

# Plastic Free

## Business Action Guide

A practical guide to eliminating the most harmful single-use plastics, and saving Australia's ocean wildlife.





# Introduction

## Australians treasure our unbeatable beaches and iconic marine life.

Growing up we enjoy magical experiences, like swimming with dolphins and turtles, or colourful fish on Australia’s outstanding coral reefs. We are visited by curious mother whales and their calves, who migrate along our coasts every year.

Looking after our beautiful beaches and marine wildlife is our privilege and our sacred responsibility.

Australians are devastated to see our pristine beaches and waterways filling up with plastic. Turtles are being entangled in plastic bags, and drowning. Mother birds are feeding plastic to their babies. And our majestic ocean giants are washing up on our beaches, stomachs full of plastic trash.

Businesses like yours have the power to stem the flow of plastic into the environment, saving thousands of animal lives. Customers increasingly expect us to switch away from problem plastics to safe, earth friendly solutions, and they will reward businesses who do so. In turn, we have the ability to influence less informed customers, by showing our sustainability values with pride.

Australia’s businesses are a critical part of the solution. You can be a leader and help solve this crisis.

We invite you to join the plastic free revolution, and help us remove unnecessary and harmful plastics from our supply chains. By opting for sustainable alternatives, you can stem the flow of plastics.

Together, we can create clean, healthy oceans that are full of life - for generations to come.

For our oceans,

**Darren Kindleysides**  
CEO, Australian Marine Conservation Society

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AUSTRALIA

*This resource was made possible with the support of Good Pitch Australia (Shark Island Institute & Documentary Australia Foundation).*



**Help us create change.**

Sign on to the Plastic Free Business Statement:  
[marineconservation.org.au/plasticstatement](https://marineconservation.org.au/plasticstatement)

# You can do it!



Image courtesy of Boomerang Alliance

For almost every single-use plastic item you depend on, there are safer earth friendly alternatives available that don't break the bank. In this guide, we have included guidance on what to ask your suppliers for, and how to keep your plastic free solutions cost effective.

Product quality has come a long way and there are many high performing alternatives to plastic that will meet your needs, and they're not as expensive as you think! By making single-use items opt-in, you can also save your business money.

We've included advice on the hiccups to watch out for, so that you are equipped with all the knowledge you need to get truly earth friendly products and save our planet.

**Every little bit helps.  
Take the first step  
today!**

Which plastic item will you choose to eliminate this month?

# Using Your Plastic Action Pack

The Australian Marine Conservation Society is working with businesses and councils across Australia to tackle the top 10 single-use plastics that are killing our marine wildlife.

## 10 most lethal single-use plastics for ocean animals

- |                                |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Plastic shopping bags       | 6. Plastic bottles & lids           |
| 2. Plastic cutlery             | 7. Plastic takeaway containers      |
| 3. Plastic straws and stirrers | 8. Polystyrene containers           |
| 4. Plastic fruit & veggie bags | 9. Plastic lined coffee cups & lids |
| 5. Balloons & balloon sticks   | 10. Plastic cups, bowls & plates    |

In this guide you can find useful information on hiccups to avoid and alternatives you can use to replace or reduce these killer plastics at your place of business.

Along with this resource, we have created a number of assets you can use to assist you to remove killer plastics and to promote your plastic free efforts.

### Plastic Free Poster

Use one of our three 'Plastic Free Champion' posters to promote your commitment to phasing out these killer plastics.

### Plastic Free Countertop Flyers

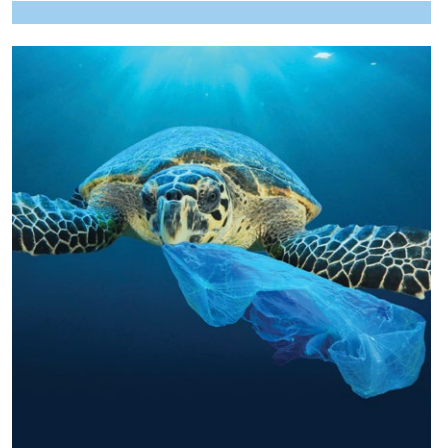
Print out these handy flyers for your countertop or coffee table to promote your commitment and encourage your customers to join you in giving up plastics that harm marine life.

### Plastic Free Social Media Templates

Add your business logo to these social media promotional templates and share on your social media accounts to promote your commitment to giving up target plastics.

### 10 killer plastics booklet

Find out how these 10 consumer plastics harm Australia's ocean wildlife, and get great ideas for switching to alternatives. You may share this booklet to spread awareness among your staff and customers.



# Common Hiccups

Manufacturers work hard to ensure their products end up on supplier shelves, and greenwashing can make it hard to distinguish the good from the bad. Even our suppliers can have trouble knowing what's truly earth friendly!

Use these helpful tips to ensure the products you get are good for the planet, and good for you.

## Polystyrene



Polystyrene is often used in takeaway food containers because it is low cost and easy to use. Yet it is one of the worst plastics for marine life.

Polystyrene products are one of the most common plastics found in the environment because they are not compostable, highly contaminated by food products and notoriously difficult to recycle.

Composed of around 95% air, polystyrene is highly mobile with the potential to travel long distances. Its soft structure means it's likely to fragment into pieces and is easily mistaken for food, harming wildlife who eat it.

### Did you know?

- Polystyrene is easily identifiable by the number '6' within a recycling symbol.
- Polystyrene is often found in disposable cutlery, clam shell containers, foam cups, or even CD and DVD cases!
- When exposed to heat, polystyrene leaches the deadly chemical styrene, a suspected cancer agent.
- Foam take-away containers are one of the 10 most commonly found litter items in international coastal cleanup surveys.

Don't risk human or animal lives. Choose to refuse polystyrene.

## Oxo-Degradable and Oxo-Biodegradable Plastics

Oxo-degradable plastics are particularly bad and many countries are banning them. They are plastics to which chemicals have been added to accelerate the fragmentation.

**An ACCC ruling in 2019 found that oxo-degradable products are not compostable.** There is no evidence that these products decompose, instead breaking up into smaller pieces that are easily ingested by marine life. They are also hard to sort out from recyclable plastics, sabotaging the recycling efforts of people who try to do the right thing.

**We recommend saying NO to biodegradable plastics. Ask for 100% compostable instead.**

*"The adoption of plastic products labelled as 'biodegradable' will not bring about a significant decrease in the quantity of plastic entering the ocean or the risk of physical and chemical impacts on the marine environment."*

– UNEP Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities 2015

## Compostable Bioplastics

You've probably seen a lot of products that look like plastic, but claim they are a compostable 'bioplastic'. As much as it is nice to think these are an ocean safe alternative, they only work if they make it to a commercial grade compost facility.

### What is bioplastic?

Bioplastic is plastic made from plant or other biological material instead of petroleum. It is also often called bio-based plastic.

It can either be made by extracting sugar from plants (PLAs), or it can be made from polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHAs) engineered from microorganisms. PLA plastic is commonly used in food packaging/utensils like bottles and cutlery, while PHA is often used for medical products like sutures.

Most plastics labelled as 'bioplastics' only break down in industrial composters - not in landfill (where they usually end up), and not in domestic compost heaps or as discarded litter in the ocean. They are not shown to have any benefit in reducing plastic pollution in our oceans.

If a plastic-looking product is labelled certified compostable, it will likely need to go to a commercial composting or a commercial organics recycling facility. Yet your customers are likely to throw these products straight into the bin, meaning they won't break down.

**We recommend trying to avoid any plastics, even bioplastics.**

**If you do need to use bioplastic, consider providing a compost collection bin at your business - helping ensure it gets safely disposed of.**

- Speak to your local council about options for organic waste collection.
- If your local council does not provide an organic waste collection service, you can try pickup schemes like BioPak Compost Service: <https://www.biopak.com.au/compost-service>



# Plastic Free Alternatives

<h2>Plastic Shopping Bags</h2>	<p>Mistaken for food, or entangling and drowning ocean animals, plastic bags are one of the biggest killers. Whether lightweight or heavyweight, they've got to go.</p> <p><b>Earth Friendly Alternatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Paper carry bags</li><li>● Cardboard boxes</li><li>● Reusable cloth bags</li></ul> <p><i><b>TIP:</b> A branded paper or reusable carry bag allows your customers to show off your business, while feeling good about treading lightly on the earth!</i></p>
<h2>Plastic Cutlery</h2>	<p>Old plastic cutlery is widespread across our coasts and oceans, injuring and killing seabirds and ocean animals who mistake plastic pieces for food.</p> <p><b>Earth Friendly Alternatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Reusable stainless steel cutlery</li><li>● Bamboo cutlery</li><li>● Wooden cutlery</li></ul> <p><i><b>TIP:</b> Save money by only offering disposable cutlery on request. Many people have cutlery at the home or office, or increasingly carry reusable cutlery with them!</i></p>
<h2>Plastic Straws &amp; Stirrers</h2>	<p>Blown out of trash cans or discarded, straws are one of the most common plastics in the oceans. Straws and drink stirrers are notorious for injuring turtles, fish and wildlife.</p> <p><b>Earth Friendly Alternatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Paper straws</li><li>● Bamboo straws</li><li>● Reusable stainless steel straws</li><li>● Reusable silicone straws</li></ul> <p><i><b>TIP:</b> These days most businesses save money by only offering paper straws on request, and by ditching drink stirrers! A reusable straw will do the job and save waste.</i></p>
<h2>Plastic Fruit &amp; Vegetable Barrier Bags</h2>	<p>Plastic packaging, like fruit &amp; veggie bags and plastic wraps, blow easily into the ocean. These killer plastics entangle and drown animals, or cause blockages in their stomachs.</p> <p><b>Earth Friendly Alternatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Paper bags</li><li>● Butchers, waxed or parchment paper for wrapping</li><li>● Cardboard boxes</li></ul> <p><i><b>TIP:</b> Ask your grocery suppliers to reduce their plastic waste, by not individually wrapping fruit or vegetables in soft plastics.</i></p> <p><i><b>TIP:</b> Don't pre-wrap produce. Allow customers the choice to ditch wasteful packaging, and help them tread lightly on the earth!</i></p>



## Balloons & Balloon Sticks

Balloons are one of the most lethal killers of ocean wildlife – entangling birds and animals in their strings, or causing blockages and starvation when eaten. Celebrate safely with these great ideas!

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- Paper lanterns
- Paper garlands
- Flags
- Banners
- Bubbles
- Flowers
- Kites

**TIP:** Think reusable! Garlands and lantern strings can be reused time and time again, saving you money while showing off your ocean-loving values.

## Plastic Bottles & Lids

Although recyclable, many end plastic bottles end up in landfill – taking up to 1000 years to break down. More than a third of all plastic on Australian beaches and waterways is beverage container rubbish.

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- Try to stock your fridges with glass bottled beverages
- Provide tap water for customers

**TIP:** Help customers recycle by offering a recycling bin at your business. Most local councils will be happy to provide recycling pickup services.

## Plastic Takeaway Containers

Easily discarded and breaking down into sharp pieces, plastic takeaway containers injure and contaminate fish, turtles and seabirds who eat them. Switch to safer alternatives and help save lives.

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- Bagasse food containers
- Aluminium and paper takeaway containers
- Cardboard food containers
- Reusable containers, returnable for refund
- Glass mason jars for salads or soups

**DID YOU KNOW?** Bagasse is made from sugarcane, and is suitable for hot foods. It's leak proof, microwave proof, freezer proof and it insulates the food. It is biodegradable in commercial compost.

**TIP:** Join <https://trashlesstakeaway.com.au/> and allow customers to bring their own takeaway containers! Joining will increase your exposure to plastic conscious consumers.

**TIP:** Where possible, try to use reusable containers for food prep or food storage.

## Polystyrene Containers & Products

Lightweight, hard to clean, and virtually impossible to recycle. Polystyrene blows into the oceans and breaks down into small pieces. Eaten by wildlife, it contaminates and starves them.

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- 100% compostable clamshell containers
- Bagasse food containers
- Cardboard containers (recycled if possible!)
- Mushroom material containers

**TIP:** Try offering reusable containers, with a refund on return! New services like Returnr allow you to join a network of cafes where customers can return washed reusable containers. <https://returnr.org/>

## Plastic Lined Coffee Cups & Lids

Most takeaway coffee cups are never recycled. It's not just the lids that are plastic - most cups have a thin plastic lining to prevent liquids leaking, making them difficult to recycle. Many end up in the ocean.

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- Offer a discount for customers who bring reusable cups
- Offer reusable mugs or cups (refund on return)
- Bagasse lids
- PLA lined cups (only compostable in commercial composters)

**TIP:** Join <https://responsiblecafes.org/> as one of thousands of cafes offering a discount for people who bring reusable cups.

**TIP:** Join schemes like <https://greencaffein.com.au/> where customers can return reusable cups to any participating cafe.

### **Help get compostable cups where they need to go:**

Ask your council about organic waste collection services, or join pickup schemes like BioPak Compost Service: <https://www.biopak.com.au/compost-service>

## Plastic Cups & Plates

Plastic plates and cups often can't be sorted due to their unusual shape, so they don't get recycled. Easily blown into our waterways, they harm turtles and wildlife who eat the plastic pieces.

### Earth Friendly Alternatives

- Bagasse plates and bowls
- Compostable paper cups
- Compostable paper plates and bowls
- Bamboo plates and bowls
- Reusable plates, cups and bowls

**TIP:** At events offer reusable items, and a washing station for attendees to wash and dry. Most people are more than willing to help out, and help save the planet.

**TIP:** Not sure if there is plastic on your paper product? Try ripping it slowly - you will quickly see if there's plastic on it!



Images courtesy of Boomerang Alliance

# Working with Local Councils

Your local council is always working towards improving sustainability in your area, and they will be eager to provide support to you as a plastic free business champion.

Council sustainability or waste management teams can often provide useful support and advice, such as:

- compost or recycling pickup services
- business recycling support
- help finding and connecting with local plastic free networks.

## How to find and contact your local council:

- ACT Regional Government Website: <https://www.act.gov.au/browse/act-government/regional-government>
- NSW Local Government Directory: <https://www.plasticfreeplaces.org/council-overview>
- NT Find Your Council Website: <https://nt.gov.au/community/local-councils-remote-communities-and-homelands/find-your-council>
- QLD Local Government Directory: <http://www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory/local-government/local-government-directory.html>
- SA Local Council Directory: <http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/councils>
- TAS Tasmanian Council Directory: [http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local\\_government/local\\_government\\_directory](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local_government/local_government_directory)
- VIC Find a Council Website: <https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils>
- WA My Council Website: <https://www.mycouncil.wa.gov.au/>

## Plastic Free Places

Supported by a number of State and Territory Governments, the widely successful Plastic Free Places program by Boomerang Alliance has been piloted across Australia in locations such as Perth, Adelaide, Byron Bay, Noosa, Elsternwick and Mt Martha.

The program reduces the use of key single-use plastics by specifically engaging those who provide these items - food retailers, events, markets etc. - to join the program and switch from single-use plastics to better alternatives, such as reusable (preferred) or compostable items.

Participant businesses in the Plastic Free Places program are supported by Boomerang Alliance experts to eliminate six of the single-use plastic items which represent the most problematic and prolific sources of the litter stream:

- water bottles,
- straws,
- coffee cups/lids,
- takeaway containers,
- food ware (cutlery, plates, cups etc); and
- plastic bags.

Once a participant business has eliminated all required plastic items, they are awarded the status of Plastic Free Champion.

Program staff help local businesses source solutions for these and other plastics.



Images courtesy of Boomerang Alliance

### Make your local area a Plastic Free Place!

Speak to your local councillor and let them know you support the plastic free places program, and express your interest in being involved!

Give them the link to the Plastic Free Places Information for Councils page (<https://www.plasticfreeplaces.org/council-overview>) and ask them to get in touch with:

#### **Kellie Lindsay**

Program Manager, Plastic Free Places  
Boomerang Alliance  
[kellie.lindsay@boomerangalliance.org.au](mailto:kellie.lindsay@boomerangalliance.org.au)

# Nationwide Ban on Single-Use Plastics

There is incredible momentum across the globe to stem the flow of toxic plastic into our oceans and our environment. With Australia's recycling systems buckling under the strain, and our oceans on track to have more plastic than fish in the sea, we all know we have to act with haste.

**Our government must play a leading role in tackling the scourge of plastic pollution.** Positive changes have begun, with bans on single-use lightweight bags and container deposit schemes announced in almost every state and territory. Yet unless we control the other single-use plastics that are killing marine animals, these efforts will be in vain.

## You can help create a plastic free future.

A rising number of countries such as the European Union, Canada and the United Kingdom have begun passing laws to ban dangerous and unnecessary single-use plastics, forcing packaging suppliers to stop using plastics and accelerate provision of earth-safe alternatives for businesses to use.

Here in Australia, this work has begun too - with new laws to ban single-use items like straws, stirrers and cutlery in South Australia, Queensland and the ACT coming into effect soon.

Businesses need certainty, with unified legislation across the nation that gets on with replacing killer plastics in our supply chains. Help us inspire other states and territories to rise to the challenge, and work together to create unified standards that ensure killer plastics are replaced across the nation.



## We need you!

Sign on to the Australian Plastic Free Business Statement to show your support:

[marineconservation.org.au/plasticstatement](https://marineconservation.org.au/plasticstatement)

# How to Support Marine Conservation Efforts

Want to be a business that supports ocean conservation?

Corporate partners help environmental charities fund critical work to protect our vulnerable wildlife.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society welcomes the support of the business community. A relationship with a non-profit can be mutually beneficial for your staff, customers and our precious oceans.

## Run a Fundraiser

AMCS works hard to clean up our oceans, save our threatened ocean wildlife and make our fisheries sustainable. As a not-for-profit charity we rely on financial support from ocean lovers like you, so that we can remain independent and ensure Australia's turtles, whales and wildlife get the help they need to have a safe and vibrant future.

### Raise funds at your workplace

There are many ways you can help fundraise for marine conservation at your place of business. Consider holding an event for World Oceans Day, World Turtle Day, or Plastic Free July! Here's just a few ideas:

- Charge an extra 50c for every takeaway coffee cup, and donate the proceeds
- Run a raffle
- Put donation containers out

You can donate the funds raised using our easy **Business Donation Form: [amcs.org.au/BusinessDonation](https://amcs.org.au/BusinessDonation)**

### Raise funds online

If you'd like to raise funds via online promotion, or participate in a charity run etc, you can! Choose from three different fundraising sites that AMCS has partnered with so you can create your own fundraising page to raise funds for the seas.

- Everyday Hero [marineconservation.org.au/EverydayHero](https://marineconservation.org.au/EverydayHero)
- GoFundraise [marineconservation.org.au/GoFundraise](https://marineconservation.org.au/GoFundraise)
- My Cause [marineconservation.org.au/MyCause](https://marineconservation.org.au/MyCause)

## Workplace Giving

Workplace giving is a simple and effective way for businesses to help staff regularly donate to AMCS through the payroll system. Under a workplace giving or payroll deduction program all donations are made from a staff member's pre-taxable income and result in an automatic tax deduction.

Register your interest online:  
[marineconservation.org.au/workplace-giving/](https://marineconservation.org.au/workplace-giving/)



## Become a Corporate Partner

Our ability to undertake key projects to raise awareness of marine conservation issues and advocate for the marine environment is dependent on the long term financial and in-kind support of our valuable corporate partners.

A corporate partnership with AMCS is a great way to show your values and engage your staff and customers, who also love our oceans, in the common goal of marine conservation.

Potential partners are assessed against AMCS's Ethical Charter and a formal Business Supporter or Partnership agreement is developed, based on the value of the contribution (financial and in kind) to AMCS, outlining the commitments of both parties.

Our corporate partners are acknowledged to our extensive supporter base across Australia, on our website, and in digital communications.

### Find out more

Get in touch at [partnerships@amcs.org.au](mailto:partnerships@amcs.org.au)  
to request an information package.



“We feel that it is a responsibility for all businesses and individuals to find a way to reduce the plastic they use. Like many things in life, it’s a journey towards becoming ‘plastic free’ rather than an overnight change, and little steps in the right direction can rapidly reduce our plastic waste.”

— Renton, Pottery for the Planet



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**Healthy oceans for a healthy planet.**  
[marineconservation.org.au](http://marineconservation.org.au)