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China imposed new contamination thresholds impacting 3.5% recyclables collected in Australia; not a sword but an opportunity for a national circular economy policy

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The real consequence of the China National Sword policy in Australia started to dawn on government and waste industry at the beginning of this year, showing the actual effect of the policy. Media's extensive attention focused on reporting about the implications for waste sector ranging from waste stockpiling to the threat of recyclables not being collected. The impact of this act has led to a drop in the international recycling commodity market prices, which undermined the economic viability of the Australian waste industry, demonstrating a vulnerability to external factors. Is this the end of recycling or a timely nudge for Australian governments to develop a national circular economy policy? This work reviews the status of recycling in Australia and explores the range of options/responses to this disruption. We have seen Australian state governments responding with an injection of funding to ease the immediate burden of these restrictions as well expressing an intention to promote new and innovative technologies to process recycling on-shore. However, it is too early to see the uptake and response by industry. The focus is extended beyond waste industry, exploring the broader opportunity for a circular economy model in Australia. The Australian context is unique; abundant material and energy resources, relatively cheap energy and extensive access to landfilling that has enabled the linear economy model, take-use-dispose and to flourish. How does this context impact a circular economy might develop in Australia compared to circular economy progress in Europe?.

Biography

Melita Jazbec is a Senior Research Consultant at the ISF working on a range of projects from waste management, lithium stewardship and renewable energies, including waste to energy options. Her recent work included development of waste strategies and study of pathways to circular economy. Her expertise ranges from modeling to analytical skills and stakeholder consultations. Her background is in Chemical Engineering with a PhD from the University of Sydney. Her PhD and Post-doctoral study included experimental and modeling study of chemical kinetics of low temperature lean methane and methanol combustion and interaction with the pollutants such as NOX and SOX.

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