protocols including auditing to gauge progress towards zero plastic waste.
3. Targeted action on reducing single use plastic products and packaging (which could include bans, fees, or recycled content requirements).
4. Targeted action on eliminating the use of problematic types of plastics and plastic additives.
5. Set national mandatory targets that are at a minimum matching those that leading producers have already agreed to<sup>9</sup>: By 2025, Canada should transform the plastic packaging sector by meeting four targets:
  - a. Along with reduction efforts, all plastic packaging should be reusable or recyclable.
  - b. A 70% target for all plastic packaging to be effectively reused or recycled.
  - c. Take actions to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging items through redesign, innovation or alternative (reuse) delivery models.
  - d. A target of 50% average recycled content across all plastic packaging.

Note it is not enough to confirm that there are municipal or industry collection systems where the product is sold in order to make a claim of "recyclable" or "compostable." There must also be facilities to process the collected materials and reuse them as an input to another product that can be marketed and used. However, these cannot be an expectation that municipal processing facilities will upgrade for new materials and packaging coming into the marketplace. This is in line with the Canadian Standards Association's Environmental claims: A guide for industry and advertisers, 2008.

6. Support for recyclable commodity markets by incenting the use of secondary materials over virgin material through tax incentives and procurement practices.
7. Public procurement requirements for zero waste plastic products and leasing goods instead of purchases, to spur the transition to a circular economy.
8. Establish permanent, dedicated, and annual adequate funding for cleanup of products and packaging that do not have a responsible producer; community led projects to clean up plastics and debris on shores, banks, beaches and other aquatic peripheries that do not take away from the goals of producer responsibility; and education and outreach campaigns on the root causes and

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<sup>9</sup> Information on the Plastic Pact can be found at <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact>.

negative environmental effects of waste products and packaging in and around all bodies of water.

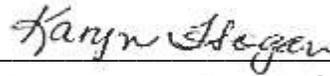
We look forward to continuing to work with the Federal Government on how to ensure that plastics remain in circulation within the economy and out of disposal sites and the environment. We would be happy to assist with discussions on development of a national producer responsibility framework. We encourage you to take bold actions to meet this challenge and to set an international example for other countries to follow.

Sincerely,



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Fred W. Jahn, P.Eng  
Chair, Regional Public Works  
Commissioner of Ontario



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Karyn Hogan, BA, MLIS, MA  
Chair, Municipal Waste Association



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Jim McKay  
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Monika Turner  
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cc: Stephen Lucas, Deputy Minister, Environment and Climate Change Canada  
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Michael Goeres, Executive Director, Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment  
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