

Swap for Good

Sustainable Procurement Guide



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What is ‘Sustainable Procurement’?

Successful businesses are embedding sustainability across their organisation strategy and day-to-day operations. This ensures that business decisions consider outcomes across environmental, social and economic pillars i.e. the ‘Triple Bottom Line’.

Rethinking your business model will make you more resilient to pressure from conscious consumers, employees and investors that all demand sustainability leadership and are ‘voting with their wallets’.

Single-use plastic is made from non-renewable resources and can have a large impact on the environment and human health, consequently it doesn’t meet the Triple Bottom Line criteria.

Finding the best alternative for your business using sustainable procurement guidelines is imperative to making this change a success.

Find solutions with the waste hierarchy



1. **Reduce:** minimising waste is more efficient than managing the waste after it is created



2. **Refuse:** say no to excess packaging and encourage renewable, reusable resources



4. **Reduce toxins:** throughout the life-cycle of plastics there are risks to human health through exposure to toxic substances¹ so eliminating this material is the way to go.



3. **Return:** look for options where products or packaging can be returned



5. **Redesign:** eliminate waste from the get-go.



6. **Rethink:** use less stuff and avoid disposables to reduce consumption and packaging.



8. **Reuse:** repurpose, repair, refurbish, share and swap and provide incentives for customers that bring their own containers, coffee cups, bags etc.



7. **Encourage cyclical use of resources:** support the circular economy and avoid using virgin natural resources. Look for recycled content in packaging.



9. **Rot:** Composting organics is a great way to reduce waste and many alternatives to single-use plastic are plant-based and fully compostable (see next page for definition of terms).



10. **Recycle:** this is at the bottom of the list as it's not desirable to produce down-cycled products and at present there isn't a strong market for these products. While it's important to develop markets for recovered materials, this isn't an excuse to keep using single-use plastics.

1. Azoulay et al. (2019) Plastic & Health: The Hidden Cost of a Plastic Planet. Centre for International Environmental Law.



Find the best alternative to single-use plastic

So you're ready to make a change but you're not an expert on the 'environmentally friendly' lingo. Be mindful of vague, tricky terms as these products are most likely not a good solution. We've done the research for you so that you can choose a real solution to the problem and avoid 'Greenwashing':

- Degradable, Oxo-Biodegradable or Biodegradable Plastics: these items simply break up into smaller pieces of plastic, eventually creating a microplastic issue.
- Bioplastics and Compostable Plastics: these are made from plant biomass such as corn starch or sugar cane but may require an industrial composting facility in order to fully break them down.
- Polylactic Acid (PLA) is an example of a bioplastic which requires high levels of heat and humidity to break down within 90 days. If littered on the land or marine environment, PLA breaks down at a similar rate to other plastics like Polyethylene (PE)². Similarly, PLA may contain toxic chemical additives and synthesisers which will be released to the environment as it breaks down.
- Plant-derived polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is indistinguishable from its petrochemical equivalent.

Keep in mind, that if it looks and feels like plastic, then generally it is plastic, despite the clever marketing terms that are used.

At Manly Cove in 2018, AUSMAP citizen scientists found **1,263 pieces of microplastic** per square metre. As microplastics have the potential to enter the human body through the food chain and impact human health, this is a situation we would like to avoid.

2. Ballinger et al. (2016) Study to assist the Commission to carry out a life cycle assessment of different possibilities to reduce the consumption for very lightweight plastic carrier bags: final report. Publications office of the EU.

Alternative material's ranking

Straws	
Reusable (Metal or Bamboo)	Metal and bamboo straws are often part of cutlery kits that your eco-conscious customers might like to carry with them. You could have these for sale at your venue to promote the BYO reusables culture and there is even an option to get the bamboo straws branded.
Paper	Paper straws are a great alternative. It's important to ensure paper is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or made from 100% recycled paper. Manufacture of paper is energy intensive and paper straws can be more expensive than plastic. To keep this a win for your triple bottom line, reduce your use of straws altogether. Train your staff to only give out straws on request.
Pasta or Wheat	Bucatini pasta is a flavourless pasta that's as biodegradable as a loaf of bread. If you can find organic, locally farmed wheat and ensure your pasta straws make it to a compost bin then this could be a winning solution. Some wheat straws use the waste product from wheat production, which can be sustainably advantageous.

Bags	
Jute or Hessian	Jute or hessian bags are the best reusable bag because they are made from vegetable fibres and naturally biodegradable. Jute plants are a renewable resource and store carbon thereby reducing the impact of climate change. Jute bags can be recycled with textiles and eventually composted at the end of their life cycle.
Canvas or Calico	Cotton bags last for hundreds of uses as they're durable and washable. Cotton fibre comes from the seed of cotton plants and is naturally biodegradable. The textile can be recycled at the end of its life cycle or cut up and placed in the compost. Always ensure you choose organic cotton. As cotton farming can have a large water footprint, make sure your product is good quality.
Reusable Paper	Paper bags generally don't last as many times as a jute or cotton bag. However, they can be recycled or composted. Look for bags made from recycled paper and printed with environmentally-friendly dyes.

Stock some foldable 'parachute' bags (which you could get branded) as a reusable bag to help your customers when they get caught out for last minute shopping.

Polypropylene 'green' bag: Polypropylene is a non-renewable, fossil fuel-based plastic. 'Green' bags are used for two years on average. At the end of life, you can recycle these bags with soft plastics at a REDcycle bin. However, be aware at this stage there is a limited market for these recycled-content products, so it's best to avoid creating this waste in the first place.



Coffee Cups	
Mug Library	Set up a mug library for free or via gold coin deposit. You can stock the basket with mugs from a local thrift shop.
Reusable Jar or Cup for sale	Stock some beautiful options for customers to buy to get them started on their BYO reusables journey. Check out Responsible Cafes, The Better Cup Guide to decide which type of cup you could stock. Classic mugs and repurposed jam jars are at the top of the list, closely followed by stainless steel, clay and glass with silicon lids.
Paper with PLA lining	This compostable solution might be ok if it's not littered. Unfortunately, there is no recyclable option for disposable cups so please make sure you encourage your customers to BYO or to dispose of their coffee cups in the general waste (red lid) bins so that compostable material is recovered at the UR3R facility. Ensure your commercial waste is being sent to an industrial composting facility if you chose this option.
Coffee Cup Lids	Ask your customers, "Do you need a lid?" If yes, have paper pulp lids in stock rather than plastic.

At present, there is no recyclable option for coffee cups (although there are innovative programs looking to downgrade this waste). The best option is the BYO cup.





Cutlery

Reusable (Metal or Bamboo)	Cutlery kits are becoming the norm for more than just your eco-conscious consumers. You could have these for sale at your venue to promote the BYO reusables culture.
Wood	Wooden cutlery is better than bioplastic and plastic cutlery when considering the impacts of both litter and climate change. Ensure that the cutlery is sourced from well-managed forests certified by the FSC.

Takeaway Containers

Reusable containers	Have glass, ceramic or stainless steel options for sale to get people started on their journey to BYO reusable. Grab some bowls from a thrift store and start a 'bowl library' to promote reusables culture. Sign up to a share system such as those listed on our Supplier List and Media Guide.
Paper (without any lining)	This could be a great option for certain types of food. Always look for FSC certification of paper.
Bagasse-sugarcane and bamboo pulp	Other natural and compostable solutions have the lowest impact if littered. Processing of these alternative fibres can be energy intensive but also may perform better than other end-of-life options for by-products ³ . Production of alternative fibres is relatively new, so efficiency in production may increase over time ⁴ .
Palm leaf plates	Made from fallen leaves of Areca palm (not palm oil trees). Heat is used to press the plates into shape. However, no chemicals are used to make the plates, they are made from renewable resources and are naturally compostable. Be aware that some products are shipped from overseas so look for local options to reduce transport emissions.

3. Kiatkittipong et al. (2009). Life cycle assessment of bagasse waste management options. Waste Management 29:1628-1633.

4. Favero et al. (2017) Life cycle and market review of the major alternative fibers for paper production. Georgia Institute of Technology.

Supply chain conversations

Find out if your supplier has sustainable options and share your reason for the product switch. If you're not sure which product is best for your business, ask for a trial pack so that you can test it out and get feedback from staff and customers.

If your supplier doesn't have sustainable options, don't just leave quietly. Take the opportunity to tell them your reason and ask them to let you know when they've improved their product lines. They could even run a special during Plastic Free July to promote these products and convert customers.

Check out the behaviour change guide for tips on how to have this conversation. Sharing your tailored reason and showcasing the 'how' through your business model will help spread the word in a positive way.

Every conversation will add up to a cumulative message that the suppliers can't ignore. Even if change doesn't happen straight away, remember that having this conversation is better than staying silent on an issue that is so important for our living world and our Northern Beaches community.

