



**BOOMERANG  
ALLIANCE**

PLASTIC FREE PLACES

OVERVIEW

[www.plasticfreeplaces.org](http://www.plasticfreeplaces.org)

# PLASTIC FREE PLACES

Globally, 95% of all plastic packaging is used once and then wasted, often as litter. In its 2014 Marine Debris Report in Australia, the CSIRO reported that, 'two thirds of the marine debris found along our coastline is plastic, most from local sources.'

It's clear we have a plastic litter and waste problem. Reducing our use of disposable plastic will reduce both litter and waste, as well our reliance on fossil fuels.

Many individuals, governments and businesses have become aware of the problem and are changing practices. However, what has been lacking are whole communities taking a systematic approach to addressing disposable plastic use, with a focus on long lasting solutions.

The Boomerang Alliance 'Plastic Free Places' program addresses this gap.

## About The Boomerang Alliance

Formed in 2003, we are a 'peak' national not-for-profit organisation representing over 50 allied groups and focused on achieving a zero-waste society.

We have staff in five states and work successfully with communities, governments and businesses on systems and policies to reduce plastic pollution.

[www.boomerangalliance.org.au](http://www.boomerangalliance.org.au)



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## WHAT IS PLASTIC FREE PLACES?

The Plastic Free Places program works in communities to directly reduce single-use plastic packaging and empower lasting changes towards a circular economy. We directly engage and provide tailored solutions for food retailers, events and markets to eliminate single-use plastics, ensuring that the right partnerships are in place, addressing barriers to transition, and delivering measurable results.

The program is a comprehensive system that can be implemented in any community by Boomerang Alliance in partnership with local stakeholders, and has demonstrated strong consumer support.

Our pilot project is Plastic Free Noosa (comm. Feb 2018), and we also operate Plastic Free Byron, WA Plastic Free (Perth), plus our newer programs Plastic Free SA (Adelaide), Plastic Free Cairns and Plastic Free Townsville. At the end of 2019, Noosa, Byron and Perth had together eliminated over **4.9 million** single-use plastic items.





## HOW DOES IT WORK?

The program reduces the use of key single-use plastic packaging 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.

Our main focus is on reducing six 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 member has eliminated all required plastic items, they are awarded the status of Plastic Free Champion.

We do not limit our advice however, and help source solutions for other plastics, and can modify our program depending on the sector and community we work in, and what the problem plastics are.

In order to deliver effective solutions, the program also works closely with councils, local communities, suppliers, manufacturers, waste transport operators and composters. In fact, most of our work to successfully run the program occurs behind the scenes. Ensuring that the right partnerships are in place, addressing barriers to transition, facilitating composting solutions and providing the right advice and value to businesses is fundamental to the success of the program.

# HOW DO WE DO IT?

There are eight basic steps towards a Plastic Free Place. However the process is very involved and time consuming. It requires careful planning, local council buy-in and reasonable funding support. Boomerang Alliance can manage this program in your community if funding is identified.

The steps are:

## 1 PARTNERSHIPS

Develop a strategic action plan in consultation with key partners and arrange funding for the program. This is vital as the program is about direct engagement. Having a dedicated on-ground coordinator at least 3 days per week is essential. Key partners include Council, Chambers of Commerce and trader associations, manufacturers and suppliers, local media and community groups.

## 2 INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS

Create a logo and branding material, website, social media accounts, shopfront and in-store signage, flyers and brochures, event/stall pop-up banners and member guidelines – for cafés/restaurants and events/markets. Print required materials. Train your coordinator on plastic alternatives and where to get them (note: this is not simple, we intensively train our coordinators for two weeks). Build up a community profile and support. Target potential members and sign them up.

## 3 SUPPLIER ENGAGEMENT

Local supplier engagement is crucial to ensure preferred items can be accessed and to help address misleading claims and greenwashing that are common in the packaging industry. Ensure to maintain good relationships with suppliers and gain their trust and agreement to work with you. Local businesses generally trust the advice of their suppliers and if they are providing misleading advice to your members this can undermine the program.



## 4 CAFE & RESTAURANT SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Once a member has engaged, go through an induction process - determine their current plastic use and identify and show alternatives. You will need to know where and how they can get alternatives, and how to implement plastic reduction and elimination measures. This requires a comprehensive knowledge of the good, not so good, and often downright bad alternatives available in the marketplace, and attention to keep on top of new developments.

You will need to go through this efficiently and be able to answer all questions. Businesses will often need follow up advice and encouragement to get them to Champion status. Once a Champion, you will need to promote their achievements and offer other value to supplement their Champion status.

## 5 EVENTS, FESTIVALS & MARKETS SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Arrange an induction and cover all requirements for the event to go plastic free using your event guidelines as a basis. Ensure to cover information on vendors, suppliers, water options, signage etc.

If composting is an option, include this too (if not, you should present to Council a request to provide a composting solution). You will need to know the regulations, event permit requirements and waste management solutions offered to events in your community to advise on composting. Events often need a lot of follow up help to get them across the line.



## 6 LAUNCH AND PROMOTION

We suggest a media conference launch with partners and local media. Ensure everything is in place for your project before this happens as you will be expected to be ready to deliver. Remember to keep the promotion going after your launch and reward those members who are making changes. Utilise your partner networks to promote on your behalf and cross promote them also.

## 7 DATA COLLECTION

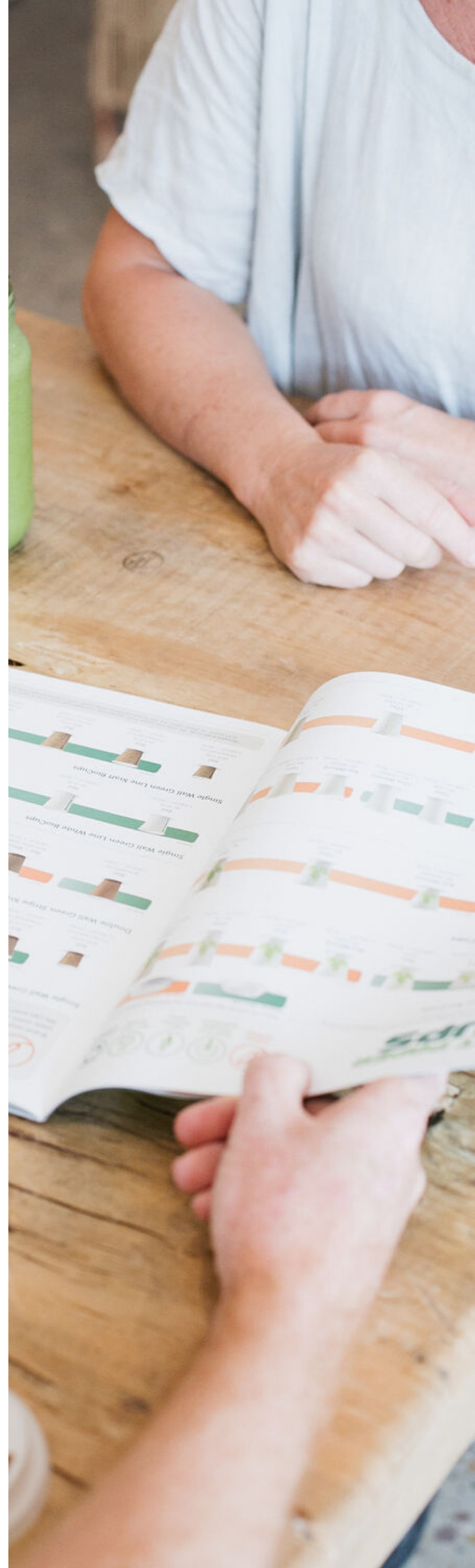
It's imperative to know what plastic savings your project is making to demonstrate that you are making a difference and to keep your funders happy. Arrange for members or their suppliers to provide procurement data to you. It can be challenging to get data so consider creating an incentive system to encourage participation.

## 8 CREATE THE CIRCULAR SYSTEM

The first priority for program members is to avoid single-use plastics and to supply reusable replacement items whenever possible. When providing disposable products these must be 100% compostable to Australian standards or equivalent. Many composters will not accept products that do not meet Australian Standards.

Utilising compostable products is not a solution in itself and still creates waste and litter if collection and processing services are not available and implemented. Additionally, there can be some community pushback and an unwillingness to buy-in from businesses and events if they know that the waste will still have to go to landfill.

If these services are not available, work with council in the development of commercial composting facilities and waste transport options. When this is complete, it will create a circular economy for these items.





## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**THE PLASTIC FREE PLACES** approach is successful due to the large amount of on-ground work we do and the relationships we build. Businesses often do not have time to complete external/self-managed programs. Even if they do, there are so many opportunities for them to get it wrong, even with great advice. This will result in many businesses paying more for cleverly marketed plastics.

**AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BARRIERS** businesses face is important. Many will not engage unless you can address these barriers and offer them value.

**WHILE ENVIRONMENTAL GOODWILL** may be a motivator, helping a businesses owner decide to switch can take compelling arguements across social, economic and environmental fronts.

**FOLLOW-THROUGH** and ongoing communication with members is essential. The time for businesses to complete the program is highly variable and most need additional help. We gain their trust and build a relationship.

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUPPLIERS** is instrumental in successful achievement of business program uptake and completion. Suppliers need to be engaged, their needs and motivations understood, and these relationships maintained.





**MAINTAINING KNOWLEDGE** of current packaging options and alternatives is critical, but it is a steep learning curve and constantly evolving. There are many products which appear to be suitable but are not. Many are still made of plastic, have no certifications, and/or contain glues, dyes, inks and chemicals that make them unsuitable. Many composters won't take products unless they carry certain certifications (and this differs between composters) and you cannot easily tell what the certifications are, or even if there are any. Misleading claims and greenwashing is common. We have to stay on top of this.

**ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BUSINESS** community and promotion through media and social media is time consuming but important.

**MANY BUSINESSES ARE WARY** of new projects and the credentials of those offering them. This is where relationships and partnerships with established organisations (such as Councils and Chambers of Commerce) are important for credibility. Opportunities to promote and engage with the community should also be sought out in order for the project to become a well-known and established.

**THERE NEEDS TO BE** in place a robust data collection and analysis system to measure program success and ensure continued funding. This has been one of the big differences between our program and many other less structured programs - quantifying impact.

## NEXT STEPS

It is our recommendation that you don't attempt to do this project on your own. Boomerang Alliance has spent three years developing the system and has the experience to successfully run it.

We recommend you approach your local council to fund and create a partnership with us to manage the project. We employ and train local coordinators to run the program in communities and engage with local stakeholders.

For more information on how to bring us to your community, drop us an email ([kellie.lindsay@boomerangalliance.org.au](mailto:kellie.lindsay@boomerangalliance.org.au)) and let's get the conversation started.

