MEDIA RELEASE

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New think tank launches in Australia to combat growing threat of ewaste

Australians are the fourth highest generators of ewaste per capita in the world generating just over 23.6 kg per inhabitant or 574,000 tonnes per annum[1]. We are also great hoarders of ewaste with more than 25 million mobile phones lying idle in homes[2].

On average we import around 100,000 tonnes of televisions, computers, printers and computer accessories a year[3]. That is about 35 million pieces of electronic equipment per annum[4]. Plus, we also import at least 9.3 million new mobile phones each year[5].

The numbers are even more staggering when you consider that the world generated 44.7 million metric tonnes (Mt) of e-waste in a year, yet only 20 percent was recycled through appropriate channels[6].

In response to the sluggish pace of regulatory and industry action, a new independent think-tank – Ewaste Watch – is being launched this Friday in Australia to act in the public interest to protect human health and the environment by accelerating increased levels of electronics sustainability from cradle to cradle.

Ewaste Watch will be officially launched at the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures by Craig Reucassel, presenter of the ABC TV series *War on Waste*. Craig will share his insights on waste, consumption and how we can all act to avoid ewaste in the first place.

Telecommunications company Ericsson predicts there will be 28 billion connected devices globally by 2020 – this does not account for a diverse range of other non-network connected products such as power-tools, domestic appliances and various battery-powered products.

Ewaste Watch director and co-founder John Gertsakis says there is a lack of effective collaboration, research and action on how to effectively deal with the rapid growth of electronics and the associated socio-environmental impacts. Most activities are limited to recycling, with no real focus on addressing the impacts of scarce and non-renewable materials used in electronics.

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[1] Baldé, C.P., Forti V., Gray, V., Kuehr, R., Stegmann,P. : The Global E-waste Monitor – 2017, United Nations University (UNU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Vienna.

[2] MobileMuster Annual Report 2018

[3] Review of the Product Stewardship Act 2011, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme Consultation paper March 2018

[4] Review of the Product Stewardship Act 2011, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme Consultation paper March 2018

[5] MobileMuster Annual Report 2018 - Appendix

[6] Baldé, C.P., Forti V., Gray, V., Kuehr, R., Stegmann,P. : The Global E-waste Monitor – 2017, United Nations University (UNU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Vienna.

"Ewaste Watch is driven by three key questions: are we doing enough; can we do better; and what are the solutions beyond recycling?" said Mr Gertsakis.

"Electrical and electronic products are proliferating in society. They saturate our existence – how we work, live and play. They are often essential devices that bring functional utility, improved safety and much needed convenience. In many ways they have become an extension of us that we take for granted" said Mr Gertsakis.

"The reality however, is that recycling alone will not deliver the sustainable outcomes and materials conservation required. Greater attention is needed on product durability, reuse, repair, sharing and productive material-use to turn the tide on ewaste and create circular electronics."

In Australia, the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme regulated under the Commonwealth *Product Stewardship Act* has collected and recycled 291,280 tonnes[7] (this is about 42% of waste arising) of TV and computer ewaste since the scheme's creation in 2011.

However, this doesn't include a variety of other end-of-life electronics, most of which are still ending up in landfill. There are few if any collection, reuse or recycling options for small appliances, power-tools, photovoltaic panels, handheld batteries and a growing number of consumer electronics devices.

The situation across the Tasman in New Zealand is even more parlous, with no regulation or national ewaste collection and recycling service for householders or business. While some voluntary initiatives exist in New Zealand, they are piecemeal with limited environmental benefit in terms of widespread diversion from landfill.

Ewaste Watch will inform, educate, engage and activate key stakeholders across the electronics life-cycle from design and manufacturing through to retail, government and the general public, said Ewaste Watch Director and Co-founder Rose Read.

"Business as usual and voluntary programs have barely made a dent in the total volume of ewaste arising, so the urgency for step-change improvement, new business models and positive disruption is now overwhelmingly obvious."

"Circular solutions for electronics across the complete product life-cycle is a cornerstone for Ewaste Watch, as is the need to empower consumers to buy less, choose well and make it last" said Ms Read.

Ewaste Watch activities will include attention to social and consumer aspects, product design, cleaner production, smart logistics, innovative consumption models (eg. sharing economy and collaborative consumption), reuse, repair and recycling. It achieves this through knowledge sharing, policy analysis, consumer education, exhibitions and public activations.

Ewaste Watch will collaborate closely with its research partner, the Institute for Sustainable Futures at University of Technology Sydney. Professor of Resource Futures Damien Giurco will chair the Ewaste Watch advisory group.

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[7] Source: http://www.environment.gov.au/news/2019/03/27/ntcrs-co-regulatory-arrangements-annual-reports-2017-18

Additional quotes to be attributed to the Ewaste Watch Institute:

"Ewaste Watch is calling on the Federal Environment Minister to expand the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme to include all products with a plug or a battery and ensure that end-of-life electronics are diverted from landfill and responsibly recycled. This should include all consumer electronics products, Internet of Things devices, and photovoltaic panels, inverters and energy storage systems."

"As a matter of urgency, Ewaste Watch is calling on the Federal Environment Minister to create a regulated national recycling scheme for all handheld batteries (single-use and rechargeables) under the Commonwealth Product Stewardship Act."

"The Federal Government through the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the Department of the Environment and Energy, must require any company placing Internet of Things devices on the Australian market, to provide a detailed plan for the reuse and/or recycling of these devices when they are damaged, replaced or reach end-of-life, including how such plans will be funded."

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About Ewaste Watch
The Ewaste Watch Institute is a not-for-profit organisation focused on accelerating electronics sustainability and environmental stewardship in Australia and New Zealand. Co-founded by John Gertsakis and Rose Read, the Ewaste Watch mission is to inform, educate, engage and activate industry, government and the public on better product design, cleaner production, smarter logistics and socially desirable consumption models, such as the sharing economy, reuse, repair and materials recycling. Our vision is a circular electronics industry that is restorative and regenerative, and acts in the public interest to protect human health and the environment. Ewaste Watch will collaborate closely with its research partner, the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney.

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