The Plastic Problem:

A National Plan to Reduce Plastic Use and Pollution in Australia

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AUSTRALIA HAS A PLASTICS PROBLEM

and we've been waiting too long to fix it

We are among the highest producers of single-use plastic waste per person in the world, using around 147kg of plastic per person every year. We recycle just 14 per cent of it. The rest goes to landfill, leaches into our waterways, and breaks up into the microplastics now found in our food, our water and our bodies.

In 2018, governments and industry set ambitious national packaging targets to reach by 2025. The deadline has passed and we missed every single target comprehensively. The lesson is clear: good intentions without infrastructure or enforceability are not enough.

Meanwhile, plastic packaging consumption keeps growing and the costs of dealing with the waste fall on the wrong people. Households pay an estimated $70–95 per year through rates and levies just to manage packaging waste, while the producers who place that packaging on the market bear none of the responsibility for it.

Recent global events have further sharpened the case for acting. The plastics Australia throws away are almost entirely derived from imported fossil fuels - oil and gas whose price and supply are vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. Reducing our dependence on virgin plastic and imported packaging is not just an environmental and human health imperative, it is also a supply chain resilience strategy.

The solution is well-understood. We already know that mandatory, producer-funded systems work. Container deposit schemes now operating in every state and territory have delivered recycling rates of up to 71 per cent for eligible packaging, measurable reductions in litter, domestic reprocessing capacity and local employment, all without significant cost to consumers. This is the model that needs to be applied to plastic packaging.

Support for reform is overwhelming. Industry, conservationists and local governments are aligned. The Government's own consultation found 65 per cent of respondents backed a mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme.

The communities of Mackellar and Curtin are demanding the same thing: national leadership, and national action. This paper sets out a package of practical reforms for 2026:

1. **Establish by regulation a mandatory, nationally harmonised EPR scheme – including mandatory enforceable waste reduction, recycling and reuse targets and a national, producer-funded soft plastics collection and recycling scheme;**

2. **Phase out harmful industrial chemicals in plastics;**

3. **Invest in research, innovation and infrastructure.**

The evidence is in. The alignment is unprecedented. The time for action is now.

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REFORM 1: ESTABLISH A MANDATORY, EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY SCHEME

Make Rules under the existing RAWR Act in 2026 to establish a single, nationally harmonised Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, replacing the voluntary co-regulatory model that has comprehensively failed.

NATIONAL PACKAGING TARGETS VS APCO ACTUALS

2025 VOLUNTARY TARGET	2023-24 ACTUAL (APCO)
100% of packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable	actual: 86%
70% of plastic packaging recycled or composted	actual: 20%
50% average recycled content across all packaging	actual: 44%
Phase-out of problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics	actual: 46% reduction against 2017-18 baseline (target: full phase-out)

Source: APCO Australian Packaging Consumption and Recovery Data 2023–24

Why the voluntary system failed

Australia's current approach is broken by design. Since 1999, packaging policy has relied on a co-regulatory framework: a voluntary industry-led scheme administered by the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO), with regulatory obligations enforced by states and territories under a National Environmental Protection Measure (NEPM). The model relied on industry acting voluntarily but has not worked in practice. An independent review in 2021 found that both pillars of the framework had failed: the NEPM was never effectively implemented, and the Australian Packaging Covenant has been undermined by vague requirements, loopholes and weak enforceability.

The result is fragmentation and failure. There are different single-use plastic bans in different states, container deposit schemes that vary by jurisdiction. The Federal Government promised mandatory packaging reform by 2025 but did not deliver.

The structural reasons for this failure are well understood. Landfilling plastic remains economically rational: plastic is expensive to collect but relatively cheap to dispose of. Packaging made from multi-polymer, multi-material composites is difficult and costly to separate. Reliable, high-value markets for recycled plastic remain scarce and Australian-made recycled plastic has long been more expensive than imported virgin plastic. These dynamics will not change without mandatory intervention.

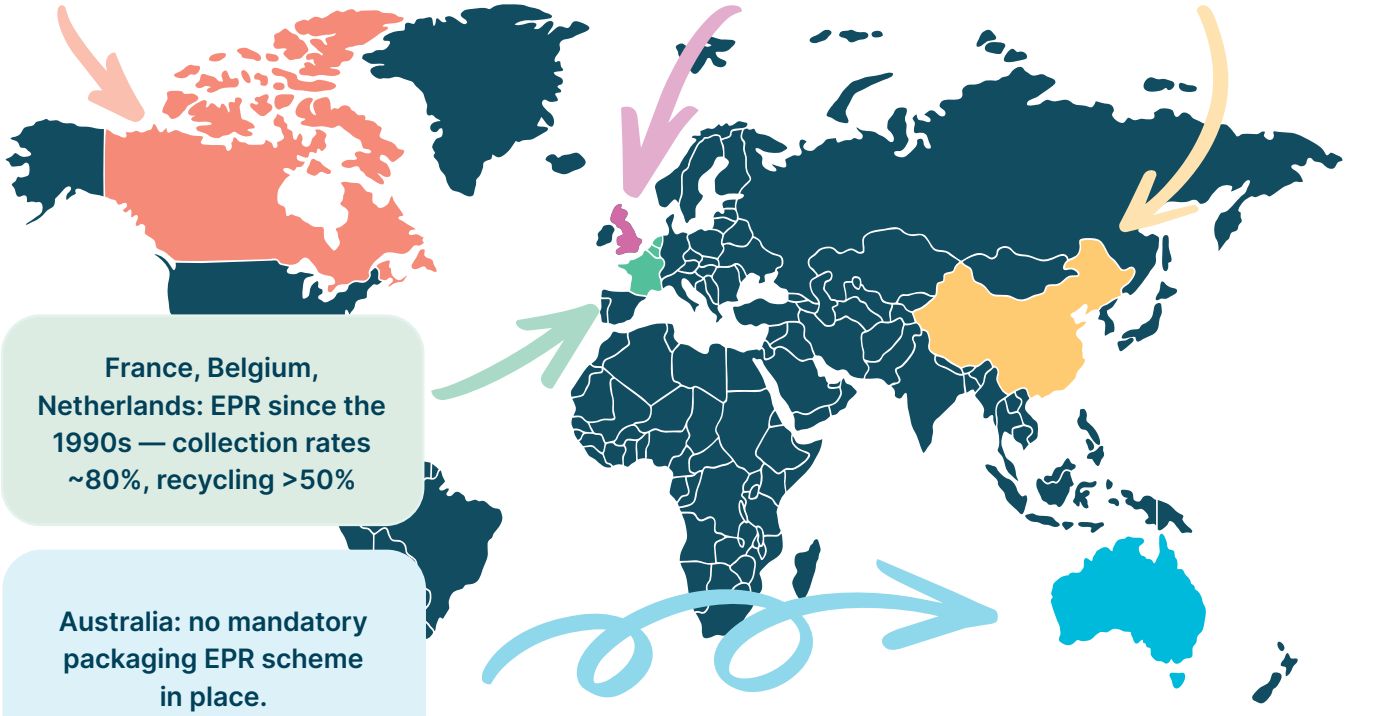
The solution is well established: a mandatory, nationally harmonised EPR scheme, grounded in a simple principle: the polluter pays. Under an EPR, producers take responsibility for their packaging across its full lifecycle, from design to disposal. That accountability changes the system. It creates a financial incentive to reduce packaging, improve recyclability, invest in reuse systems and fund incremental improvements to recovery infrastructure.

AUSTRALIA IS AN OUTLIER

Canada: mature provincial EPR schemes operating across all major provinces

UK: scheme launched April 2025 — projected £1.2bn annual shift from councils to producers

Mainland China: nine new national standards for recycled plastics introduced February 2026



France, Belgium, Netherlands: EPR since the 1990s — collection rates ~80%, recycling >50%

Australia: no mandatory packaging EPR scheme in place.

Australia is now one of the only advanced economies without a mandatory EPR scheme for packaging

France, Belgium and the Netherlands have operated packaging EPR schemes since the 1990s, achieving collection rates of around 80 per cent and recycling rates above 50 per cent. The UK's scheme, launched April 2025, is projected to shift approximately £1.2 billion annually from local authorities to producers, and to support around 25,000 jobs and stimulate more than £10 billion in recycling investment over the next decade. Canada operates a mature provincial EPR. Around 63 per cent of Australia's two-way trade with Asia is with partners already operating or actively implementing EPR frameworks. In February 2026, China introduced nine new national standards for recycled plastics requiring quality certification, lifecycle traceability and design-for-recycling. We are becoming an outlier, and outliers become dumping grounds.

Support for reform is not contested. Industry groups, environmental organisations and local governments are aligned. The Boomerang Alliance, the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR), Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia, APCO and Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia (SPSA) have jointly called for a national mandatory scheme. Parliamentary inquiries have recommended it. The Government's own 2024 consultation found 65 per cent of respondents supported mandatory EPR requirements, and a YouGov poll conducted by Boomerang Alliance found that 73 per cent of the broader public support shifting packaging waste costs from taxpayers to producers.

A common concern about mandatory packaging reform is the cost-of-living impact. However, independent analysis by Rennie Advisory, prepared for ACOR and APCO, confirms that EPR adds just 0.1 per cent to product costs.

Modelling by Phantm, drawing on the UK's confirmed 2025 EPR base fees and Australian packaging volumes, estimates a household cost of approximately 25 cents per week under conservative early-phase fee levels – less than the normal week-to-week variation in a grocery bill and a cost that only phases in as the scheme matures. As as producers take on responsibility for packaging waste, the costs currently borne by households through council rates and levies should fall, offsetting at least in part any increase at the checkout.

The legal architecture already exists. What has been missing is the will to use it.

The Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020 (RAWR Act) already provides the Commonwealth with everything it needs to establish a mandatory EPR scheme for plastics without new primary legislation. The Act allows the Minister for the Environment to make Rules imposing mandatory product stewardship obligations directly on producers, prescribing who is a liable party, what outcomes must be achieved, and what financial obligations apply, including requirements to fund collection, recovery and recycling. For several categories of plastic packaging, the required prior step of designating products as priority products has already been taken.

The Act's preconditions have been met. Industry has been on notice. Voluntary action has comprehensively failed. The Minister now has the grounds and the obligation to act.

The Commonwealth and states are currently negotiating an EPR scheme and developing an intergovernmental agreement. We welcome that process and urge governments to conclude it without delay.

In the meantime, the Commonwealth Government should act now to make Rules under the RAWR Act to give effect to the following core design principles:

- **National and mandatory:** a single, nationally harmonised scheme replacing the voluntary co-regulatory model, with legislated effect achieved through RAWR Act Rules in 2026.
- **Separate binding targets and obligations:** reduction, reuse, recycling and recycled content targets, bans on harmful materials, phase-out of problematic plastics, and mandatory recycling labelling based on the National Packaging Targets.
- **Eco-modulated fees:** levies adjusted by material type and volume, with the lowest fees for reusable packaging and the highest for hard-to-separate laminates, composites and problematic plastics. The design and operation of the fee mechanism is discussed in the next section.
- **Independent enforcement:** Establishment of a designated enforcement function and scheme coordinator, vested in a new or existing national body, with the authority to monitor compliance and apply significant, proportionate penalties for non-compliance.

25¢ / week

Estimated household cost of EPR under conservative early-phase fee levels

(Source: Phantm modelling based on UK 2025 EPR base fees)


CURTIN'S INDEPENDENT MP
Kate Chaney
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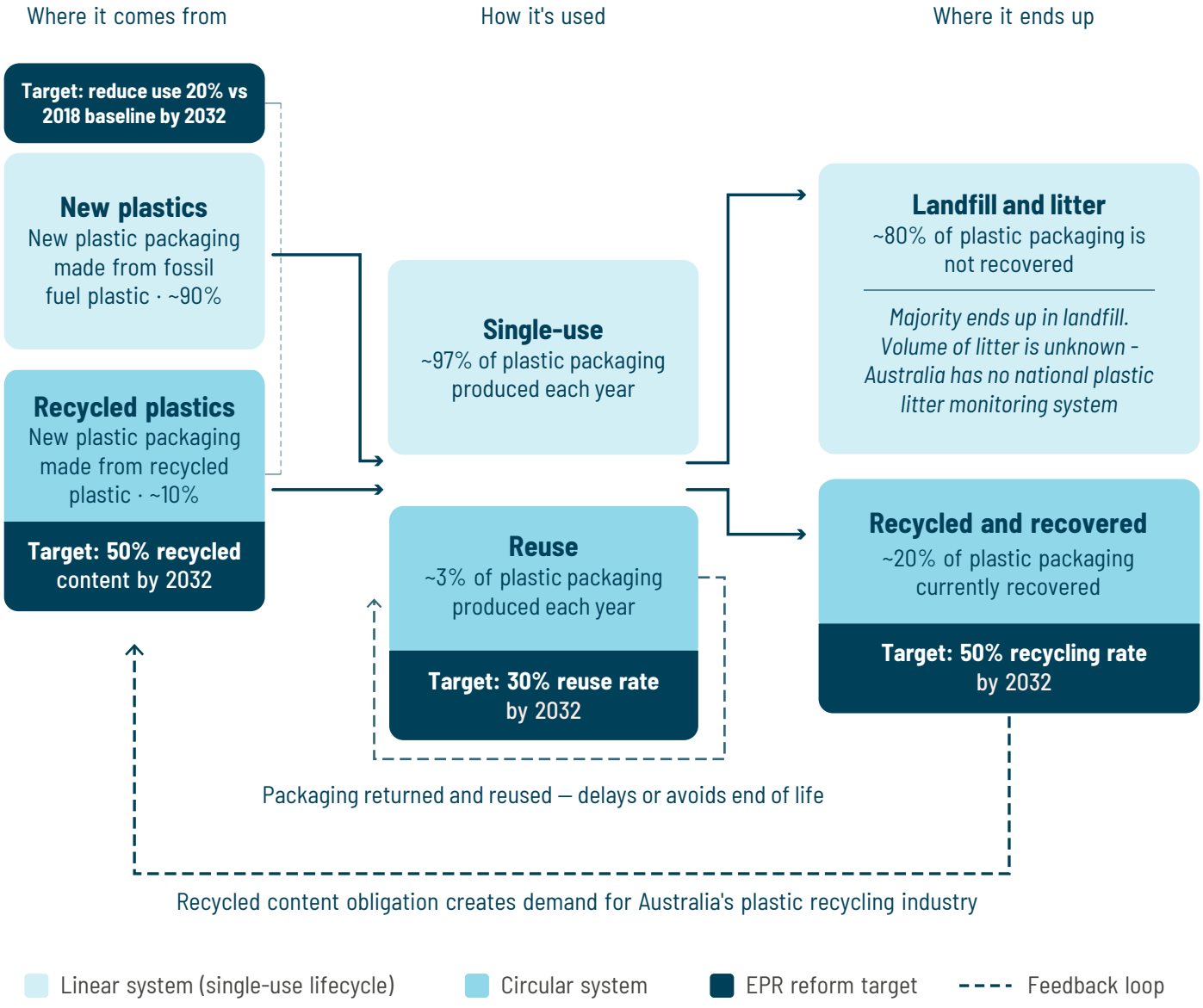
Other Plastic

MANDATE ENFORCEABLE WASTE REDUCTION, RECYCLING AND REUSE TARGETS

An EPR scheme is only as effective as the targets that sit beneath it. These goals must be legally binding obligations with annual reporting and real consequences for non-compliance

Australian plastic packaging flows and where reform targets intervene



Sources: APCO Australian Packaging Consumption and Recovery Data 2023-24 (Nov 2025); Rennie Advisory / ACOR / APCO, Securing Australia's Plastic Packaging Recycling Future (2025)

The National Waste Policy Action Plan sets the right ambitions but ambition without enforceability is what got us here. These goals must be broken into material-level, legally binding obligations with annual reporting and consequences for non-compliance.

Targets must also be calibrated to what the scheme can realistically deliver at each stage of its development. Building collection systems, sorting capacity, reprocessing infrastructure, end markets and consumer participation all take time, as does the flow of producer levies into the system. A credible targets framework acknowledges this, setting binding near-term milestones that lock in scheme establishment, while committing to ambitious, disaggregated recovery outcomes as the scheme matures.

Targets must be backed by eco-modulated fees – the mechanism that turns EPR from a waste management fund into an incentive for better design. Instead of a flat rate per kilogram, fees are adjusted to reflect the true cost of recovering each material: lower fees where recovered material commands a strong market price and feeds back into the circular economy, higher fees where material has low or negative commodity value and requires a subsidy to process. The message to producers is direct: use less packaging and/or design for materials that the market wants, and your fees fall. Design packaging that costs the system money to manage, and you pay for that cost.

Implementation Milestones by 2028

The first period is about building the system with binding obligations that establish the foundation on which recovery outcomes depend:

- The EPR scheme is operational and all obligated producers are registered and compliant
- Eco-modulated fees are flowing and being directed to recovery infrastructure
- Purpose-built reprocessing capacity is commissioned or under construction
- All remaining problematic plastics are phased out
- Annual public reporting is in place against leading indicators: tonnes levied, infrastructure commissioned, collection points established, and material-specific recovery rates

This reporting requirement ensures accountability from day one before the recovery targets bite, so the public and the Parliament can see whether the system is being built as intended.

Recovery Targets by 2032

As levies flow, infrastructure is built and markets develop, the scheme must deliver materially stronger outcomes against separate, disaggregated targets for each stream. Combining streams, as the previous voluntary framework did, made poor performance on individual materials invisible and unaccountable. Each of the following targets stands alone:

- **A plastic packaging reduction target of at least 20 per cent against the 2018 baseline.** We must produce less plastic, not just recycle more. The existing voluntary framework contained no standalone reduction target whatsoever. This is a gap the mandatory scheme must fill. The EU has legislated a 5 per cent reduction by 2030 compared to 2018 levels, increasing to 15 per cent by 2040. Australia, which generates more single-use plastic waste per person than almost any other country, should be more ambitious.
- **A reusable packaging target of at least 30 per cent.** The voluntary framework combined reuse with recyclable and compostable packaging in a single 100 per cent target, making progress on reuse specifically invisible. A standalone, mandatory reuse target of 30 per cent by 2032 is essential. The EU's sector-specific approach, beginning with transport and beverage packaging, offers a workable model.
- **A plastic recycling rate of at least 50 per cent, reported annually against plastic-specific sub-targets.** This is the most comprehensively failed of all the voluntary targets: Australia achieved just 20 per cent of plastic packaging recycled or composted against a voluntary target of 70 per cent. Without a mandatory floor, independent analysis by Rennie Advisory projects that recycling facility utilisation could fall to just 32 per cent within five years, triggering closures, job losses and the dismantling of infrastructure that taxpayers have already funded.
- **A recycled content obligation of at least 50 per cent for plastic packaging.** The voluntary target was 50 per cent average recycled content across all packaging. Australia reached 44 per cent, but this masks significantly lower performance for plastics specifically. A mandatory minimum sets a clear floor: packaging producers must incorporate a defined proportion of recycled plastic into their products where it is safe to do so, rather than defaulting to cheaper imported virgin plastic. This directly creates demand for domestically recycled material, making local recycling facilities commercially viable. The economic modelling is compelling: mandatory recycled content obligations could divert 370,000 tonnes of plastic from landfill, cut 700,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions, and support 19,000 jobs within five years. Caution should be taken in applying the recycled content obligation to food contact materials and products intended for infants and young children as research indicates that harmful chemicals can be more concentrated in recycled plastic.

Beyond 2032: a legislated ratchet

Targets should not be static. The scheme should incorporate a mandatory review mechanism, at which targets are assessed against actual outcomes and reset at higher levels of ambition as the system matures. The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation offers a useful model: rather than setting a single endpoint, it legislates progressive waste reduction targets of 5 per cent by 2030, 10 per cent by 2035 and 15 per cent by 2040 against 2018 levels, with the Commission required to review implementation and assess the feasibility of subsequent targets at each stage. A built-in ratchet of this kind ensures the framework drives continuous improvement rather than locking ambition in at the level achievable in the scheme's earliest years.

Counting what counts

These targets must be built on genuine circularity. The goal must be less plastic, better managed. Australia should draw on the growing international consensus, reflected in EPR scheme design across Europe and Canada, that waste-to-energy and incineration should not count toward recycling targets under the scheme, ensuring the fee incentive drives packaging redesign and reprocessing investment rather than subsidising combustion of materials that could be recovered.

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL, PRODUCER-FUNDED SOFT PLASTICS SYSTEM

Nowhere is the failure of the voluntary framework more stark than in soft plastics. Manufacturers placed over 540,000 tonnes on the market in 2022–23, and just 6 per cent was recovered.

REDcycle's collapse in 2022, with up to 12,400 tonnes found stockpiled in warehouses, taught a clear lesson: collection without processing capacity, producer responsibility or viable end markets will always fail. Any replacement must be designed from the end market backwards.

- **2011:** REDcycle soft plastics collection scheme launched at Coles and Woolworths
- **2018–22:** Rapid growth - scheme collected millions of bags at ~2,000 supermarkets nationally
- **November 2022:** REDcycle suspended all collection - citing capacity and processing failures
- Investigation revealed up to 12,400 tonnes of soft plastics stockpiled in warehouses, unable to be processed
- 540,000 tonnes of soft plastics placed on market in 2022-23 — just 6 per cent recovered (Source: APCO)

The scheme now being established by Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia (SPSA) – an industry-led body authorised by the ACCC in November 2025 – is a step forward, but it covers only around 15 per cent of soft plastics on the market and remains voluntary. We support bringing soft plastics within the mandatory EPR framework, with the following requirements:

- **Mandatory and universal**: all producers contributing through a tonnage-based levy with a floor of at least $160 per tonne rising to $200 per tonne as the system expands. Consideration should be given to allowing the scheme administrator to contract with multiple Producer Responsibility Organisations, aggregators and service providers – including organisations such as SPSA where they meet mandatory performance standards – to allow flexibility, competition and innovation in delivery, provided that a single national body retains oversight and holds all PROs publicly accountable against consistent national standards.
- **Infrastructure-first:** purpose-built reprocessing facilities verified as operational before collection scales up, with no single-operator dependency. Australia has around 600,000 tonnes of reprocessing capacity running at just 50 per cent. The constraint is demand certainty, not physical capacity.
- **Dual-pathway:** in-store and kerbside collection developed in parallel, expanding beyond the roughly 500 stores currently operating under the Soft Plastics Taskforce and SPSA pilot.
- **Clearly labelled:** mandatory, standardised labelling integrated with the Australasian Recycling Label.
- **Independently governed:** with transparent public reporting on tonnes collected, processed and recovered, and progress against targets.
- **Backed by a stockpile plan:** federal procurement of recycled soft plastic content for public infrastructure to clear the 12,400-tonne REDcycle backlog and signal long-term demand to the market.

REFORM 2: PHASE OUT HARMFUL INDUSTRIAL CHEMICALS IN PLASTICS

Plastic is a physical and a chemical pollutant. Many of the thousands of chemicals used to manufacture, stabilise, colour and flex plastic products are persistent, bioaccumulative and potentially toxic. They leach into our food, our water and our bodies across a product's entire life cycle, from production through to disposal. The Government must establish a national green/orange/red classification framework now.

The scale of the problem is only beginning to be understood. The PlastChem report, published in 2024 in the peer-reviewed journal Science, synthesised evidence on more than 16,000 chemicals potentially present in plastic materials and products. Of these, more than 4,200 are of concern due to their hazard properties, around 3,600 are currently unregulated anywhere in the world, and hazard information is lacking entirely for more than 10,000. Regulators are being asked to manage a problem they cannot yet fully see.

Minderoo Foundation researchers have described this as a chemical roulette with the human population and the consequences are not abstract. Plastic-associated chemicals have been linked to declining fertility rates, measurable reductions in IQ, and rising rates of chronic disease across populations, with Australians among the most highly exposed in the world.

Phthalates, used widely in food packaging, children's toys and medical devices to make plastics softer and more flexible, are among the 15 priority chemical groups identified by PlastChem as requiring urgent regulatory action. Research drawing on data from more than 1.3 million people has found consistent, statistically significant associations between phthalate exposure and miscarriage, child neurodevelopment impacts, obesity, type 2 diabetes, thyroid dysfunction and increased inflammatory markers. None of the phthalates studied can be considered safe. Exposure begins in the womb and continues throughout life through food, water, air and direct contact with plastic products. The costs of inaction fall disproportionately on those with the least capacity to avoid exposure and the most to lose from it – pregnant women, infants and young children.

New Australian research confirms both the scale of this exposure and the possibility of reducing it. The PERTH Trial, a randomised controlled trial from the University of Western Australia published in Nature Medicine in 2026, found that every single participant carried measurable plastic-associated chemicals in their body. When researchers switched participants to low-plastic food and kitchenware, phthalate levels fell by up to 54 per cent within a week.

Australia has the tools to act. The Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management Standard (IChEMS) provides a framework for scheduling chemicals of concern. The NSW Government has shown leadership under its Plastics Plan 2.0, committing to work with the Commonwealth to identify and phase out chemicals of concern in plastic items, beginning with food and beverage packaging, and to pursue nationally consistent restrictions. That is the right direction. What is needed now is national coordination and enforceable standards.

THE GREEN / ORANGE / RED FRAMEWORK

This could be implemented through IChEMS scheduling decisions. The framework should be a living instrument, updated as new evidence emerges.

PERMITTED	PRECAUTIONARY RESTRICTIONS	BANNED
Chemicals with robust evidence of safety for their intended use, including food contact materials and children's products	Chemicals where evidence is insufficient to establish either safety or harm. Subject to precautionary restrictions in high-exposure applications pending research.	Chemicals banned or restricted where evidence of harm is established.
Only green-listed chemicals permitted in high-exposure applications.	Incentive for industry to fund safety studies to achieve green-list status.	At minimum covers PlastChem's 15 priority chemical groups

What we are calling for

In parallel with establishing an EPR, the Commonwealth Government should establish a national chemical classification framework for plastic packaging and products, modelled on the NSW Government's approach and aligned with leading international frameworks including the European Union's restrictions on substances of very high concern. Given that an estimated 10,000 chemicals used in plastics have unknown safety profiles, we are calling for a three-tier system:

- **Green list:** chemicals with robust evidence of safety for their intended use, including in food contact materials and children's products. Only green-listed chemicals should be permitted in high-exposure applications. Inclusion on the green list should be subject to periodic review as new evidence emerges.
- **Orange list:** chemicals where evidence is insufficient to establish either safety or harm. These should be subject to precautionary use restrictions in high-exposure applications pending further research. The orange list creates a direct incentive for industry to fund the safety research needed to achieve green-list status.
- **Red list:** chemicals banned or restricted from use in plastic packaging and products where evidence of harm is established. The red list should at minimum cover the chemicals identified by PlastChem as priority groups of concern, with phthalates and bisphenols prioritised for phase-out given the weight of human health evidence.

The framework should be implemented through IChEMS scheduling decisions, with enforceable restrictions on use in food contact materials, children's products and other high-exposure applications.

The framework should be a living instrument, updated regularly as new evidence emerges, and should include a mechanism to apply precautionary restrictions to structurally similar chemicals where evidence for individual compounds is limited but the chemical class has demonstrated harm.

Australia has rightly aligned itself with the High Ambition Coalition in Global Plastics Treaty negotiations, explicitly calling for a global phase-out of harmful chemicals used in plastics. Those negotiations have twice failed to reach agreement in the face of opposition from major petrochemical-producing nations. Establishing a domestic chemical classification framework is not only sound public health policy, it is the logical domestic expression of the position Australia has already taken on the world stage.

REFORM 3: INVEST IN RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND EDUCATION

These reforms will only succeed with sustained public investment in three areas: research to fill critical knowledge gaps, innovation to develop better packaging, and public education to drive behaviour change.

Australia has existing platforms – CSIRO, Cooperative Research Centres, the National Environmental Science Program – but short-term, fragmented funding has repeatedly failed to build the capacity this problem requires.

Research

The health impacts of microplastics on the human body remain one of the most significant gaps in current scientific knowledge. Microplastics have been detected in human blood, lungs, placentas and breast milk, but the long-term health consequences are not yet fully understood. The Australian Centre for Disease Control should commission a dedicated research program on microplastics and human health, funded through the Medical Research Future Fund. Long-term, stable Commonwealth funding should also be provided for research collaboration platforms, including Cooperative Research Centres and the National Environmental Science Program, to build sustained capacity rather than short-term projects.

Innovation

Australia has significant untapped potential to lead on materials and systems innovation across safer chemical substitution, source reduction, and reuse and refill systems. The EPR scheme's eco-modulated fees will create a direct commercial incentive for producers to invest in better packaging, but fee signals alone are not sufficient. The Commonwealth should expand the Recycling Modernisation Fund into a Circular Economy Fund to co-invest with industry in building a genuine sustainable packaging framework where any packaging brought to market is reusable, recyclable and free of harmful chemicals. Priority areas should include alternatives to hard-to-recycle laminates and composites, reuse and refill systems, and drop-in chemical substitutes for the phthalates and bisphenols identified for phase-out. The fund should draw actively on world's best practice, accelerating what works internationally rather than reinventing the wheel. Australia has real competitive advantages here, including significant potential for novel materials from domestic agricultural feedstocks, and a well-designed fund could move Australian industry to genuine global leader in this space.

Public education

Australians broadly support action on plastic pollution, but concern does not automatically translate into behaviour change, particularly where the system does not make sustainable choices easy or accessible. A Commonwealth-funded behaviour change campaign should be practical and system-focused: telling people what they can recycle, where soft plastics can be returned, and how to access reuse options, not simply lecturing them to do better within a broken system. Community-led initiatives like Clean Up Australia Day, Planet Ark, Plastic Free July, Take 3 for the Sea, and Indigenous Sea Rangers' plastic removal programs in communities including Arnhem Land have demonstrated the power of locally driven action to shift norms. National education investment should support and amplify these efforts rather than replace them. Local government is also well placed to contribute through community education and business pilot programs.

CONCLUSION

Australia has everything it needs to fix its plastics problem. The legal powers are in place. The solutions are proven. The public, industry and state governments are aligned. What has been missing is national leadership to bring it together.

The reforms in this paper are practical and achievable in 2026. A mandatory, nationally harmonised EPR scheme, using powers Parliament has already granted, with binding targets for reduction, reuse and recycling, and a soft plastics system designed from the end market backwards, with verified infrastructure and genuine accountability to last. A chemical classification framework – green, orange and red lists – that protects the most vulnerable from chemical harm and positions Australia's domestic policy where its international position already sits. And the research, innovation and public education investment that will make the whole system work.

Every year without action is a year in which households pay for a problem they did not create. Plastics litter our environment and chemicals accumulate in our bodies.

The gap between Australia's ambitions and its outcomes has widened long enough.

The time for action is now.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform 1: Establish a mandatory, nationally harmonised EPR scheme

- Make Rules under the existing RAWR Act in 2026 to establish a single, nationally harmonised Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, replacing the voluntary co-regulatory model
- Apply eco-modulated fees adjusted by material type, with lowest fees for reusable packaging and highest for hard-to-separate laminates and composites
- Establish an independent national enforcement power to monitor compliance and apply proportionate penalties for non-compliance
- Incorporate mandatory recycling labelling as a core obligation within the scheme

Mandate enforceable waste reduction, recycling and reuse targets

- Phase out all remaining problematic plastics by 2028
- Reduce plastic packaging by at least 20 per cent against the 2018 baseline by 2032
- A reusable packaging rate of at least 30 per cent by 2032
- A plastic recycling rate of at least 50 per cent by 2032
- At least 50 per cent recycled content in plastic packaging by 2032

Establish a national, producer-funded soft plastics scheme

- Bring all soft plastics producers into a mandatory tonnage-based levy scheme, with a floor of at least $160 per tonne
- Require purpose-built reprocessing infrastructure to be verified as operational before collection scales up
- Develop in-store and kerbside collection pathways in parallel
- Mandate standardised labelling integrated with the Australasian Recycling Label
- Require independent governance with transparent public reporting on tonnes collected, processed and recovered
- Establish a federal procurement commitment for recycled soft plastic content in public infrastructure where it is safe to do so to clear the REDcycle stockpile and signal long-term market demand

Reform 2: Phase out harmful industrial chemicals in plastics

- Establish a national three-tier chemical classification framework – green, orange and red lists – for plastic packaging and products, implemented through IChEMS scheduling decisions
- Prioritise phthalates and bisphenols for phase-out, beginning with food contact materials and children's products
- Make the framework a living instrument, updated regularly as new evidence emerges
- Maintain and strengthen Australia's position in Global Plastics Treaty negotiations

Reform 3: Invest in research, innovation and education

- Commission a dedicated research program on microplastics and human health through the Australian Centre for Disease Control, funded via the Medical Research Future Fund
- Provide long-term stable Commonwealth funding for research collaboration platforms including Cooperative Research Centres and the National Environmental Science Program
- Expand the Recycling Modernisation Fund into a Circular Economy Fund to co-invest with industry in reusable, recyclable and chemical-free packaging and systems innovation, with priority areas including alternatives to hard-to-recycle laminates, reuse and refill systems, drop-in chemical substitutes for priority phase-out chemicals, and engagement with world's best practice
- Fund a Commonwealth behaviour change campaign focused on practical recycling and reuse information, supporting and amplifying existing community-led initiatives

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The Plastic Country: a film by Kal Glanznig

We pride ourselves on being a country girt by sea, with a deep connection to our wildlife, our environment and our own health. But all of this is under threat in the absence of a mandatory plastic packaging policy. Filming 'The Plastic Country' showed me the worst of Australia's plastics problem, but also genuine reasons for hope. Decision makers now have a clear opportunity and obligation to lead on plastics in the national interest. **Now is the time to act.**

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