



Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc.

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Re: Australia's War on Plastic Waste - Targets Missed

Australia's battle against plastic waste is facing a critical setback, with a new report revealing sluggish progress towards the nation's ambitious 2025 National Packaging Targets.

In 2018, a coalition of local, state, territory, and federal government representatives joined forces with industry partners, setting forth the National Packaging Targets – a pledge to steer Australia towards a circular economy for all packaging produced, used, and sold within its borders. Now, six years on, the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO), the key driver of this initiative, has released its 2022-23 Consumption and Recovery Data Report, casting a shadow of doubt over the nation's ability to meet its self-imposed deadlines.

A Breakdown of Disappointing Results

The report card reveals a mixed bag of outcomes, with some targets barely budging and others even sliding backward.

Target 1: The goal of 100% reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging saw a negligible increase, with recyclable packaging rising from a mere 84% to 86%.

Target 2: In a particularly alarming trend, the target of achieving 70% plastic packaging recycling or composting actually *regressed*, falling from 20% to a concerning 19%.

Target 3: The objective of reaching 50% average post-consumer recycled content in packaging witnessed only a modest improvement, climbing from 40% to 44%.

Target 4: The phasing out of problematic single-use plastic packaging has seen some success, with a 40% reduction from the 2017-18 baseline.

Economic Headwinds Hampering Progress

APCO's 2022 review pinpointed several significant economic barriers that continue to impede progress towards the targets. These include:

- The cost of recycling many packaging materials remains higher than the market value of the recycled materials themselves.
- Insufficient collection systems are in place for certain materials.
- Existing collection infrastructure is underutilized.
- Reprocessing facilities and market demand are inadequate to handle the volume of materials that are collected.

In response to these challenges, Environment Ministers have asked APCO members to accelerate progress and support the transition to a reformed regulatory framework.

APCO's Strategic Roadmap for Change

APCO has unveiled its 2030 Strategic Plan, developed with input from over 800 organizations, which outlines a series of key strategies to get Australia back on track. Such as:

- Designing packaging with a focus on reduction, reuse, and recovery.
- Improving user participation and utilization of reuse and recycling systems.
- Establishing comprehensive and accessible packaging recovery systems for all packaging types.
- Developing robust local and global markets to drive demand for Australian recycled materials.
- Securing the necessary financial resources to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Building stakeholder confidence in the system's decision-making processes and overall integrity.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) at the Forefront

The Strategy also proposes innovative approaches to waste management, with a strong emphasis on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. An EPR scheme holds packaging production companies responsible for the collection and packaging recovery. They collect 'problematic materials' that cannot be collected at the curb, often for specific industries. This is similar to Product Stewardship, a policy that supports sustainable practices from conception to end-of-life. However, unlike EPR Product Stewardship involves governments and shared responsibilities whereas with EPR only the production company is responsible, from conception to disposal. Both encourage the production of reusable packaging and reducing kerbside waste. Several EPR's currently exist, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme founded in 2011 and more are being developed

APCO proposes entering service agreements with Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) that “operate voluntary, industry-led packaging EPR schemes”. APCO noted that collection and recycling of voluntary EPR schemes is often financially constrained, by entering a service agreement PROs would receive service payments to deliver high quality collection and recycling of specified materials, if this can be done efficiently and effectively.

Broader Solutions for a Systemic Shift

The Boomerang Alliance has put forward 13 additional recommendations for consideration in the 2025 Federal Election, advocating for a more systemic shift in tackling plastic waste:

1. Mandatory national Product Stewardship for packaging.
2. Cohesive and consistent state and territory policies to phase out single-use plastics and promote viable alternatives.
3. National mandatory packaging standards and labelling to combat greenwashing and ensure transparency.
4. Product Stewardship schemes specifically designed for soft plastics, particularly in the wake of the REDcycle cessation.
5. National regulations to enforce circular economy principles across all sectors.
6. Expansion of the Recycling Modernisation Fund into a broader "Circular Economy Fund."
7. Support for an international plastics treaty to address global plastic pollution at its source.
8. A national microplastic pollution reduction plan to mitigate the pervasive threat of microplastic contamination.
9. Improvements to existing State Container Refund Schemes to maximize their effectiveness.
10. Development of a Commonwealth Reusable Packaging Plan to encourage and support reusable alternatives.
11. Funding assistance to regional neighbours in the Pacific to curb plastic pollution at its source and prevent harmful waste disposal.
12. Support and funding for community clean-up projects to engage citizens and address existing pollution.
13. A comprehensive cigarette litter reduction plan and a national EPR scheme for discarded vapes

The challenge of ending plastic waste pollution is immense. It demands unwavering dedication and a shared sense of responsibility from industry, government, consumers, and waste management operators, as well as collaborative efforts with our neighbouring countries to prevent harmful waste disposal in the Pacific region.

We call on voters and party candidates in the lead up to the 2025 federal election to make plastic waste reduction a priority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Kula', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

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