

Position Statement on the use of compostable foodware in away-from-home-situations

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Boomerang Alliance supports the use of 100% Australian-certified compostable foodware over recyclable foodware in the away-from-home situation.

Note: Reusable products are the best option for takeaway services. Where reusables are not an option and single-use items are used, we recommend certified compostable substitutes.

In away-from-home situations, the majority of foodware (whether recyclable or compostable) currently ends up as litter or waste to landfill. This is largely due to inadequate public collection systems and/or public misunderstanding of what packaging goes in which bin. The result is widespread contamination of bins, meaning that public collection bins end up going to landfill. This needs to change.

There are ample recycling facilities and a growing number of composting facilities that could receive takeaway packaging, with the latter expected to increase dramatically as governments introduce kerbside organics bins. The challenge is to have a more effective public place collection and processing service.

The first approach is to improve collection in the away-from-home situation with only one form of packaging, not two (e.g. compostable packaging not both compostable and recyclable). The reasons we favour compostable packaging over recyclable packaging in the away-from-home space are:

1. The public are increasingly used to, and support 100% compostable packaging (Australian standards AS 4736 or AS 5810) in away from home situations.
2. To effectively collect takeaway packaging, it is imperative to have a clear system the public understands. Having two options - recyclable and compostable - is confusing. We need one option that is simple to understand and build a collection infrastructure around this.
3. Recyclable foodware, when contaminated with food, cannot be easily recycled. Compostable foodware can be put in the same bin as discarded food.
4. When littered, compostable foodware is generally less of a threat to the environment and most will (eventually) biodegrade - note that we recognise that bioplastics only effectively break down in a commercial composter – it is our practice to minimise bioplastics. Recyclable plastic foodware will not biodegrade, will cause damage to the environment and breaks up into microplastics.
5. While there are/will be home kerbside collection services for both recyclables and compostables, it is unlikely that foodware purchased away from the home will be kept and then taken home for discard. Thus, the majority of packaging used away from home currently ends up as litter or waste.
6. According to the waste hierarchy, composting is of higher resource value than recycling and is a preferred option in a circular economy.
7. Recyclable packaging includes single use plastics that are made from fossil fuels. Compostable packaging is derived from plant-based materials.

Most Australian governments are now setting new and bigger targets to reduce waste going to landfill. One of the largest sources of this waste is organics. Collecting organics (garden, food and foodware) through municipal and commercial kerbside collection and public places will inevitably become commonplace if waste-to-landfill targets are to be achieved. This organic waste will need to be sent to a composting facility. This is the next best thing we can do (besides reducing and reusing) to reduce waste going to landfill.

This means that, in addition to recycling facilities, most communities will have a composting facility of some form. There will be more collection and processing services available for away from home compostable packaging. Given the trend towards compostables and the public's clear preference for better

environmentally friendly packaging, compostable packaging should become the packaging of choice rather than recyclables in away from home situations.

The future agenda should therefore be to promote reusable foodware and allow 100% compostable takeaway products (Australian standards) that can be collected and go to the local composter. If these were the only alternatives in away-from-home situations, the public would better understand the options when discarding foodware at home, i.e. put it in the compost bin with any leftover food. This will make collection easier and more effective.

In our view, the first step to set this up is through developing collection systems at events and markets (controlled environments) and at cafes/precincts where collections can be monitored. Making collection in these circumstances work effectively will demonstrate a potential better system for public places and also build awareness about best practice.

Kerbside collection of organics is an obvious opportunity in resource recovery. Cities such as Adelaide and many regional areas, such as northern NSW, already offer these services.

