



TO THE AUSTRALIAN PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
MEND IT, AUSTRALIA'S SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT REPORT

“Actioning their right to repair, in a utilitarian way, is typical of accomplished tinkerers. There is no time to waste...or things for that matter!” Mend It, Australia.

“Why stop the self-repair community?” Steve Wozniak / Co-founder of Apple

“Yes, why indeed stop us from fixing our stuff?” Karen Ellis / Co-founder of Mend It, Australia

Since 2015, Mend It, Australia [\[MIA\]](#) is a legacy project in retirement founded by Karen and Danny Ellis with the goal to raise awareness of reuse and repair.

MIA tried to introduce a repair cafe into its local [TIP Shop](#) aka Resale Shop at the [Melton Recycling Facility](#) back in October 2012 to share its repair skills and knowledge with the local community and to help its lower socio-economic community keep its useful but broken stuff out of an expanding [Melbourne Regional Landfill](#). Appendix A is the letter headed ‘Our community, our future’ that was received back from [Melton City Council](#).

Melton Council failed to engage with MIA to find out that [repair cafes do not compete](#) with existing repair shops. It also failed to find out why the TIP Shop would be a great location to host a repair cafe. Repair cafes are not just held in centralised community centres as stated by Melton Council, but out of homes and household garages, especially during the pandemic as well as churches, men’s sheds, parks, nurseries, cafes, libraries, warehouses, schools, town halls, resource recovery centres to name a few.

MIA’s idea was ahead of its time, however nearly a decade on and due to the nation’s waste crisis, at least communities are catching on to the [benefits of collaboration](#) when it comes to resource recovery, reuse and repair. It’s time for governments and bureaucrats to catch up and help communities deliver grassroots initiatives that will effect human behavioural change related to waste.

MIA was pleased recently to find out about the Sustainable Victoria [grants](#) awarded for community repair and reuse initiatives. However, this funding is project based and therefore lacks a long-term commitment by the Victorian government to dedicated repair and resource hubs or sheds. That’s the next step!

MIA also campaigns and advocates for the right to repair in the community at community repair events, via [media opportunities](#) and on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). A submission [\[number 101\]](#) by MIA was made to the Australian Productivity Commission’s [APC] Issues Paper on 1 February 2021.

MIA attended the National Repair Summit [NRS] on the 9 July 2021 and presented with others on a panel. A post-recording of the presentation informs this submission [here](#) [or read Appendix B]. And MIA appeared before the APC's [hearing](#) on Tuesday 20 July 2021.

Community repairers whilst reported in the Draft Report [DR] as becoming more prevalent only had a half a page write up [Box 2.21, pg 47] in a 340 page document. MIA is aware that this lack of attention to community repair by the APC is not that helpful or encouraging for the future sustainability of community repair initiatives. This concern was also highlighted in the South Australian Repair Cafe Coordinators submission [DR 187](#) as follows:

“Whilst there is a strong focus on advocating for consumer rights, access to repair supplies and improvements to product warranties, durability and repairability and management of e-waste, we feel the Draft Report lacks community empowerment elements.

We would like to see greater support for community-led repairing initiative such as Repair Cafes, Makerspaces and Tool Libraries...”

It was encouraging when WIN News Canberra [reported](#) on the NRS and featured volunteers [not OEMs or third party repairers] fixing stuff. These are the people shining a light on repair at the local level and they need more support and funding from governments to ensure their volunteering continues. It is also encouraging that [Shane Rattenbury MLA](#) is supportive of repair cafes, mentioning [ACT repair cafes](#) in his appearance before Commissioner Paul Lindwall on Wednesday 21 July 2021.

In Box 2.1 on page 47 of the DR, MIA does not agree with some of the findings. There is mention that electrical products tend to be less repairable than other products but this can vary depending on what is bought into an event. For example two older electronic devices [[laptops](#)] were unable to be fixed at a recent repair cafe but Mend It's Danny fixed a cheap plastic [electric fan](#), a [microwave](#) and an [electric hand tool](#). That was a 100 per cent repair rate for electrical items at this event.

In the second paragraph, MIA disagrees with [Darebin Repair Cafe](#) in relation to the lack of availability of skilled repairers in the electrical field. MIA's Danny is skilled in electrical repair and attends this repair cafe. He is supported by others with electrical aptitude. However, there can be a lack of volunteers with electrical skills across community repair groups. [Appendix B, point 5] And [volunteering](#) has not been helped by the pandemic.

Without the hearing transcript to refer to at the time of writing this submission, MIA's Danny Ellis, from memory, highlighted to the APC's hearing that many repairers at community repair events were not necessarily experts and were just very talented with their hands, were good at troubleshooting problems, and that he could probably perform surgery, if he had to. This is not as ludicrous as it may first have sounded to the Commissioners, as demonstrated in this [video](#) training tradies for surgery.

[Louis Rossmann's](#) comment in his submission [DR 217](#) also supports the above argument as follows:

“I employ many people who did horribly in school, who are my best technicians. If you are good at solving puzzles and have a detective's mindset, you can do very well at repair even if you were a terrible student - as I myself was.”

In the third paragraph it is interesting the barriers are related to the items, spare parts and tools. MIA mentioned these barriers in its presentation at the NRS [Appendix B, points 9 and 10] However barriers are not only related to the direct repair of items. There are barriers related to bureaucratic ignorance [Appendix A], funding, insurance, venue hire etcetera [Appendix B, points 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11]

MIA has been a supporter of the International Repair Cafe Foundation [[IRCF](#)] movement since hearing about it in 2010, following its inception back in October 2009. As previously mentioned, MIA was keen to establish Australia's first repair cafe back in 2012.

The IRCF in the Netherlands registers repair cafes and provides set-up kits, however it would be even more helpful to have an overarching incorporated repair group association in Australia, similar to the Australian Men's Sheds Association [[AMSA](#)] [Appendix B, point 7]

MIA understands that there will be community repair groups happy with the status quo under the IRCF umbrella, where their monthly activity rolls out under the auspice of a not-for-profit agency or community house.

However, there is an opportunity to address the barriers to the long-term sustainability of community repair groups seeking more long-term viability and permanent venues. The next step up from a monthly event [where people sometimes have to wait a month to get their item fixed] could be dedicated repair sheds or similar.

Repair sheds have been mentioned by the Victorian State Government but no funding has been allocated to establish these [[sub101 pg 2](#)]. Repair centres were mentioned by [World's Biggest Garage Sale](#) in its presentation to the APC hearing on Wednesday 21 July 2021. And the [Sustainability Party of Australia](#) has mentioned supporting major community centres dedicated to the repair in its submission [DR169](#).

Therefore, MIA is of the opinion that more attention is required in the APC's Draft Report related to community repair and repairers. It suggests that the DR is an opportunity to consider some recommendations to the Government that will support community repair groups and their volunteer repairers into the future, as the nation is being required via legislation to move towards a [truly circular economy](#).

Recommendation 1

That Federal Government funding for Repair Sheds or similar is made available to establish these venues in local government areas that will be able to provide repair, reuse, and resale of items on a daily basis. MIA and Shane Rattenbury MP both mentioned at the APC hearings that collaborations could be forged between community repair groups i.e. repair cafes and the men's sheds in local communities. If not collaborations, then at least venues could be shared if more types of shed infrastructure were deemed excessive.

Recommendation 2

An Australian association to support and assist community repair groups i.e. repair cafes, repair sheds or centres and repairers with government funding allocation, liability concerns and brokering insurance. Also creating and supplying promotional literature, list and map of other community repair groups and their details. This type of service could be similar to the services provided by the Australian Men's Shed Association [[AMSA](#)].

Recommendation 3

MRFs with [TIP Shops](#) are untapped venues for community repair, reuse and re-sale initiatives. This idea could fit in with an expanded National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme [[NTCRS](#)] before items are given up to the scheme; they should be picked-over by the [TIP Shop](#) staff and/or community volunteers for re-sale back into the community.

This process would be of more direct benefit to the local community than discarded items being shredded by a recycler or being sent overseas for reuse and repair, especially in lower-socio economic communities.

The image below is taken from a survey currently being undertaken by [Resourceful Hepburn](#) a group of Hepburn Shire residents aiming to improve resource recovery (repair, reuse, repurpose, recycle) in their shire.

The word cloud responses for question 5 show that the most popular suggestion in each category were: Repair: repair cafe, Reuse: Tip shop, Repurpose: Tip shop, and Recycle: Education.



For consideration, some unique resource recovery examples of repair and reuse initiatives for a truly circular economy as follows:

[Hobart TIP Shop](#)

[The Green Shed Canberra](#)

[ReTuna in Sweden](#)

[Rancho Grande USA](#)

[Re-made](#)

MIA commends the APC and its staff on an informative and well researched draft report and is grateful for the opportunities to write two submissions and present before a hearing. We look forward to the final report in October that provides more attention to greater support for long-term repair and reuse initiatives that are community based and community led.

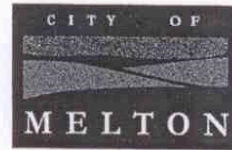
Yours sincerely

Karen and Danny Ellis

[Mend It, Australia](#)

#AURightToRepair

Our community, our future



Our Ref: LShannon/gw
DWS: 2132547

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luke Shannon".

Luke Shannon
General Manager
Planning & Development

1 October 2012

Mr I

cc: Troy Eley – Community Development

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Dear Mr

Re: Public Question – “Repair Cafe” Proposal

Thank you for your question presented to the Council meeting on 20 September 2012 in relation to the Melton Recycling Facility accommodating a “Repair Cafe”.

Currently the Melton Recycling Facility does not have the capacity to accommodate a “Repair Cafe”, and it is not a concept that Council is contemplating at this time.

The “Repair Cafe” concept originated in Europe in 2009 where skilled volunteers (generally skilled retirees) donate time to attempt to repair items from the public. This is usually accommodated within centralised community centres that have appropriate facilities that the public can use whilst they wait for the repair to take place. These repair sessions usually take place over a few hours each month depending on the availability of suitably skilled volunteers.

Learning's from the European experience indicate that such ventures must be driven by the community through skilled and committed volunteers and that applying standard business models to such enterprises invariably leads to failure. “Repair Cafes” cater and attract people who find it too expensive to have their items fixed. As such, these concepts should not aim to compete with existing repair shops.

The success or otherwise of such a concept requires a commitment from a number of broadly skilled volunteers. If you are interested in pursuing this concept further please contact Troy Eley, Council's Community Development Coordinator.

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Presentation to the National Repair Summit ~ 9 July 2021
The Barriers and Challenges of Community Repair

Presenter Karen Ellis/Co-Founder

A [Pythagoras](#) quote to roll an intro

"The oldest, shortest words - 'yes' and 'no' - are those which require the most thought."

When I received a NO of sorts, to a community repair activity back in 2012, it got me thinking and I had the same question that [Steve Wozniak](#) the co-founder of Apple had in his [YouTube video](#) posted yesterday.

["Why stop the self-repair community?"](#)

Yes, why indeed, stop us from fixing our stuff?

I knew that if repair was to have a future in local communities, my husband Danny and I had to help make that happen, along with other repair enthusiasts.

We both knew that there was no time to waste or things for that matter! We had to get out in the community repairing.

Since 2015, under the banner of [Mend It, Australia](#), Danny and I have volunteered at over 190 community repair events around Victoria, including online sessions related to reuse, repair, and the [circular economy](#).

Mend It advocates for right to repair legislation globally and [campaigns](#) for Australian

right to repair legislation.

Whilst Mend It mostly attends [registered repair cafes](#) we must make it clear that it enjoys volunteering in communities as a free entity and welcomes and promotes diversity in community repair models.

Mend It suggests that by only mentioning repair cafes, this could have the unintentional effect of excluding those repair groups that choose to develop their own identities, using a [different title](#).

Mend It believes a mass cultural shift to repairing can happen and that Australia's first [National Repair Summit](#), is a good place to start discussions of how best to support repair at the grassroots level.

It's at this community level that some [heavy lifting](#) is being undertaken by passionate repairers and repair advocates helping consumers keep their useful, mostly inexpensive household items and textiles from prematurely being downcycled or sent to landfill.

[Community repair events are amazing](#). Mend It has repairing and mending skills that it can share. It's extremely motivating for our creative minds to use our skills to troubleshoot broken items. It's the best endorphin fix to repair these items as we get to experience the repair joy! HOWEVER

Free community repair activities can be fraught with challenges and barriers. Here are some of these:

1. Ad-hoc funding from benevolent bureaucrats - this begs the question why should repair people be working for free, to deliver free services and be breadcrumbing for funds?
2. Expensive insurance coverage - some brokers are reported to be refusing repair groups and tool libraries insurance coverage.
3. Liability and risk concerns are regularly flagged as issues.
4. Venue hire costs - unlike Men's sheds governments have not committed to dedicated [repair sheds](#) or similar in their Waste and Resource Recovery Plans for a circular economy.
5. [Lack of volunteers](#) can be an issue. However, Mend It does not agree there is a lack of expertise out there.
6. Myths about safety abound - Some of these we addressed in our [submission](#) to

the Productivity Commission.

7. No formal support alliance for Australia's community repairers and groups [hopefully an outcome of the summit will be to address this issue],
8. Disproportionate bureaucratic requirements for the repair activity.
9. Limited open access to [manuals](#), diagrams and schematics – This issue could be addressed by right to repair legislation to ensure community repairers are NOT excluded from accessing these.
10. Items that are [glued shut or hard to get into](#) due to proprietary and hidden screws
– right to repair legislation related to the design of products to address this issue would be helpful.
11. The cost of Portable Appliance Testing Equipment, its calibration and the training of volunteers are expensive to fund. Our [submission](#) to the Commission had some details on the lucrative business of PAT machines, testing and ongoing associated costs.

To finish a quote from [Cherie White](#), author of Victim to Victor

“When others tell you, 'you can't', they actually fear that you can and are even more afraid that you will.”

Thank you.