



**NATIONAL
RECYCLING WEEK**

PLANET ARK

**RESEARCH REPORT
2020**

**A
FUTURE
BEYOND
THE BIN**

INTRODUCTION

2020

It's been a year of unprecedented events that have caused instability, stress and uncertainty, both in Australia and globally. We all want recovery, whether it's for resources, the environment, the economy or ourselves. For National Recycling Week 2020, Planet Ark draws on information and statistics from a range of internal* and external sources to investigate current recycling behaviour, knowledge and attitude in Australia. Some of the findings from this research include:

- Waste and recycling were important issues to Australians.
- Australians were recycling for different reasons, depending on their age.
- Although most of us were concerned with waste and are recycling, we're still making mistakes.
- Australians do not realise the economic value of recycling.

OPPORTUNITIES - PACKAGING, ELECTRONICS AND FOOD

Furthermore, 3 areas of opportunity were investigated as part of NRW this year. Food, electronics and packaging are waste streams with low recycling rates and the current management of these resources poses threats to both environmental and human health. There is huge potential that will be realised, both economically and environmentally, by reducing these waste streams and transitioning to a circular economy.

RECOVERY - A FUTURE BEYOND THE BIN

The catastrophic events of the 2019/20 bushfires, followed by COVID-19, has left ourselves, the economy and the environment, devastated. We need recovery and to build back better.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY:

- Australian Gross Domestic Product contracted at record pace between April and June 2020 amid job losses and business shutdowns.¹
- The current linear model of "take, make, dispose" sees resources wasted - the payoff of transitioning to a circular economy could be huge for the Australian economy, giving a \$23 billion boost to our GDP by 2025.²
- A transition to a circular economy can help address current economic and environmental issues.³
- Every 10,000 tonnes of materials recycled creates 9.2 jobs whilst if those materials were landfilled, it would create just 2.8 jobs.⁴

RESOURCE RECOVERY:

- Climate change increases the probability of more extreme weather events such as the drought, bushfires and floods experienced in recent years.⁵
- 17 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions can be avoided in Australia through the increased recycling of high embodied energy materials like metals, paper, cardboard, glass, and plastics (avoiding the emissions associated with the extraction and processing of natural resources).⁶
- The overall resource recovery rate is 58% of the 67 million tonnes of waste generated in Australia.⁷ Australia has a target of 80% by 2030.⁸
- The recent waste export bans introduced by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will ensure materials are processed in Australia and support an expansion of the local market for recovered resources.⁹

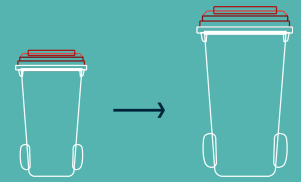
EMOTIONAL RECOVERY:

- 3 in 5 people feel that life in Australia is getting worse.¹⁰
- Concerns about the economy have increased to the highest point ever.¹⁰
- The lack of action to address climate change and how it is impacting the broader environment is the primary area of environmental concern.¹⁰
- 7 in 10 people agreed that workplace recycling makes them feel happy.¹¹
- Participating in sustainable practices and taking action to address large scale issues such as climate change is proven to improve mental health and can be an important part of emotional recovery.¹²

RECYCLING TRENDS

CHALLENGES AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

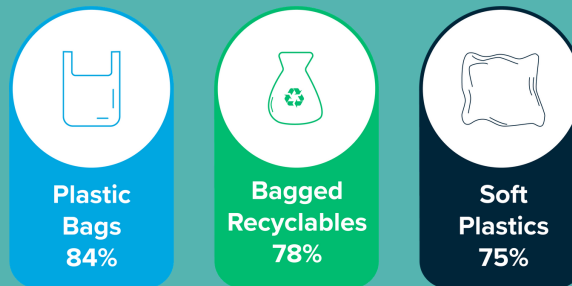
70% of councils reported increased volume in general waste kerbside bins.



45% of councils reported increased contamination in kerbside recycling bins.



COMMON RECYCLING MISTAKES



Australians tend to carry recyclables to kerbside bin by hand, however those that carry them in single use plastic bags (10%) are often also putting the bags in the recycling bin.



KNOWLEDGE OF ECONOMIC VALUE OF RECYCLING

The Australian recycling industry is worth \$15.5 billion.¹³

80% of Australians either didn't know or underestimated the value of recycling.



Underestimated value	37%
Don't know	43%
Estimated correctly	8%
Overestimated value	13%

Q. How much in Australian dollars do you think recycling is worth to the Australian economy?

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO TAKE ACTION



Women (84%) are more likely to take action to reduce their waste than men (76%).



Australians in regional areas (85%) are more likely to take action than those in urban areas (78%).



About 40% of workers would like to see more recycling options at work.

Older Australians are more likely to reduce waste by recycling, however younger Australians are more likely to reduce waste by their purchasing decisions.

Action to reduce waste	Total	Age			
		14-24	25-34	35-49	50-64
Recycling	57	53	43	60	65
Reduce disposable plastic	31	34	35	25	31
Reduce food waste	30	23	23	29	42
Reuse items	25	28	22	23	25
Purchase decision	24	28	31	22	19
Extend item lifecycle	18	20	17	18	17

Q. Please tell us what you are doing to reduce your waste.

REASONS FOR RECYCLING

Overall, **reducing landfill** and just **doing the right thing** are the primary reasons most Australians try to recycle and reduce waste.



Younger people are more likely to recycle to combat **climate change and save wildlife** than older generations.



Older people more likely to recycle because they have **always done it** and to **reduce landfilling** than younger generations.



Reasons to Recycle	Total	Age			
		14-24	25-34	35-49	50-64
It reduces landfilling	45	45	31	49	51
It's the right thing to do	36	36	35	39	35
It combats climate change	16	16	26	14	10
It saves wildlife	15	15	22	13	12
I've always done it	18	13	11	20	25

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

72% of Australians are concerned about waste

80% of Australians report that they are acting to reduce their waste.



Older women in metro areas tend to know more about home recyclables.

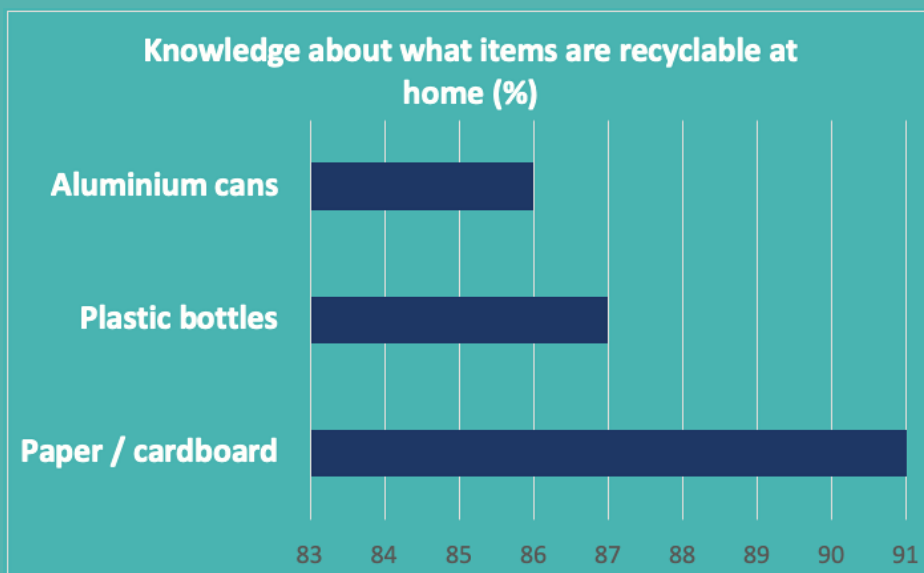


People who spend more time outdoors have more consistent recycling knowledge.



Meditation enthusiasts have above average knowledge on home recyclables.

Overall, cardboard, plastic bottles and aluminium cans remain the top items people know they can recycle.



OPPORTUNITIES

Food, electronics and packaging are three areas where Australia has many opportunities to reduce the amount going to landfill and reap the benefits. Australia is one of the worst performers in each, we're close to the top of the countries that generate these types of waste.

In terms of food waste, Australia is the fourth highest producer in the world – only USA, Canada and Belgium waste more! A staggering \$10.1 billion worth of food was wasted in Australia last year.¹⁴

In terms of electronics, Australians produced 21.7 kg of electronic waste per capita in 2019.¹⁵ Only 10% was officially recorded as collected and recycled in 2018.¹⁵ We are falling behind other western nations in Europe, who are recycling much higher proportions of their e-waste (e.g. Norway 71%).¹⁵

In terms of packaging, 28% of packaging is being disposed of in the wrong bin or directly disposed to landfill.¹⁶ And 38% of Australians incorrectly believe that soft plastics can be recycled in their kerbside bin.¹¹ But Australia has a great opportunity to go beyond the bin...



FOOD

Going Beyond the Bin

50%

Too Much

Food waste can make up half of the contents of a waste bin.

25x

More Potent

When food scraps end up in landfill it produces methane. If this gas is not captured, a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than CO² is released.



Contamination

Food and liquids can't go in the recycling bin – it ruins the recycling process.

01 REDUCE



Check what food you already have.



Plan your meals for the week.



Make a shopping list and stick to it.



02 REUSE



Make lunch from leftovers.



Freeze fruit for smoothies.



Freeze veggie scraps for homemade stock.

03 RECYCLE

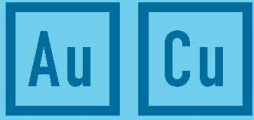


Start composting, set up a worm farm, get a Bokashi bucket or donate your food scraps to a community garden.

Visit RecyclingNearYou.com.au to find recycling options

ELECTRONICS

Going Beyond the Bin



Losing Resources

Electronic waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in Australia and when sent to landfill we lose precious resources.

95%

Recoverable Materials

Generally around 95% of materials are recovered from e-waste to make new products.



Starting Fires

E-waste should be kept out of the kerbside recycling bins, they can contain hazardous materials and have the potential to start fires.

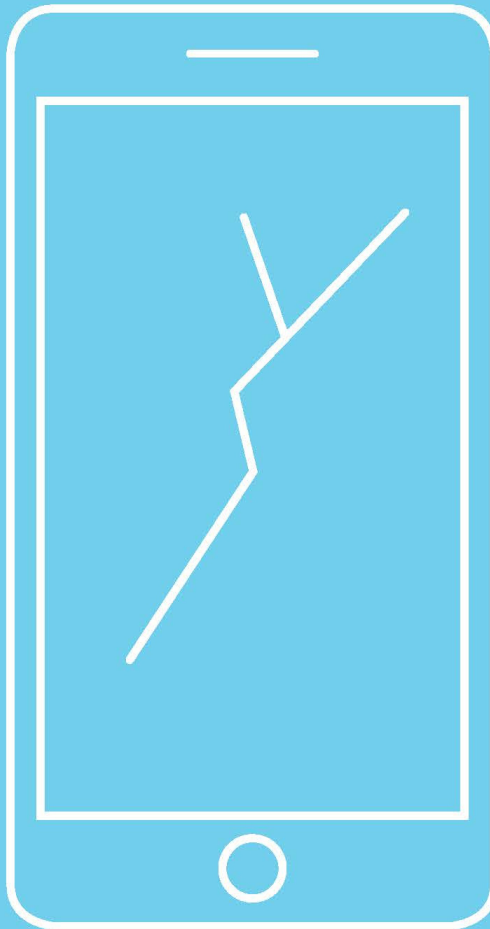
01 REDUCE



Ask yourself if you really need the latest gadget when your old one still works.



Check if your non-responsive item can be repaired or serviced.



02 REUSE



Buy second-hand or refurbished products.



Pass it on to others who will make use of it by selling, swapping or donating your item.

03 RECYCLE



Find programs to recycle printer cartridges, mobile phones, batteries, computers and other electrical appliances at RecyclingNearYou.com.au

Visit RecyclingNearYou.com.au to find recycling options

PACKAGING

Going Beyond the Bin

16%

Plastic Packaging

Just 16% of plastic packaging is recovered in Australia compared to 63% of paper and cardboard packaging.

5.4Mt

Packaging Used

A huge amount of packaging is sold in Australia each year.
(Source: APCO 2020, Our Packaging Future)



95% Energy Saved

Recycling aluminium saves 95% of the energy used to make new metal from raw materials.

01 REDUCE



Say no to plastic bags offered in fashion shops, you can use your BYO bags here too.



Remember your shopping bags, water bottle and coffee cup when you leave the house.



02 REUSE



Rinse out zip lock bags, ice cream and yogurt containers, and use them again to keep and store food.



Buy in bulk to make containers last longer and use them again for refills at the bulk food store.

03 RECYCLE



Look for The Australian Recycling Label, the ARL helps you dispose of packaging correctly.



To close the recycling loop, look for packaging made from recycled content like drink, shampoo and detergent bottles.

Visit [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](https://www.RecyclingNearYou.com.au) to find recycling options

REFERENCES

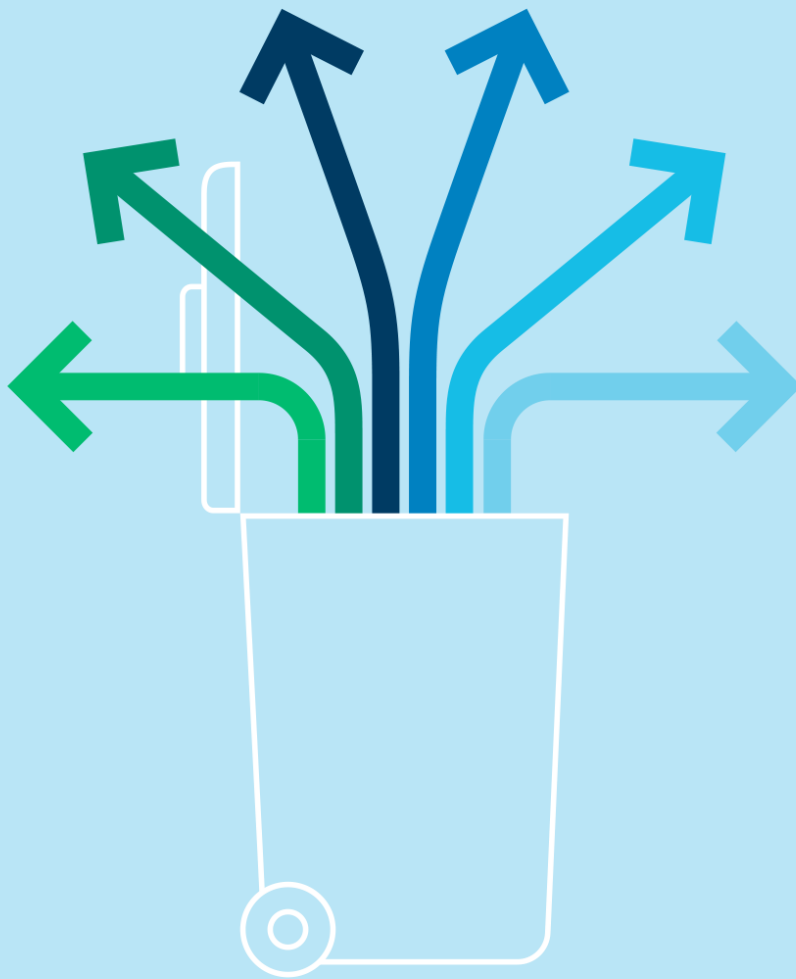
1. Focus Economics. (2020). Australia Economic Outlook. retrieved from: <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/australia>
2. KPMG Economics. Potential Economic Payoffs of a Circular Economy. (2020). retrieved from: <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2020/potential-economic-pay-off-circular-economy-australia-2020.pdf>
3. Ellen Macarthur Foundation. Completing The Picture: How The Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change. (2019). retrieved from: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/completing-the-picture-climate-change>
4. Commonwealth of Australia. 2018 National Waste Policy: Less waste, more resources.(2018). retrieved from: <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/d523f4e9-d958-466b-9fd1-3b7d6283f006/files/national-waste-policy-2018>
5. Grose, M. Hope, P. (2019). Climate Change and extreme events - quantifying the changing odds. ECOS. issue 261
6. MRA Consulting. (2020). Carbon abatement - the waste sector can do much more. retrieved from: <https://mraconsulting.com.au/carbon-abatement-the-waste-sector-can-do-much-more/>
7. Department of the Environment and Energy. (2018). National Waste Report 2018. retrieved from: <https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste-resource-recovery/national-waste-reports/national-waste-report-2018>
8. Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. (2019). National Waste Policy Action Plan. retrieved from: <https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste-resource-recovery/publications/national-waste-policy-action-plan>
9. Australian Government: Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment. (2020).Waste export ban. retrieved from: <https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste-resource-recovery/waste-export-ban>
10. Pollinate's The Pulse Survey, March 2020
11. Planet Ark commissioned research by Pollinate for National Recycling Week 2020
12. Reach Out. (2020). How to cope with anxiety about climate change. retrieved from: <https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-cope-with-anxiety-about-climate-change>
13. Centre for International Economics (2017) Headline Economic Value for Waste and Materials Efficiency in Australia, prepared for the Department of the Environment and Energy
14. Rabobank. (2020). 2019 Food Waste Report. retrieved from: <https://www.rabobank.com.au/foodwaste/>
15. Forti V., Baldé C.P., Kuehr R., Bel G. (2020). The Global E-waste Monitor 2020: Quantities, flows and the circular economy potential. United Nations University (UNU)/United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) – co-hosted SCYCLE Programme, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Rotterdam.
16. Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation. 2020. Our Packaging Future: A collective impact framework to achieve the 2025 National Packaging Targets

Report Contributors:

Author: Sarah Chaplin

Content Review: Claire Bell, Ryan Collins

Design: Sarah Chaplin, Laura Chalk, Harry Day



Major
Sponsor



Associate
Sponsors



Supporting
Sponsors



To take action for National Recycling Week, visit:
RecyclingWeek.PlanetArk.org