



# Recycling Behaviours Report 2026

Australians and recycling:  
attitudes, behaviours and outlook

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cleanaway and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) have teamed up again to conduct research on how Australians think about, talk about and act on key areas of recycling.

These insights reflect the voice of Australians and help inform Cleanaway's priorities for waste education, advocacy, and the development of innovative waste and recycling solutions. They also align with the CEFC's focus on financing the technologies and solutions that support Australia's transition to net zero emissions. Together, the goal is to understand the factors that drive recycling behaviour and where barriers exist to maximise resource recovery across the country.

This report summarises commissioned research conducted by Loneragan Research between the 30th March and 5th April, 2026. A total of 1,000 Australians aged 18 and over were surveyed online through a permission-based panel, with representatives from all states, including capital cities and regional areas.



Post-consumer mixed soft plastics were a key focus of this year's research - one of the most persistent and visible gaps in Australia's recycling system. The results reveal what Australians want, expect and where they believe responsibility lies when it comes to plastic packaging solutions. The findings also provide information beneficial to the continuing development of Cleanaway and Viva Energy's joint-initiative - Cycleback Plastics, a landmark national soft plastics recycling solution.

To understand how recycling attitudes and behaviours are changing over time, some questions from previous Recycling Behaviours Reports were repeated. The repeat questions were spread across recycling, sustainability, food and garden organics (FOGO) and the ongoing industry challenge of correct battery and battery-operated device disposal. New questions were also added, providing deeper insight on where momentum is building and where gaps remain.

The findings point to a public whose support for recycling has never been stronger, with the challenge now in ensuring that the systems designed to enable recycling are not outpaced by the support for it.

## Australia's recycling system is entering a turning point

Australians overwhelmingly say recycling is important; most rate themselves as good recyclers and trust in the system is slowly increasing. Encouragingly, support for a circular economy is now near-universal and the rapid uptake of FOGO services shows what's possible when governments deliver practical solutions.

While it might seem Australians are just supportive in theory, the data reveals they are acting where they can and are motivated by a desire to help the environment and do the right thing. Half (50%) are seeking out products with minimal packaging when shopping (up from 43% in 2024), and more Australians are finding the right places to take harder-to-recycle items, with 52% now finding battery recycling easy (up from 41% in 2024).

## Battery recycling poses a challenge

Overall, most Australians know that batteries and other electronic devices (such as mobile phones) should not be placed in kerbside bins. However, with approximately a third of respondents not aware that placing batteries in kerbside bins can cause fires, 45% unsure where to take mobile phones and laptops for safe disposal and recycling, and 39% indicating taking batteries to drop-off locations is inconvenient, there seems to be a gap in consumer knowledge and process efficiency. This gap could mean people are placing these items into their household bins even if they know they shouldn't, leading to serious ramifications in collection trucks and processing infrastructure.

## Soft plastics recycling solutions are supported and overdue

Findings show Australians are overwhelmingly keen to reduce their waste to landfill and improve the circular economy, with 94% saying they would be likely to use a new soft plastics recycling scheme if one launched tomorrow and 87% saying Australia should prioritise a national soft plastics solution.



**33%**

One-third of Australians (33%) describe feeling confused about the nation's current post-consumer soft plastics recycling approach.

### A call for action

When looking at who should act to help establish a stronger approach to our country's recycling capabilities, Australians say governments are best placed to lead. There's strong support for a national approach that brings consistency to how waste is handled, funds the infrastructure to support it, and mandates packaging reforms that hold manufacturers accountable. These reforms are strongly supported, with 94% backing a single national plan with consistent plastics recycling rules across all states, 93% supporting a national kerbside collection for soft plastics, and 92% preferencing mandated minimum recycled content in plastic packaging.

But reform alone won't shift behaviour. Ongoing investment in infrastructure and education that continues to help people understand how the system works and the role they play, is essential to turn this support into lasting change.

### Where momentum is building and where more work is needed

Encouragingly, Australians aren't just supportive of a circular economy, they're increasingly clear on what it means in practice and what it will take to build a stronger one. Support is near-universal, with 99% saying it's important to implement a circular economy in Australia, up from 95% in 2024. This growing endorsement is accompanied by a clearer understanding of the actions industry and governments can take to lead the delivery of practical and sustainable solutions.

Battery safety awareness, while still broadly high, is showing signs of decline, particularly among younger Australians. Seven in ten Australians (71%) correctly know batteries cannot go in kerbside bins and the barriers to correct disposal remain unchanged: not knowing where batteries should be safely disposed of and inconvenience. Narrowing this gap requires investment in targeted education and accessible infrastructure, both of which can be supported by a standardised national approach that everyone can follow with confidence.

When looking at the emerging waste stream of Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO), participation is growing strongly among those with access. Three-quarters (74%) of Australians with a FOGO bin use it, with younger generations leading the way (18-29 year olds 85%, 30-44 year olds 79%; cf. 45-64 year olds 68%, 65+ year olds 62%). Uneven rollout means many households are still missing out, with 57% of non-users citing lack of access to kerbside services as the primary barrier. The problem is access, not willingness. This gives governments an incentive to expand FOGO services and deliver lasting change to waste management systems and Australia's environmental outcomes.

These findings show a nation ready to take the next step in reducing waste to landfill. Australians want to create a sustainable future for the country and are looking for clearer guidance, better infrastructure and stronger accountability to help them get there. The willingness is there, and this momentum creates a strong foundation for consumption-driven and circular economy initiatives.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 91%** say recycling is important
- 99%** say implementing a circular economy in Australia is important
- 64%** have felt misled by soft plastics packaging that appears recyclable but isn't
- 94%** would be likely to use a new soft plastics recycling scheme if one launched tomorrow
- 94%** would support a circular economy for packaging in Australia.
- 86%** of Australians aged 65 and over know batteries can't go in kerbside bins
- 74%** of Australians with a FOGO bin use it
- 86%** believe the rollout of FOGO services across Australia will help reduce waste to landfill



### About Cleanaway

Cleanaway is Australia's largest provider of comprehensive waste management and resource recovery solutions. With more than 50 years of experience, over 10,000 employees, and a network spanning 350 sites, Cleanaway supports industries and communities across the country – helping manage waste responsibly, recover valuable resources, and reduce environmental impact. Driven by the belief that today's waste is tomorrow's resource, Cleanaway plays a vital role in delivering innovation that advances Australia's circular economy and provides practical, sustainable outcomes for its customers and communities.

### About the Clean Energy Finance Corporation

The CEFC is Australia's specialist climate investor, helping cut emissions in the race towards net zero by 2050. The CEFC invests in the latest technologies to generate, store, manage and transmit clean energy. With access to more than \$33 billion from the Australian Government, the CEFC invests with commercial rigour and is governed by an independent board. Since 2017, the CEFC has been working with Cleanaway to support waste education efforts, such as the Recycling Behaviours Report. Through this investment, Cleanaway and the CEFC aim to reduce waste going to landfill and create a sustainable future for Australians.

## GENERAL RECYCLING TRENDS

For most Australians, recycling has become a natural part of daily life and support for a circular economy has never been stronger. But beneath that enthusiasm sits a more complicated picture. Trust in the recycling system, although growing, remains fragile. Motivations are shifting and while Australians know what they want, many are still waiting for the education, infrastructure, and national leadership that will help them get there.



### Recycling remains deeply embedded in Australian life

Nine in ten Australians (91%) agree that recycling is important, a figure that has remained consistently strong year on year, and five in six (86%) rate themselves as a good or very good recycler, up from 81% in 2024. For most Australians, recycling sits alongside the everyday values of doing the right thing and looking after the country we live in. Across all of Cleanaway's Recycling Behaviours Reports, a common motivation for recycling has consistently been simply that it is the right thing to do. This indicates a values-driven commitment that speaks to how Australians see themselves and their responsibility to the environments they live in.

### Environmental drivers lead recycling behaviour, though motivations are levelling

Environmental motivations continue to lead the reasons Australians recycle, with two-thirds citing helping the environment (67%), reducing waste going to landfill (67%) and doing the right thing (66%) as their primary drivers. Those aged 65 and over are the strongest advocates for the moral case, with 82% in this age bracket seeing recycling as simply the right thing to do.

**91%** agree recycling is important

**86%** rate themselves as a good recycler

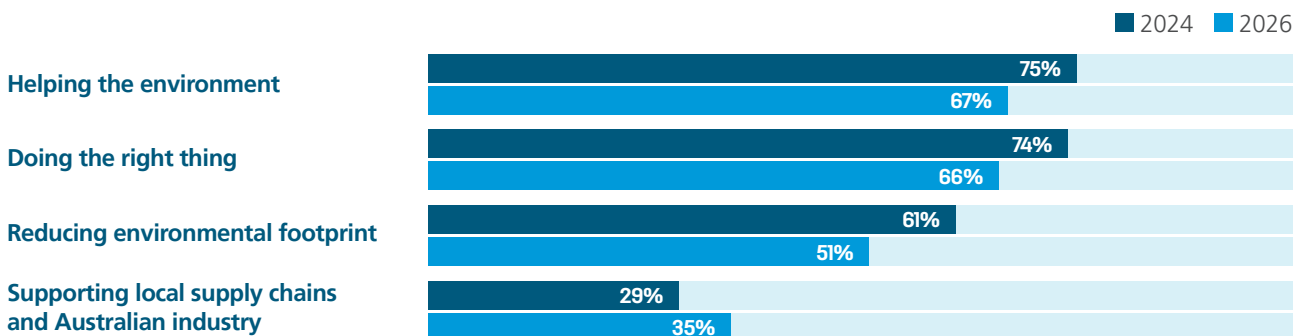
**77%** say recycling correctly is easy (up from 65% in 2024)

**83%** believe there should be national consistency in recycling standards

When compared to 2024, several of these motivations have softened. This shift may be shaped by the broader cost of living pressures continuing to dominate Australian household decision-making. The 2023 Recycling Behaviours Report cited 84% of Australians ranked cost of living as one of their top two concerns. Three years on, that pressure has not eased and the data suggests it may be quietly influencing how Australians frame their reasons for recycling. One motivation growing since 2024 is supporting local supply chains. As the only measure to increase, it likely reflects a broader shift in consumer sentiment toward economic nationalism and buying local.

### Access to bins varies significantly

Unfortunately, not all Australians have equal access to the infrastructure that makes effective recycling possible. Access to dedicated source separation bins that help improve resource recovery and landfill diversion outcomes remains limited, with only 30% having a FOGO bin, 22% having a separate paper and cardboard bin, and just 6% having a dedicated e-waste bin at their premises.



## GENERAL RECYCLING TRENDS



### Australians want nationally consistent rules

More than four in five Australians (83%) believe there should be national consistency in recycling standards, no matter the waste stream. Australians experience recycling rules differently depending on where they live, and they want that to change.

### Confidence is growing, but trust still lags

Encouragingly, 77% of Australians now agree that recycling correctly is easy, up significantly from 65% in 2024. This represents a meaningful turnaround from earlier years reporting, with 2023's findings highlighting that 38% of Australians found recycling confusing and 44% found it hard to find clear instructions on how to recycle. This suggests that education efforts and improved access to information are having a measurable impact. However, challenges remain with one in four Australians (25%) still finding recycling confusing, and 32% not fully trusting that their waste will be properly recycled. This demonstrates an ongoing gap between confidence in individual behaviour and trust in the broader system.

### Bigger bins means more recycling

Over half of Australians (54%) say they would recycle more items if they had a bigger recycling bin. This is a practical signal that investment into waste management infrastructure can directly translate into behaviour change, and that expanding bin access and capacity remains one of the most straightforward levers available to drive recycling rates up.

### Some items remain harder to recycle than others

While most Australians find everyday items straightforward to recycle, confidence drops significantly for more complex waste streams. Paper and cardboard ranks as the easiest item to recycle (91%), followed by hard plastics (86%) and garden plant cuttings (85%). At the other end of the scale, chemicals rank as the most difficult, with half of Australians (50%) finding them hard to recycle, followed by e-waste (45%) and paint cans (42%). Soft plastics, while showing improvement from 40% finding them difficult in 2024 to 28% in 2026, continue to present challenges for many households, with ongoing uncertainty about whether sustainable recycling solutions exist for this material.

## THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

It's clear Australians want a circular economy. One where products are built with longevity and quality in mind, and where waste becomes a resource rather than a problem. The question is no longer whether a circular economy is worth pursuing, but how to build one, who leads it and how Australians get the information they need to take part.

### Support for a circular economy has never been stronger

Nearly two in five Australians (38%) say it is extremely important to implement a circular economy in Australia, with a further 40% describing it as very important and 20% as quite important. Combined, almost all Australians (99%) agree it is important, up from 95% in 2024. Looking across the generations, those aged between 18-29 are particularly passionate about establishing a circular economy, with more than half (54%) rating it as very important.

### Australians want to build a circular economy

While support for a circular economy is strong, Australians are clear that getting there will take more than good intentions. They want education to help them participate, infrastructure to be built and the responsibility shared across government, industry, and consumers - with strong rules to back it up.

### Shared responsibility is on the rise

Australians still look primarily to the Federal Government to lead, with one-third (32%) naming it as most responsible for implementing a circular economy. However, this figure has dropped from 40% in 2024, with responsibility increasingly shared across local (15%) and state governments (11%), brands and manufacturers (22%), and Australian consumers themselves (21%). It is a shift that suggests Australians are beginning to see developing a circular economy as a collective effort rather than one for the government alone.

### A call for stronger rules

The appetite for government action extends well beyond general support for a circular economy. The majority of Australians (88%) are in favour of increasing fines for companies that do not meet recycling/circularity rules, and creating one national plan with consistent plastics recycling rules across all states (94%) is highly favoured. An equal share of Australians (89%) believe there should be stronger rules for manufacturers and brands to help reduce waste, a burden which currently falls largely on consumers.

### Packaging reform is a clear priority

When it comes to the role packaging reforms could play in strengthening a circular economy, support is strong. The majority (94%) of Australians support a circular economy approach to packaging, with 91% wanting recycled content to be a requirement across all packaging. Going further, 89% think all packaging used by brands should include a percentage of recycled content.

On plastic packaging specifically, 92% back national rules for recycled content to be used in plastic packaging, and an equal share (92%) want all plastic packaging to include a set minimum amount of recycled material. There's also strong support for requiring companies to pay for the cost of recycling plastic packaging used in their products (83%) and publicly reporting how much plastic they use and recycle (90%).

These findings reveal a shared accountability, where government, industry and consumers all have a role to play in making recycled packaging the norm.

### Education still plays a part

When asked to rank the most urgent priorities for making a circular economy happen, one-quarter (25%) placed education at the top, ahead of infrastructure (19%) and ensuring products are designed with circularity in mind (17%). Of particular interest, participants were shown a diagram explaining what a circular economy is before being asked how important it is to implement in Australia. The near-universal support that followed in their responses suggests that when Australians understand what a circular economy actually is, they care about it.

More broadly it shows how important education is for the entire waste management sector. Year on year, the research shows that when there are less barriers, clearer information and simple steps to follow, greater recycling behaviours are adopted across the entire waste management system. Awareness drives advocacy and closing knowledge gaps is an important first step.

**86%** agree recycling is a valuable contributor to developing a circular economy in Australia

**94%** support a circular economy for packaging in Australia (one that minimises waste and maximises use of recovered materials)

## SOFT PLASTICS

Australia produces approximately 521,000 tonnes\* of soft plastic waste each year, including packaging and wrappers, cling wrap, bubble wrap and plastic bags - the vast majority of which is difficult and costly to recycle. Despite national packaging targets being set by the Australian Government in 2018, aiming for 70% of plastic packaging to be recovered by 2025, Australia only reached around 20% of that target by the time the deadline arrived, and specific targets for soft plastics only sat at 9%.



The findings make it clear. Australians want to do the right thing with soft plastics and further policy support needs to be implemented. Currently, Australian Environment Ministers are discussing a potential transition from voluntary targets to mandatory obligations. The Federal Government is in the process of developing mandatory design standards, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes and enforceable rules that would hold brands accountable for packaging - all of which is a step in the right direction.

**“Nearly two-thirds of Australians have felt misled by soft plastics packaging that appears recyclable but isn’t.”**

### Most Australians are trying to recycle soft plastics with good intent, but getting it wrong

Three in five Australian households (61%) recycle or intend to recycle their soft plastics, one in five (21%) take soft plastics to a soft plastics recycling scheme at a participating store and 16% put them loose in their recycling bin at home - a behaviour that, while well-intentioned, risks contaminating the broader recycling stream.

Separately, half of Australians (49%) say they have at some point put soft plastics in their kerbside recycling bin hoping they would be recycled. This behaviour is known as ‘wish-cycling’ - born from good intentions but driven by a lack of clear alternatives and confusion around packaging symbols (recycled content logos are often mistaken as a sign the packaging itself can be recycled at the kerb).

Inconsistent soft plastics recycling behaviour is expected when you look at how many people misunderstand labeling. Nearly two-thirds of Australians (64%) have felt misled by soft plastics packaging that appears recyclable but isn’t. In the 2023 Recycling Behaviours Report, 81% of Australians misidentified the Plastics Identification Code for PVC as a recycling symbol and half said they would place such items in their kerbside recycling bin. This highlights how confusion around recycling symbols and labelling has persisted over time, extending beyond the well-known recycling symbol to others that look similar.

When we look a little closer at labelling on packaging, Australians are feeling deceived at the point of purchase. Much of this confusion stems from the disposal instructions on packaging labels, which have been slow to update their guidance after the lapse of previous soft plastics solutions. In hope of new soft plastics collection schemes emerging, one in ten (9%) households are holding on to soft plastics at home. Compounding this, consumers are often directed through labels to check locally for recycling rules, adding an extra step that many Australians are simply not interested to take.



**64%** have felt misled by soft plastic packaging that appears recyclable but isn’t

**39%** of those using a soft plastics scheme can’t name the scheme they’re using

**38%** put soft plastics in general waste

\* <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/documents.packagingcovenant.org.au/public-documents/APCO+Australian+Packaging+Consumption+and+Recovery+Data+2023-24.pdf>

## SOFT PLASTICS

### Good intentions are not enough when the system is unclear

Even among those who want to recycle soft plastics, a combination of misleading packaging, system confusion and a lack of practical solutions is standing in front of genuine outcomes.

### Many Australians don't know which schemes are real

Among those actively using a soft plastics recycling scheme, there appears to be significant confusion about what schemes exist and what they accept. When those who say they use a soft plastics recycling scheme were asked 'which one?' more than one in ten (12%) named a Container Deposit Scheme, which does not accept soft plastics, only specific hard/rigid plastics. 8% named REDcycle, which collapsed in 2022 and a further 39% were unsure or unable to specify which scheme they are using. This confusion reinforces the need for leadership in the soft plastics space, helping create national consistency in recycling and securing the long-term end markets a circular economy depends on.

However, it's not all bad. Since the collapse of REDcycle there has been progress made on how this material is recycled, but greater education, infrastructure and support is needed to meet the needs of community and industry. To date, notable actions on the management of soft plastics in Australia include the establishment of a retailer-led Soft Plastics Taskforce to process legacy REDcycle stockpiles, alongside a soft plastics funding stream under the Recycling Modernisation Fund and a new collection and recycling scheme authorised by the ACCC for Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia to manage. However, these actions only address a minority of soft plastics currently placed on market. Significant investment and policy change to scale are required to achieve meaningful impact.

### Sentiment reflects the broken system

When asked how they feel about Australia's current approach to soft plastics recycling, one-third of Australians (33%) chose confused as the word that best describes their feeling. One in five feel frustrated (20%), disappointed (20%) or indifferent (20%) about the current situation. Despite the frustration, Australians have not given up on soft plastics recycling, but only three in ten (31%) feel optimistic about Australia's current approach - a figure that reflects just how much ground there is to recover trust in this space.

### Inconvenience is still a hurdle

Among the 6% of Australians who say they would not use a new soft plastics recycling scheme, two in five (39%) say it is inconvenient, more than one in four (28%) say they don't recycle soft plastics at all, and one in five (20%) say separating soft plastics from other waste is too hard. However, likelihood of participation increased when inconvenience was replaced with convenience in a



hypothetical scenario, with 94% of Australians saying they would be likely to participate in a new soft plastics recycling scheme if soft plastics were collected at the kerb. This is a reminder that alongside systemic change, user convenience must be considered as well as behaviour change management to keep Australians engaged in recycling programs.

### Future solutions for soft plastics

The documented frustration and confusion around soft plastics has not dampened Australians' appetite for change. When presented with the prospect of a better system, Australians respond with enthusiasm. The demand for a credible, nationally consistent soft plastics solution is high, and Australians are clear on what they want the solution to look like.

### The appetite for a solution is nationwide

Australians are in favour of introducing a national kerbside collection for soft plastics (93%) and over five in six (87%) say Australia should prioritise a national soft plastics solution. Support is consistent across every state and territory however, South Australians are marginally more likely to back a national solution (90%) - reflecting the state's longstanding leadership on plastic waste reform, but the call is strong regardless of where Australians live (NSW/ACT 87%, WA 87%, VIC 88%, NT/TAS 86%, QLD 85%).

**94%** would be likely to use a new soft plastic scheme if one launched tomorrow.

### CLEANAWAY AND VIVA ENERGY: ANSWERING THE CALL

Cleanaway and Viva Energy are progressing plans for Australia's first large-scale advanced soft plastics recycling facility - a direct response to the 94% of Australians calling for a credible national solution. The partnership will see soft plastics collected at scale and converted into food-grade recycled plastic, closing the loop between waste and new packaging.

See page 17 for further information on this innovative partnership solution.

## BATTERIES & RECHARGEABLE DEVICES

Battery fires are a serious and growing challenge for Australia's waste management system. Industry estimates between 10,000 and 12,000\* fire incidents annually across collection trucks, transfer stations, landfills and recycling facilities, which are often sparked by batteries and e-waste items incorrectly disposed of into a kerbside bin. The consequences for workers, communities and infrastructure can be severe, costly and deeply disruptive. This year's research provides an important sense-check on how well Australians understand this risk, and whether that understanding is translating into correct disposal behaviour.

### Progress is being made, but knowledge gaps remain

The good news is that correct disposal behaviour is becoming more common, with nearly half of Australians (47%) saying that they dispose of batteries at specialised drop-off locations often and over one-third (37%) do the same with mobile phones. These are encouraging signs that education campaigns and improved infrastructure are creating a positive impact. Greater awareness and more accessible collection points are helping to further reduce the ongoing risk to waste infrastructure and workers' safety. However, findings also highlight opportunities to strengthen understanding and correct disposal of other common rechargeable items such as electric toothbrushes and headphones, with only 24% of Australians regularly disposing of electric toothbrushes at specialised drop-off locations and 28% doing the same for headphones.

### Awareness of the rules is declining

Seven in ten Australians (71%) correctly answered that batteries or rechargeable devices cannot be placed in kerbside bins, down from 77% in 2024. This decline warrants attention. Australians aged 65 and over remain the most likely to answer correctly (86%), while younger Australians show the greatest knowledge gaps, with 18-29 year olds (59%) and 30-44 year olds (60%) the least likely to know the rules. Interestingly, Australians living outside capital cities are also more likely to answer correctly than those in cities (76% vs 68%), a difference that may reflect a combination of different council communication approaches, ease of access to drop-off points, and education campaigns that cut through more effectively outside of busy metropolitan environments.

### Knowledge needs to extend beyond AAs

Progress hasn't yet extended to the growing range of everyday items powered by lithium batteries. While only 9% of Australians would put a battery in the general rubbish bin, that figure doubles for items most people don't think of as "batteries". Notably, 18% would put headphones in general rubbish and 20% would do the same with electric toothbrushes, meaning the same

disposal mistakes that cause battery fires in collection trucks and processing facilities are being made with items people don't think of as "batteries".

As lithium-ion batteries become embedded in more everyday products, from smart watches and earbuds to power tools and personal care devices, expanding Australians' understanding of what counts as e-waste and a 'battery' is vital to safe disposal.

### Understanding of the consequences is fading

Among those who do understand batteries should not go in kerbside bins, awareness of the specific consequences has also shifted. Over three in five Australians believe batteries could cause a fire in a garbage truck (62%), a fire at a processing facility (62%) or a fire in the household bin (58%), all slightly lower than 2024 figures. Awareness that battery chemicals can contaminate the environment has also decreased notably, from 77% in 2024 to 58% in 2026. As the risk of battery fires continues to grow, this erosion of awareness is a trend the industry cannot afford to ignore.



**71%** correctly know batteries can't go in kerbside bins (down from 77% in 2024)

**37%** don't take batteries to drop-offs because they don't know where to go

**47%** would take items to drop-off because it's the right thing to do

### Those doing it right know why

Among those who would take items to specialised drop-off locations, the motivations are well-founded. Most cite the dangers of disposing of items like batteries and old devices through other means (57%), followed by the knowledge that drop-off ensures they are recycled or repurposed (48%) and a straightforward sense of doing the right thing (47%).

\*Footnote to be referenced here...

## BATTERIES & RECHARGEABLE DEVICES

### Convenience, awareness, and location remain as key barriers

Not knowing where to take items (37%) and inconvenience (37%) remain the two most common reasons Australians would not take batteries and e-waste to specialised drop-off locations. These figures have improved slightly since 2024 (45% and 39% respectively), suggesting that education campaigns are beginning to cut through. However, 14% of Australians say they simply did not know they were supposed to take batteries to a specialised location at all meaning there is still room for improvement

### Closing the gap requires action on education and infrastructure

Reaching the Australians who are still placing batteries in kerbside bins requires simultaneous progress on two fronts. Education must make the consequences of incorrect battery disposal tangible and immediate, particularly for younger Australians. Equally, infrastructure must make correct disposal as easy and accessible as possible, removing the practical barriers that convenience currently presents. Cleanaway continues to work alongside B-cycle - Australia's battery stewardship program, and other industry partners to advocate for reform and promote consistent messaging about safe battery disposal across the country.

**57%** agree recycling is a valuable contributor to developing a circular economy in Australia

**48%** agree recycling is a valuable contributor to developing a circular economy in Australia





Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) recycling represents one of the most meaningful and actionable steps Australians can take to reduce their environmental impact. FOGO services help reduce organic waste from landfill, lessen greenhouse gas emissions and transform food and garden waste into compost - a nutrient-rich soil conditioner that supports healthier soils and improved plant growth across agriculture, parks, gardens and land rehabilitation projects.

As FOGO services continue to gain momentum nationwide, this year's research shows high levels of uptake and participation among households with access, alongside a strong understanding of the contribution FOGO makes to reducing waste to landfill. Encouragingly, broad public support for FOGO is evident. Even among Australians without access, the rollout is widely seen as a step toward reducing landfill. This underscores the need for continued and timely expansion to support broader uptake.

### Access drives participation

Three in ten Australians (30%) say a separate FOGO bin is provided to their household, with this number expected to rise over the coming years with continued mandate rollouts. Among those surveyed who have FOGO services, three-quarters (74%) use it.

For the one-quarter of FOGO bin holders (26%) who never use their bin, there is an opportunity for education. Amongst this group, 22% say they simply don't know how to use it, and a small minority cite not wanting to (7%), finding it too hard (7%) or unpleasant (5%).

These findings reinforce Australians are broadly willing

to do the right thing with organic waste when given the opportunity. With participation closely tied to access, and access remaining uneven, the expansion of FOGO services is one of the most direct levers available to drive participation rates up.

However, expansion alone is not enough. Even where mandates are in place, such as New South Wales, where all councils are required to provide household FOGO services by 2030, gaps in downstream processing infrastructure can limit service viability.

This underscores the need for FOGO expansion to be matched by investment in the full end-to-end system: collections, processing capacity, and accessible end markets for the compost produced - especially in regional areas where providing commercial services can be cost prohibitive.



**86%** believe the rollout of FOGO services will help reduce waste to landfill

**79%** of FOGO bin users believe their waste is composted after collection

### Small practical changes would unlock greater participation

When asked what would make FOGO recycling easier, two in five Australians (40%) said being provided with compostable bin liners would help the most, a figure that rises to 52% among those who already use their FOGO bin. Over one-third (37%) said more frequent collections, while one-third (33%) said a larger bin, and three in ten (31%) said reminders would make a difference. These are practical, low-cost interventions that councils and service providers can act on directly, helping to boost participation amongst those with access.

### Australians believe FOGO makes a real difference

Among FOGO bin holders who use their bin, 79% believe their waste is composted after collection, suggesting that trust and knowledge in the system is strong once Australians are actively engaged with it.

Despite not all Australians having access to FOGO, the purpose of the service is well received nationally, with 86% of Australians believing the national rollout of FOGO will help reduce waste to landfill and over four in five (82%) believing FOGO recycling will help reduce greenhouse gases. For those with access, the motivations are already there. Seven in ten FOGO bin users (71%) say it reduces waste going to landfill, 59% say it is simply the right thing to do, and 45% say it helps reduce greenhouse gases. Across all Australians, three in five (60%) correctly identify that FOGO waste is composted, while one in five (21%) still believe it goes to landfill. This points to a clear opportunity for further education on what FOGO actually delivers.



### Confidence is high, but knowledge gaps remain

Most Australians who use their FOGO bin are confident about what they're doing, but confidence isn't the whole story. Some everyday food items continue to cause hesitation, and the certified compostable logo designed to guide correct disposal, isn't reaching enough Australians to do its job. Both gaps point to a clear opportunity for education to reduce contamination.

### Specific items are causing uncertainty

Confidence on what items go in the FOGO bin is high among current users with over nine in ten (92%) stating they feel confident about what goes in their bin. Among the small group who are less confident, the research indicates that items such as dairy (59%), meat scraps (52%), caddy liners (50%), cooked leftovers (49%) and compostable packaging (49%) are causing the most uncertainty.

Education delivered at the point of service introduction, alongside ongoing awareness campaigns post-rollout, will help improve Australians' understanding of what's accepted through their local FOGO service. With FOGO rules and collection varying state by state and across local government areas, these initiatives would increase engagement and boost resource recovery, landfill diversion and compost outputs.

### Opportunity to clarify compostable logo

Like traditional recycling, the FOGO system has a dedicated symbol that identifies whether packaging is certified industrially compostable to Australian standards. While this symbol is important, particularly for items such as caddy liners, state-by-state variation in FOGO rules means that the presence of the logo does not always guarantee an item can go into a household FOGO bin.

Despite its intended role in guiding correct disposal, recognition of the certified compostable logo remains low. One-third of Australians (33%) have never seen the logo, while one in five (21%) do not know what it means. By contrast, Australians who understand the meaning of the certified compostable logo are far more likely to feel extremely confident about what can be placed in their FOGO bin (42%). This gap in recognition represents a clear and actionable education opportunity at both an industry and state and local government level.



## SUMMARY

This year's Recycling Behaviours Report shows a nation that is motivated, engaged and increasingly ready for the systems around it to catch up. Australians believe in recycling, and they want to do it well.

Self-reported recycling behaviour continues to improve and awareness of the circular economy is at an all-time high. Support for packaging reforms that reduce reliance on virgin materials and divert waste from landfill is near-universal, and the roll out of FOGO services nationwide is backed as a means to make a sustainable future possible. The challenge is no longer convincing Australians that recycling matters. It's about building the systems and infrastructure needed to translate the voice of Australians into real outcomes, with support of governing bodies.

Soft plastics remain the clearest gap in our current recycling system. Australians are confused but eager to do the right thing. The data is unambiguous about what would make a difference to Australians: a government-backed, accessible, kerbside-friendly national scheme. The 94% of Australians who say they would be likely to use such a scheme if it existed tomorrow are not waiting to be persuaded, they are waiting for the solution.

Awareness of correct battery and battery-operated device disposal is strong amongst 62+ and 45-64 year olds however younger Australians appear less likely to know batteries cannot go in kerbside bins and the risks involved. The barriers to correct disposal are the same barriers identified in previous years: unsure of where to take them and inconvenience. Progress will require sustained investment in both education and accessible infrastructure.

FOGO is a success story in progress. Participation is strong among those who have access, and the purpose of the service is understood – being to reduce landfill by recycling FOGO into compost which can be used to support better soil health and plant growth across farms, parks and gardens. Motivations are clear and the infrastructure to support this sustainable waste management solution is expanding. Going forward, the challenge will remain in ensuring timely FOGO rollouts across the nation to keep pace with ambition, and turning willing participants into confident, regular users.

Australians have good intentions and growing confidence when it comes to recycling. Meeting them where they are with clearer information, better infrastructure and consistent national standards - is how that intent becomes impact.



## SOLUTIONS

### Cleanaway's role in building the circular economy

Partnerships and investment in soft plastics



Cleanaway and Viva Energy are working together on a large-scale, end-to-end soft plastics recycling facility - Cycleback Plastics. Cleanaway would manage national collection and sorting through its existing waste infrastructure after which the soft plastics would be converted into pyrolysis oil at the Cycleback Plastics joint venture facility. Viva Energy's Geelong refinery would convert the pyrolysis oil into food-grade polypropylene for use in new packaging, resulting in a true circular solution: soft plastics become new packaging which reduces reliance on virgin plastic and closes the loop.

Following the completion of a pre-feasibility study in April 2025, the project has now moved into its engineering phase. Together, with federal government reform of packaging regulations, this partnership represents a direct response to what Australians have told us they want: a credible, accessible, government-backed pathway to a genuine, long-standing soft plastics recycling solution.



### Plastic packaging and the Container Deposit Scheme

Cleanaway is Australia's largest collector of PET, HDPE and PP plastics, supporting Container Deposit Schemes across NSW, WA, Queensland and Victoria. The plastics collected feed directly into Circular Plastics Australia - Cleanaway's joint venture partnerships that turn billions of used bottles and containers into recycled plastic each year, ready to be used in new Australian packaging.

With Australians overwhelmingly behind recycled content in packaging, Cleanaway will continue investing in the infrastructure that closes the loop, turning Australian plastic waste into Australian plastic packaging.



### Batteries and e-waste

Cleanaway continues to work alongside B-cycle, Australia's national battery stewardship program, to promote consistent messaging and expand access to safe battery drop-off locations. With awareness showing signs of decline among younger Australians, Cleanaway remains committed to education campaigns and collective industry action that make the consequences of incorrect battery disposal well-known and the path to correct disposal simple.

### FOGO infrastructure and education

As Australia's leading total waste management provider, Cleanaway continues to support the expansion of food organics and garden organics (FOGO) services across Australia. Cleanaway's support spans both residential and commercial sectors, providing collection and processing infrastructure at scale. Ongoing investment in advanced FOGO processing technology and tailored state-by-state education addressing what goes in the bin and improving awareness of the certified compostable logo, supports Australians to make the most of the sustainable waste management services available to them.

### Waste and recycling education

Cleanaway is continuing to grow trust amongst Australians by driving transparency around what happens to recycling once it leaves the kerbside. Nationally, Cleanaway's team of waste and sustainability education specialists work with local Councils and commercial customers to support residents, businesses and school students in understanding waste, recycling, and what goes in which bin. Cleanaway offers a range of resources and digital tools to support schools and communities, including curriculum-aligned education programs and the Greenius e-learning platform, which provides engaging online waste education on what can and can't go in your bins. By building awareness and knowledge from an early age, these programs aim to drive long-term behaviour change and reduce contamination in household recycling. Cleanaway also conducts site tours across many of its facilities throughout the year, showcasing how waste in Australia is processed for recycling.

[Visit cleanaway.com.au](https://www.cleanaway.com.au) for more information.

## METHODOLOGY

This report was prepared with the assistance of Lonergan Research, who conducted a 43-question online survey among members of a permission-based panel. Fieldwork commenced on Monday 30 March 2026 and was completed on Thursday 9th April 2026.

Category	Breakdown	Sample	Weighted %
<b>Sample</b>	Total	1,000	100%
<b>Gender</b>	Man / male	469	48%
	Woman / female	518	51%
<b>Generation</b>	Gen Z (18–29)	181	18%
	Millennials (30–44)	299	30%
	Gen X (45–64)	297	30%
	Baby Boomers (65+)	223	22%
<b>Location</b>	Capital city	644	64%
	Regional area	356	36%

Data was weighted to the latest population estimates sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The study was conducted by Lonergan Research in accordance with the ISO 20252 standard.

The research was commissioned by Alt/Shift and Cleanaway. Surveys were distributed throughout Australia including both capital city and non-capital city areas.



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Cleanaway Waste Management Limited | ABN: 74 101 155 220