

Position Statement on single-use water bottle alternatives

June 2020

Boomerang Alliance supports the use of reusable water bottles wherever possible, and allows for some single-use alternatives (with conditions).

Plastic drink bottles remain one of the biggest litter and waste problems in Australia. Despite being recyclable, most have ended up in rubbish dumps or in the environment, where they persist and cause significant damage to ocean life. While water bottles are no different to other types of drink bottles, we single them out because bottled water has a viable alternative practice - tap water and a reusable cup or bottle. We believe there is no need for single-use bottled water in Australia, even though container deposit schemes are significantly increasing their recycling rate. However, a transitional approach is required to deal with them.

Boomerang Alliance first and foremost supports the use of tap or filtered water when eating out, coupled with reusable water bottles at all other times.

Australians currently drink a lot of single-use bottled water, despite us having some of the best tap water in the world. Much of the blame comes down to marketing, with beverage companies implying that bottled water is superior. Our throwaway lifestyle and desire for convenience is also a big factor. While all this may change over time, unfortunately it means that disposable water bottles are still currently a way of life.

With bottled water being a revenue item for businesses, it can be hard for them to entirely eliminate it, especially as they risk losing business to competitors who do sell bottled water.

For this reason, our Plastic Free Places program allows for the sale of certain types of disposable bottled water for plastic-free businesses, but under certain conditions. We consider this a practical and transitional approach towards the eventual elimination of single-use bottled water.

To qualify for 'Plastic Free Champion' status under our program, any café or food outlet must first provide free drinking water and a refill station. Cafes may also choose to sell reusable water bottles to their customers. Water in disposable bottles can then be provided under the following rules.

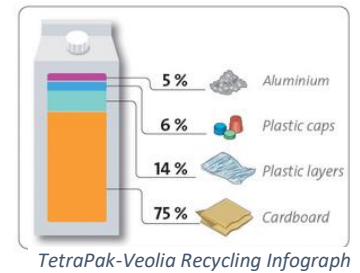
As a temporary measure under our Plastic Free Places program, we allow the following disposable bottled water containers where there is an effective recycling collection system:

1. Glass. This is our preferred alternative, though we acknowledge that glass can have plastic labels. We recommend paper-based labelling that can easily be removed during recycling. We don't allow for plastic lids or plastic sealing rings. The downside is that glass is heavier to transport and can have a higher carbon footprint through its lifetime than other options.
2. Aluminium cans. We acknowledge that cans are not plastic-free, with an inner and out plastic (epoxy) lining to protect the can. The average can contains 0.06 grams of plastic, compared to 9.3 grams for plastic water bottles. Aluminium cans can be recycled indefinitely, unlike plastic bottles which degrade over time. We prefer cans be used in a closed-loop situation, where they are captured for recycling.

Both of these containers are included in state Container Deposit Schemes and attract a 10-cent refund.

Disposable bottled water we DO NOT allow under our Plastic Free Places program:

1. Carton or boxed water. These are a composite material made of paper, plastic, aluminium and sometimes even other materials. Because of this, it is a challenge to recycle – the materials need to be separated out which often makes it uneconomical to recycle. These products usually have a plastic lid. While boxed water does have a lower transportation footprint, we don't consider it an acceptable alternative to plastic water bottles.



2. Compostable bioplastic (PLA) water bottles.¹
Many of these bioplastic water bottles have a plastic lid and neck ring that is not compostable. They also need to go to commercial facility to be composted – it is far more likely these bottles will end up in the domestic and business recycling stream, where they are not recyclable and may cause contamination – or landfill. While these bottles have a lower environmental footprint to produce, many will end up littered, where they will act like standard plastic.

We should be moving away from single-use plastic water bottles altogether towards reusable options. Where single-use is made available, we maintain a process of continuous improvement. We will continue to seek better solutions and work with manufacturers and innovators on these. If/when these become available, we will review our position.

¹ For products other than water bottles, and where reusable is not an option, we allow for 100% compostable products as an alternative, including compostable bioplastic/PLA if a more sustainable alternative is not available.