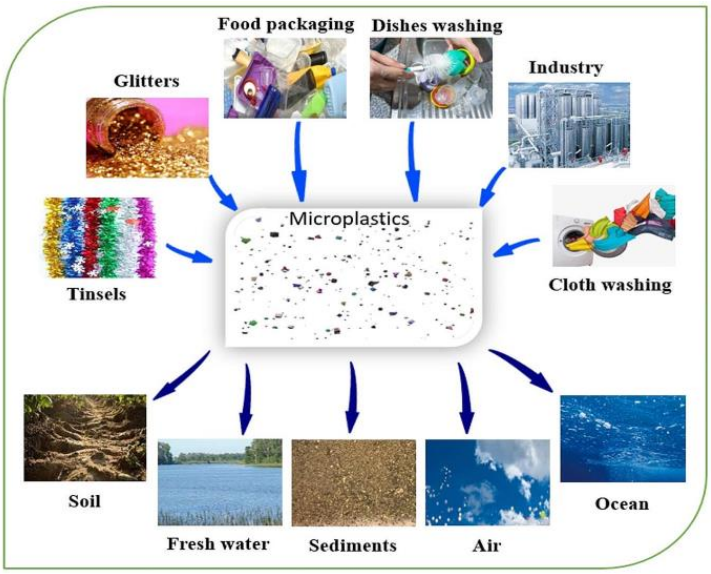
Boomerang Alliance – Advancing a Circular Economy
(Written by Allan Fong – HOPE researcher NSW)

Plastic pollution

Plastic pollution is undeniably rife across the globe, and the scale of the problem is enormous. Microplastics have been found everywhere from the deepest oceans to the highest mountains as well as within the human body. Scientists are still trying to understand their impact on the environment and human health, and the emerging evidence is concerning. Studies so far suggest microplastics may:

- slow the growth of microscopic marine algae known as phytoplankton, a base of multiple marine food webs
- Makes soil less fertile
- Speed melting of snow and ice, thereby speeding global warming
- Negatively impact the human immune system
- Increased risk of lesions in the respiratory system from airborne particles



(Everything you should know about microplastics) (Top 10 Questions on Microplastics Answered - WWF-Australia

Introducing Boomerang Alliance

Boomerang Alliance is an Australian non-government organisation (NGO) representing a network of community and environmental groups dedicated to reducing waste, plastic pollution and advancing a circular economy. Founded in 2003 by a group of enthusiastic people who campaigned for a container deposit system across Australia, it has since evolved into an alliance of over 55 local, state and national allies. Today, the Boomerang Alliance has become the most influential national alliance fighting waste and plastic pollution in Australia.

The vision: A circular economy by eliminating waste and pollution resulting in a healthy planet

The mission: To drive the behavioural and systemic change required to deliver the social, economic and environmental benefits of a zero-waste society

The work of Boomerang Alliance is driven by the following four strategic pillars:

Advocacy **Actively lobbying government for policies to address waste and pollution**	**Engagement** **Collaborating with businesses, government and communities to promote waste reduction**
Leadership **Leading and supporting allies in the shared mission to reduce waste**	**Evidence** **Their work is evidence based**

The Scale of the problem

Research shows that in Australia less than 13% of plastic packaging is recycled with the remaining 87% going to landfill after just one use. Based on current trends, it has also been estimated there will be more plastic than fish (by weight) in our oceans by 2050 (The Problem | Boomerang Alliance). The Boomerang Alliance is campaigning to:

- Urge governments to phase out problem plastics
- Promote recycling
- Hold packaging producers accountable for the materials they place on the market
- Promote a circular economy to stem the generation of endless waste
- Support initiatives such as "Plastic Free Places" by providing guides and tools to support businesses, event organisers and local governments to eliminate single-use plastics and transition to sustainable alternatives
- Raising the bar on Australia's Container Deposit Scheme by increasing the refund from 10 cents to at least 20 cents per container, and expanding the network so it is available to more communities

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is an environmental policy and management strategy which shifts the responsibility of product waste from consumers to manufacturers and suppliers. Producers pay for the collection, sorting, recycling or safe disposal of their products when they reach end of life. This incentivises manufacturers to design products which are easier to disassemble and recycle. Reducing single-use packaging waste or using recyclable materials in packaging is also a key aspect of EPR.

Countries with well-designed EPR systems have seen recycling rates increase and overall plastic usage fall, and better environmental outcomes with less products destined for landfill.

(Extended Producer Responsibility: A Critical Component for the Global Plastics Pollution Treaty)

Packaging reform in Australia

Prior to the last federal election in Australia (May 2025), a packaging reform consultation run by the Labor Party confirmed significant support for an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging. The Boomerang Alliance called for the government to mandate better product stewardship with the following objectives:

- A mandatory product stewardship scheme for packaging to be in place by 2026
- Fast-track an industry funded collection scheme for soft plastics
- Phase out problem single-use packaging through state legislation
- Introducing reusable cups and containers in public places such as stadiums and other major events

Disappointingly, in mid-2026 the Australian Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt announced the Albanese Labor Government will not be introducing mandatory, national Extended Producer Responsibility packaging reform during its current term in government for the following reasons:

- Cost of living concerns – a mandatory national EPR system would impose compliance costs on manufacturers which might be passed onto consumers
- Regulatory burden – a desire by the government to balance environmental concerns with the broader needs of the economy and avoid rigid compliance requirements for businesses during a time of economic strain (Australian government shelves proposed packaging reforms in favour of…)

Latest news from Boomerang Alliance website:

(1) Clorox Australia, the manufacturer of Glad products was fined $8 million dollars over misleading ocean plastic claims. Their “Glad to be Green Garbage Bags” packaging contained the footnote *Ocean Bound Plastic* which is a term describing plastics collected within 50km of a coastline which has not yet made it into the ocean. A court determined the packaging gave consumers the false impression the bags were helping to remove ocean plastics.

(2) An audit conducted by the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) and the Boomerang Alliance found that our supermarkets are failing on plastic reduction, especially when it comes to packaging. The following table summarises the performance of our major supermarket chains in terms of transparency, evidence of plastic reduction and recycling and other criteria:

Table 1. Detailed supermarket performance in 2025.

Supermarket	Transparency Weighting: 10% of final score	Plastic Reduction Weighting: 40% of final score	Reuse Weighting: 20% of final score	Recycling Weighting: 20% of final score	Policy, Planning & Governance Weighting: 10% of final score	Total Weighted Score
Woolworths	52%	38%	22%	29%	77%	38%
Metcash	4%	30%	23%	19%	57%	26%
coles^	*	22%	22%	20%	21%	19%
ALDI^	*	20%	9%	13%	14%	14%

Key: Not Good | It's a start | Good

* Insufficient data.
^ No response to survey, data derived from public reporting only.

Other areas of concern:

- Despite selecting loose products online, shoppers still received their groceries overwrapped in plastic. Single garlic bulbs are often packed in their own plastic bag.
- Another audit revealed loose produce is often more expensive than pre-packaged alternatives
- Packaging now makes up 58% of all litter collected by Clean Up Australia volunteers

(3) Return and Earn – The latest NSW EPA figures indicate the Return and Earn scheme is reducing litter statewide. Plastic litter has decreased by 45% since 2018, and all litter by 42%. The Boomerang Alliance is maintaining the momentum by calling on State and Federal governments to continue reform to:

- Introduce EPR
- Phase out problem single-use plastics
- Establish a national soft plastics collection service
- Increase container scheme refunds from 10 cents to 20 cents

(About | Return and Earn - Bottle, Can & Container Recycling - Official Site)