



Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action
Meeting on Circular Economy as it relates to the Waste Sector
Tuesday 9th July 2024.

Attending for IWMA:

IWMA Chairman: Des Crinion

IWMA Secretary: Conor Walsh

IWMA Opening Statement

The Irish Waste Management Association (IWMA) is the representative body for waste management companies in Ireland. We have 63 member companies, employing close to 10,000 people. Our members collect and manage all types of solid waste including household, commercial, industrial, construction, demolition, hazardous, metals, aggregates, biowaste, etc. We represent about 95% of municipal waste collection and treatment in Ireland.

Waste Management in Ireland is highly advanced. It is the only country in the world where every bin is weighed, and the weights reported to the customers and to the authorities. It is highly regulated by the National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO), the Waste Enforcement Regional lead Authorities (WERLAs) and the EPA. We work closely with all three to ensure the highest standards of performance in that context.

Our 'Pay as You Throw' system encourages waste prevention and recycling, with a result that our household waste generation per capita is amongst the lowest in the EU. Ireland has met all our EU targets to date, but we are 'at risk' of missing the new recycling targets for municipal waste from 2025 onwards. Most other EU countries are also at risk of missing the new targets.

Our reported municipal waste recycling rate of 41% is similar to the UK, France and Spain, but lower than Italy, Germany, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. We have formed an IWMA Task Force and are working hard on this issue in an attempt to meet the new targets.

We commissioned Eunomia to prepare a report¹ that looks at Ireland's recycling performance and compares details with the highest rated countries. The report shows that our residual waste levels (non-recycled waste) are similar to some of the best performing countries in the EU. The main difference in the recycling rate is the collection and treatment of biodegradable garden and parks waste. Municipalities in Germany count huge volumes of composted biodegradable parks waste in their recycling rates. Ireland prevents that waste. If we recycled as much garden and parks waste as Germany, our recycling rate would be 10% higher.

Our Task Force has uncovered large quantities of construction and demolition waste in the municipal waste data, and we are working with the EPA to rectify this error, which relates to reporting practices for skip waste. This

¹ See https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/MSW-Recycling-Rates-Study-MASTER_v6.pdf

adjustment will show that Ireland's municipal waste recycling rate is currently at about 48% to 49% and our residual municipal waste per capita is amongst the lowest in the EU.

To close the gap to 55% recycling by next year, we need to work on better segregation by all citizens and we believe that this requires a sustained national education and awareness campaign, alongside further incentivization. We need to make it easy for people to do the right thing and hard for them to do the wrong thing. We are working in support of the relevant authorities to enhance the waste collection permitting system to ensure that the charging systems are fully incentivised to promote waste prevention and recycling.

In relation to prices and competitiveness, SLR Consulting prepared a report² in 2018 that looked at prices in Ireland compared them to other EU countries and to historical costs and prices. The report shows that prices have gone down due to privatization and in 2018 prices were approximately €100 per house lower than in 2005. This should be viewed in the context of other utilities where prices have increased greatly during that period.

In response to the question of re-municipalisation, the IWMA commissioned KPMG to prepare a report³ on this issue. The report shows that the transition to such a system would require an upfront spend of between €1.3 billion and €2.7 billion and costs would continue to be significantly higher, with the result that householders would have to pay between 48% and 85% more each year for their waste collection service. We are strongly opposed to such a move, and we say that it will not deliver lower prices or a better service.

We are also opposed to Competitive Tendering or Franchise Bidding for household waste collection. Currently, there are about 25 companies collecting household waste in Ireland. Under competitive tendering, this could reduce to about 5 or 6 large companies and the market would become a lot less competitive. Our members have built, developed and expanded their businesses over the last 3 to 4 decades and cannot be expected to hand over those businesses to the State to be tendered out.

With regard to the Deposit Return Scheme, we lobbied for a Digital scheme that would use QR codes and the existing kerbside recycling bins, with a small number of reverse vending machines at strategic locations. Such a scheme would be a lot easier for the public, would have lower carbon emissions and could be expanded to a lot more packaging. This would have a much greater impact on municipal waste recycling rates. We prepared several reports and submissions on this subject.⁴

Ends.

²See https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Household-Waste-Collection-Benchmarking-Report_Final.pdf

³ See <https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/KPMG-IWMA-Final-report-January-2024.pdf>

⁴ See <https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Digital-DRS-Dublin-Trial-Final-Report.pdf>,
https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/210429_501.181.8_IWMA-submission-on-DRS-Consultation_CW_Rev0-Final.pdf,
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https://iwma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Likely-Impact-of-DRS-on-Irish-Waste-Management_Final-Report_Jan2020.pdf