

AUSTRALIA'S RECYCLING CRISIS IS A PRODUCT REGULATION FAILURE



Independent report warns families, councils and businesses are paying the price for a fragmented national system.

THE BOTTOM LINE

\$17 BILLION
Australia spends approximately \$17 billion a year managing product waste.

75 MILLION TONNES
Australia generates around 75 million tonnes of waste annually.

\$520 MILLION
Each year, approximately \$520 million worth of recyclable packaging ends up in landfill.

59%
Australia's packaging recovery rate has hovered around 59% for a decade. (~40% still to landfill).

\$32 BILLION
Without regulated EPR, Australia is on track to lose more than \$32 billion in plastics by 2050.

EPR WILL HELP AUSTRALIA ACHIEVE ITS 43% TARGET
Mandatory EPR will help Australia achieve its legislated target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030.

MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF VALUABLE MATERIALS ARE BEING WASTED

ELECTRONIC GOODS
An estimated **\$680 MILLION** of electronic goods are disposed of each year.

MATTRESSES
Around **1.8 MILLION** mattresses discarded annually.

CLOTHING
More than **300,000 TONNES** of clothing sent to landfill.

PLASTICS & PACKAGING
On track to generate **6-7 MILLION TONNES** plastic product waste each year by 2050.

THE IMPACT ON OUR ECONOMY

Unless changed, Australia's fragmented, regulations could,.....

WIPE \$26 BILLION from national GDP over the next decade

ADD MORE THAN \$9 BILLION to household costs

WHY THE SYSTEM IS FAILING

- No new national producer responsibility scheme has been regulated since 2011.
- Fragmented regulations with 10 state, territory and federal regulators and 8 different container deposit schemes.
- Voluntary schemes mean free-riding producers and underfunded organisations.
- No single national regulator and no clear national engine.

FREE RIDERS WEAKEN THE SYSTEM

Only a small proportion of liable companies pay levies in voluntary schemes:

AUSTRALIA
3 – 45% pay levies

OVERSEAS (REGULATED)
85 – 100% pay levies

Plastics recycling facilities are operating at around 53% capacity utilisation now, which could drop to an unviable 32% by 2030.

A REDCYCLE WARNING, NOT A ONE-OFF FAILURE

REDCycle showed Australians what happens when responsibility is optional, schemes and recycled content targets are voluntary and national coordination is missing.

The collapse of REDCycle should be treated as a warning about fragile systems, not an isolated failure.

Why wait for another collapse when the Australian Government has the power to regulate now?

OTHER COUNTRIES ARE ALREADY PROVING MANDATORY PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY WORKS

BELGIUM
Highest packaging recycling rates in the world.

- Strong producer participation, national coordination and transparent reporting.
- Invested €1 BILLION in infrastructure over six years to reach nearly 80% recycling and 60% plastic recycling.
- Records amounts of quality material back into the local economy for local manufactures.

FRANCE
Well-established schemes for packaging, electronics and clothing:

- Use eco-modulated levies that reward products with great design.
- Easy disassembly
- Repairability
- Spare parts availability
- Recycled content
- Great for French consumers and businesses.

BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA
True stewardship scheme success:

- 100% of producers fund the system \$32M.
- 100% collection rate.
- 86% local mechanical recycling.
- Invests ~\$32 MILLION annually in jobs, recycling, training and manufacturing.
- Australia's tyre scheme budget is ~\$7.4 MILLION and domestic mechanical recycling only ~17%.

BRAZIL
Focused on strong agricultural industries and a competitive manufacturing sector.

- Revised packaging law (2025) that strengthens reuse, recycling and recycling targets.
- Prioritises agricultural packaging recovery to support food security and reduce waste.
- Builds competitive advantage for local manufacture against imports.
- Drives economic growth, rural jobs and environmental outcomes.

WHAT MANDATORY EPR WOULD MEAN FOR AUSTRALIANS

- Lower costs for households, businesses and councils.
- Cleaner recycling and more drop-off points.
- Less waste going to landfill.
- No confusion between state systems.
- National coordination and education campaigns.
- Better value through one national approach.

87% OF SCHEMES OVERSEAS RUN FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT

87%

- 87% Not-for-profit (public benefit)
- 13% For-profit

Three countries (UK, Slovenia and Poland) revised their laws in 2023-25 to stop for-profit schemes due to fraud, dumping, concealed fees and cartel behaviour.

EIGHT RECOMMENDED REFORMS AUSTRALIA NEEDS

- 1 Regulate nationally, not at state level, for mandatory EPR.
- 2 Stop fragmentation. Appoint the national EPA as regulator for EPR schemes.
- 3 Empower the national EPA to penalise missed targets, free riders and identify malpractice.
- 4 Establish national producer registries to reduce free-riding.
- 5 Immediately establish a bridging loan finance program.
- 6 Ensure public benefit by regulating for not-for-profit schemes.
- 7 Require use of eco-modulated fees to incentivise circular eco-design.
- 8 Streamline national reporting frameworks across schemes and producer responsibility organisations.

“We have the international evidence, clear need for reform, existing schemes and industries, existing laws, and a new national regulator. The time has come to regulate and evolve to a far better future.”
– Helen Millicer

THIS IS PRACTICAL REFORM THAT CAN:

- ✓ Reduce waste.
- ✓ Ease pressure on households and governments.
- ✓ Strengthen local jobs, manufacturing and industry.
- ✓ Deliver world-class sustainable products that Australians can use for decades to come.

That the Australian Government announces in 2026: regulations to come into effect by 2028. Acting now on mandatory EPR will ensure Australians have world-class sustainable products they can use for decades to come.

ABOUT HELEN MILLICER
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Helen has qualifications in business management, governance, carbon accounting and sustainable investment from Monash University, AICD, Swinburne University and qualifications as company director.

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TO READ FULL REPORT
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