

REFORMING PACKAGING REGULATIONS IN AUSTRALIA



“Australians are amongst the highest consumers of packaging, especially plastic packaging, in the world.

We are in a packaging crisis that is causing environmental, health and economic harm. Australia urgently needs reforms to disposable packaging to make it more sustainably and responsibly managed.

Despite promises to act on this in the last term of government and a consensus across environment groups, the packaging sector and recyclers – the Albanese Government has failed to introduce much needed reforms.

Parliament, including the Liberals, Nationals, One Nation and the public need to hold the Government to account for this failure.

It's time to resolve the packaging crisis by adopting a producer responsibility model that ensures more packaging is made to be reusable, compostable or recyclable – and is reused, composted or recycled in practice and at scale.

There is no time to waste.

The average Australian consumer discards over 146 kgs of packaging every year, both at home and away from home. Business consumption equates to 116 kgs/person/pa, making total annual consumption 262 kgs per capita (262 kgs would fill 100 large laundry bags).

Whilst paper and cardboard packaging is readily recycled, plastics are not, with less than 20% recovered in Australia. The rest goes to landfill or is littered, wasting resources, killing wildlife and contaminating the environment and breaking up into microplastics. Soft plastics in particular are not accepted in kerbside recycling collections.

Since 1999 a co-regulatory (voluntary) packaging recovery scheme managed by the packaging industry has been in place.

This scheme promised to deliver less problematic packaging and meet agreed recovery targets. These goals have never been voluntarily achieved.

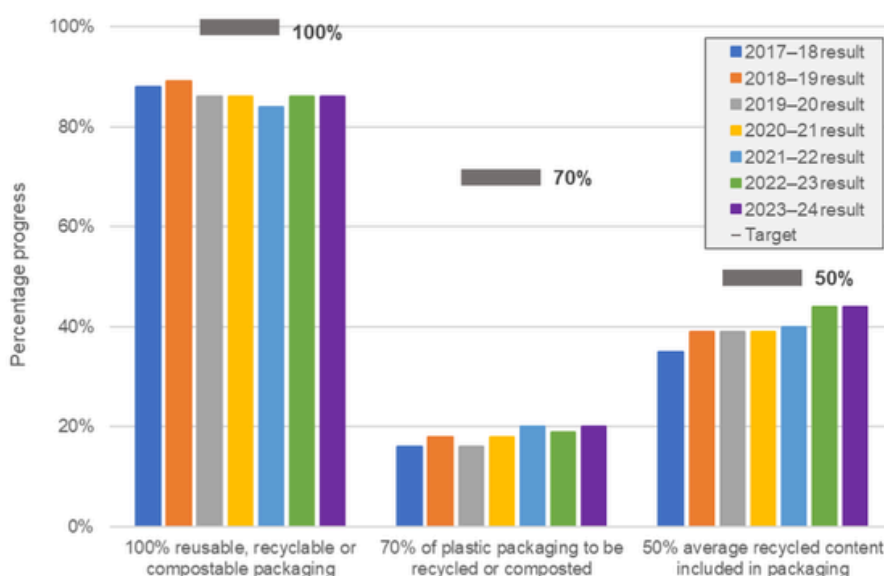


Figure ES-2 – Summary of the National Packaging Targets and progress to 2023–24. SOURCE: APCO

This graph shows average recycled content including paper and cardboard.

Less than 7% of plastic packaging contains recycled content.



The packaging industry, state and local governments, environment organisations and (according to surveys) a significant number of Australians are calling for packaging reforms. These should be based on making the producers of packaging responsible for their products. We can't risk another REDcycle collapse and ongoing plastic pollution.

The beverage industry are responsible for bottles and cans through container refund schemes, so there is no reason why the packaging industry should not take a similar responsibility.

Over the last 10 years State and Territory governments have introduced measures to reduce plastic waste and pollution.

These measures include a national container refund scheme and bans on problem single-use plastics such as bags and avoidable plastic food ware. To support packaging reforms, governments should continue to phase-out problem packaging and endorse new practices. The reuse of cups and containers at stadiums and major events and in public places is becoming common place around the world. State and Territory Governments have an opportunity to follow suit in Australia.

The Boomerang Alliance is calling for a mandatory national scheme for packaging that includes:

- A producer responsibility scheme for packaging (EPR) for all producers that covers the whole life cycle of packaging
- Mandatory targets for avoidance/reduction, reuse, recycling and recycled content into new products
- The inclusion of a framework and targets to identify and eliminate harmful chemicals in packaging
- A scheme based upon achieving an effective circular economy that eliminates waste and manages products in the economy according to their highest resource value
- The immediate establishment of a national producer-funded soft plastics collection service with clear performance targets

How EPR Works

An EPR scheme is based upon polluter pays principles. It requires producers to design products for cost effective recovery and pay the costs of collection, processing and reuse of recycled materials through a circular economy framework.

Most schemes require producers to contribute to an EPR scheme fund that can be used to fund any collection and recovery services. The Container Refund Schemes now operating in every State and Territory are examples of EPR.

Cost of Living

Currently households and businesses pay for kerbside collection of packaging, recycling, landfill costs and public place and litter clean ups through their council rates and other services. It is estimated that on average, every household is currently paying over \$300 per year to manage discarded single use packaging. APCO and ACOR have investigated and found that cost of living increases were minimal when compared to existing costs.

THE BOOMERANG ALLIANCE HAVE PUBLISHED A BEST PRACTICE MODEL FOR AN EPR SCHEME.



REFORMING PACKAGING REGULATIONS IN AUSTRALIA THROUGH EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY.

FOUR REASONS TO ACT



“Australians are the second largest consumers of single use plastic packaging in the world*and we only recycle 18% of the plastic we use. **It's time for change.**”
*Plastic Waste Maker Index, Minderoo Foundation

1 GLOBAL COMMITMENT

In Australia an estimated **130,000 tonnes of plastics leak into the sea every year**. This can have a profound impact on marine ecosystems. As human beings, who can recognise the consequences of our actions, surely we can do better and stop this waste and pollution.

Australia has endorsed the 'high ambition' goals for a **Global Plastics Treaty**. This position supports capping production, banning high-risk plastics and enforcing polluter-pays principles. To make a genuine stand, these are practices we should adopt in our own country.

2 CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND JOBS

By applying circular economy practices, producers can expand the use of reusable, compostable or recyclable packaging, based upon their highest resource values and sustainable performance.

Producer-funded packaging reform would establish a more cost-effective management system for discarded packaging that **reduces material waste; lowers greenhouse emissions in manufacturing; makes collections efficient; and creates significant business opportunities in new reprocessing and over 20,000 associated jobs.**



3 TOXIC LOAD

In addition to the waste of plastic, packaging often contains added chemicals that can be **toxic to humans and wildlife exposed to them**. A PlastChem Report in 2024 found more than 16,000 chemicals potentially present in plastics.

There are few regulations to control the use of these chemicals. A proper framework to identify, control and eliminate harmful chemicals can be built into any reforms. Microplastics add to this dilemma by exposing us to **harmful chemicals that can be absorbed into our bodies.**

4 AUSTRALIANS ALREADY PAY FOR PACKAGING

Australians are already paying for packaging management **via council waste levies, litter control and environmental harm.**

A report by APCO and ACOR found only a minimal impact on cost of living. On average households currently spend \$246pw on groceries, packaging accounted for only 2.5% of that or \$6.14 pw. Industry figures estimate that to meet a 20-30% recycling target for example, it would cost between 19-31 cents per week - a very small price.

In addition households currently pay between \$70-\$95 per year to collect packaging and an average \$215pa in council cost to pick up packaging discarded in public places and for environmental clean ups. These are all costs that can be offset through producer fees contributing to council service costs and reduced pollution.



IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE.



**AUSTRALIA IS
THE SECOND
BIGGEST
GENERATOR
PER CAPITA OF
SINGLE USE
PLASTIC WASTE
IN THE WORLD.**

Minderoo.

Every year, Australia uses...

**1.3+ MILLION TONNES
OF PLASTIC PACKAGING**

Of which...

**1 MILLION TONNES ARE
LANDFILLED OR LITTERED.**

**THAT'S 100K FULL TRUCKS
LINED UP FROM MELBOURNE
PAST SYDNEY.**

**ONE MILLION
TONNES OF
AUSTRALIA'S
ANNUAL
PLASTIC
CONSUMPTION
IS SINGLE USE**

DEPT OF AGRICULTURE, WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT
NATIONAL PLASTICS PLAN 2021

**IN OUR
GROUNDWATER
SOIL
RIVERS
OCEANS
BODIES.**

**IN YOUR BRAIN
ARTERIES
BREASTMILK
AND SPERM.**

**MICROPLASTICS
ARE FOUND
IN 77%
OF HUMANS.**

THE NEXT ASBESTOS?

Every year...

**130,000 TONNES OF
PLASTIC LEAK INTO
AUSTRALIA'S MARINE
ENVIRONMENT**

**DAMAGING
ECOSYSTEMS,
WILDLIFE,
FISHING AND
TOURISM
INDUSTRIES.**

**AUSTRALIA'S
ANNUAL PLASTIC
CONSUMPTION
PRODUCES MORE
EMISSIONS THAN
4 MILLION CARS.**

**IF CURRENT TRENDS
CONTINUE, THE COST OF
EMISSIONS FROM
AUSTRALIA'S PLASTIC
CONSUMPTION WILL
MORE THAN QUADRUPLE
BY 2050,
THE YEAR AUSTRALIA
HAS LEGISLATED TO
REACH NET ZERO.**

**WITHOUT REFORM,
AUSTRALIA'S
RELIANCE ON
IMPORTED
FOSSIL FUEL BASED
PLASTICS WILL
GROW
EXPONENTIALLY.**

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REACH NET ZERO.**

Without packaging reform,
**ENVIRONMENTAL
COSTS WILL
AMOUNT
TO \$32 BILLION
BY 2050**

**DOMESTIC RECYCLING
PLANTS ARE CURRENTLY
OPERATING AT ONLY 53%
CAPACITY.**

**WITHOUT REFORM,
THIS IS SET TO DROP TO
32% WITHIN FIVE YEARS,
LEADING TO FACILITY
CLOSURES, STRANDED
ASSETS AND JOB LOSSES.**

By 2030

BENEFITS OF NATIONAL PACKAGING REFORM

- REDUCING LANDFILL WASTE BY AROUND 370,000 TONNES EACH YEAR
- CUTTING 700,000 TONNES OF GHG EMISSIONS EACH YEAR
- AVOIDING \$2 BILLION IN ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS
- ATTRACTING \$220 MILLION IN PRIVATE INVESTMENT
- 19,000 JOBS
- ADDING \$2.5 BILLION IN VALUE TO THE ECONOMY

**THE IMPACT ON PRODUCT PRICES IS AROUND
0.1% OF PRODUCT COST.**