

Position Statement on bioplastics in takeaway foodware

June 2020

Boomerang Alliance accepts Australian Standard certified compostable bioplastics as an alternative to fossil-fuel based plastic takeaway foodware where better options are not available.

Bioplastics differ from conventional fossil-fuel based plastics in that they are made from renewable plant or other biological material. Not all bioplastics are able to biodegrade however - they are classed as either biodegradable (e.g. PLA, PHA) or non-biodegradable (e.g. bio-PET, bio-PE).

Boomerang Alliance does not support the use of non-biodegradable bioplastics for takeaway foodware. While they are made from renewable resources, their chemical structure means they are not able to be composted - thus our opposition for their use in foodware is the same as for conventional plastics.

PLA's are the most common type of bioplastic used for food packaging – they are made by extracting sugars from crops such as corn or sugarcane and converting it into polylactic acid. Australian Standard certified compostable bioplastics provide a disposal option of composting in a commercial composting facility.

However, their use as a replacement product is not without issue. There are a lack of commercial compost collection and processing facilities in Australia, and when discarded inappropriately, the compostability of bioplastics are limited due to the specific conditions that they require in order to compost effectively.

Unfortunately, like conventional plastic, the vast majority of bioplastic packaging currently ends up in landfill, where it breaks down very slowly. When littered, bioplastics largely act just like any piece of plastic and can be hazardous to marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Whilst compostable bioplastics are technically recyclable, the majority of municipal waste services do not have appropriate facilities to recycle them. They are problematic in the recycling stream and can cause issues with contamination of other materials.

It is our position to first recommend reusables and encourage BYO practices over the use of any single-use product. We allow for 100% Australian Standard certified compostable bioplastics for foodware only when there is no non-plastic alternative item available or suitable. We recognise that all 100% compostable products, whether bioplastics or not, still need to be collected and processed. For more information, see our *Position Statement on alternatives to single-use plastic products*.

Our decision to allow 100% Australian Standard certified compostable bioplastics for foodware is based on the following reasons:

1. Where a single-use item is used, in some cases a bioplastic option is the only alternative option available. This is currently true in the case of compostable coffee cups and some container lids.
2. It is presently not feasible to expect cafes to avoid takeaway options, and if we don't allow these, they will continue to use conventional plastic options.
3. We need consistent messaging to the public around the use of compostable foodware. Not allowing for bioplastics means we would inevitably accept the use conventional plastics for takeaway foodware. We need one option (compostable) and to build collection infrastructure around this. See our *Position Statement on the use of compostable food ware in away-from home-situations* for more information.
4. While compost collection and processing is currently limited in Australia, it is expected to increase. Most Australian governments are now setting new and bigger targets to reduce waste going to landfill. Collecting organics (garden, food and foodware) through municipal and commercial kerbside collection and public places will inevitably become commonplace if waste-to-landfill targets are to be achieved.
5. Innovations from both the supplier and composter sides are likely to provide a solution to this issue and then we will be able to adjust for changed products/practices.