



SALES REPRESENTATIVE: GREG STOCK
WRITER: LORAIN TULLEKEN

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A Focus on the South African Plastics Pact 2020

Innovative collaboration gears to transform plastics packaging industry within five years

IN SOUTH AFRICA, less than half of all plastic packaging is recycled, with the remainder being landfilled – or worst-case scenario, ending up in the environment. To achieve a circular economy for plastics where no plastic becomes waste, we need to fundamentally rethink the way we design, use and reuse plastic, according to Dr Kirsten Barnes, GreenCape for the South African Plastics Pact.

She cautions however that this cannot be achieved by a single organisation, “Businesses, government, NGOs and others, need to collaborate. And our recently formed Pact, is the ideal platform for concerted action. Notably, all stakeholders have signed a joint set of ambitious and time-bound targets to drive significant change by 2025. The signatories to date are Addis – USABCO, Clicks, Coca-Cola Africa, Danone, Distell, Homechoice, Massmart, Myplas, Nampak Rigid, Palletplast, Pick n Pay, RCL Foods, Shoprite, Spar, Spur, The Foschini Group, Tiger Brands, Tuffy, Unilever, WastePlan and Woolworths, with supporting members the City of Cape Town, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Fruit South Africa, the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa, PETCO, Polyco, the Polystyrene Association, the South African National Bottled Water Association, the



DR KIRSTEN BARNES

South African Plastics Recycling Organisation, the South African Vinyls Association, WRAP UK and WWF. “Essentially, the South African Plastics Pact is a collaborative initiative that brings together key stakeholders from the local plastics value chain, including businesses, the South African government, NGOs and other organisations to tackle plastics waste and pollution at its source.

“As a pre-competitive platform it aims to stimulate industry led innovation, dialogue and collaboration to create new business models and unlock barriers to move towards the circular economy for plastic, with improved economic, environmental and societal outcomes overall.”

The Plastics Pact, she assures, will build

on the positive work started by other initiatives and help scale up and disseminate good practice more quickly. “We are determined that within five years the country’s plastic packaging sector will be transformed.”

The ambitious targets include:

- Taking action on problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative (re-use) delivery models
- 100 percent of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable*
- 70 percent of plastic packaging effectively recycled
- 30 percent average recycled content across all plastic packaging.

She adds, “Importantly these targets will also stimulate job creation in the South African plastics collection and recycling sector while helping to create new opportunities in product design and reuse business models.”

One of the first actions since the programme launch on 30 January is development of a high-level roadmap for a detailed action plan geared to meet the 2025 targets. It will involve all actors in the system and the UK’s Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has secured funding to support with this.

Sustaining the environment, strengthening the economy, enabling transformation

PETCO, an industry driven and financed company, increased the recycling of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles in South Africa from a mere two percent in 2004 to 63 percent in 2018 - 98 649 tonnes equalling 2,3 billion bottles.

“That,” CEO Cheri Scholtz reveals, “equates to 6,2million bottles collected daily and a substantial achievement in a relatively short period.

“PET was formed when South African producers realised that collectively addressing their responsibilities with respect to post-consumer waste would be more effective and efficient than government-imposed regulation. Members include brand-owners, resin producers, converters and bottlers.

“The goal is to capitalise on the expected growth in the market for recycled PET and to act as the vehicle through which the industry can self-regulate and co-ordinate its recycling activities.”

The non-profit company does not collect or recycle waste, choosing instead to financially support activities along the waste value chain. A voluntary EPR is paid by manufacturers, bottlers, and importers. Resin producers and brand owners contrib-

ute annual grants which support recyclers (or, more accurately, reprocessors), particularly during adverse economic cycles.

Scholtz says, “The PET market price is linked to fluctuations in oil prices, exchange rates, demand from large countries such as China, and other factors, so it can be a volatile market. Support for the recycling value chain is paid out at contracted rates for tonnages, in line with our annual recycling targets. In turn, recyclers ensure a consistent demand for post-consumer PET from collectors. Many of whom operate informally, either at the kerbside or at landfills.

“Through targeted support of recycling operations, we have stimulated the development of local end-use markets as well as the export of fibre produced from bottles that would have ended up in landfill sites. More recently, Bottle-2-Bottle Plants, including two Coca-Cola approved bottle-grade PET recycling plants, were established with our support and investments to manufacture PET strapping and monofilament exclusively from post-consumer material. An important revival step in a sector that has for many years been serviced almost exclusively by imports.”



CHERI SCHOLTZ

Presently the collection network of post-consumer material is largely unregulated or self-regulated, with no widespread municipal separation at-source collection systems in place. Recyclables are mostly recovered from co-mingled waste by a network of informal collectors and micro-entrepreneurs. They collect, consolidate and supply post-consumer PET bottles to industrial-scale recycling operations, typically via intermediary agents such as buy-back centres. In many cities PET recycling activities provide income generating opportunities and improved livelihoods for the urban poor.