



# Let's swim out of the packaging bubble

Why packaging matters for your business

## Acknowledgement of Country

Circular economy inspires regeneration of land and rethinking the current waste and resource intensive systems we are a part of. It asks us to rethink how we can apply better practices in our businesses that prioritise community, land, and welfare of people and planet. This toolkit acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation who practice this care and have for tens of thousands of years, providing a lesson for us all to value the materials and food products in our business and supply chain, now and into the future.

## How to use the toolkits

These toolkits are designed for managers, owners and chefs who want practical, workable sustainability improvements. Each toolkit focuses on simple actions you can introduce into day-to-day operations without disrupting service. The examples show how circular economy principles can be applied in real kitchens and venues, improving efficiency, reducing waste and uncovering measurable cost savings.

Each guide covers one core area of your business: waste management, food and organics, packaging, and procurement. Use them individually or as a series. Start with the area that creates the most waste or cost pressure in your venue.

You'll find clear steps to reduce environmental impact, strengthen operational discipline, cut unnecessary spend and build a story your staff and customers can stand behind.

## Definitions

### **RECYCLABLE**

A material or product that is accepted in your recycling stream (whether commingled, cardboard, organics, or another stream).

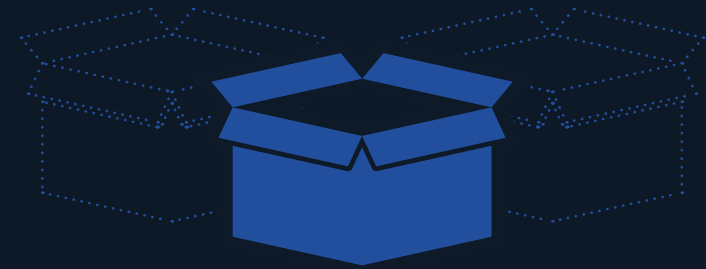
### **PFAS**

Polyfluoroalkyl substances - known as forever chemicals – do not break down well in the environment or human bodies.

### **PACKAGING**

Materials used to wrap or protect goods.

## Real solutions to packaging waste




Every hospitality venue relies on packaging to protect products and keep deliveries intact.

While plastic packaging can seem like the cheaper option upfront, the back-end costs tell a different story. More plastic means more waste, higher collection costs and more time spent sorting.

Plastics also create wider environmental risk. Microplastics, PFAS and the difficulty of recycling soft plastics are real challenges linked to single-use packaging.

The goal is not to ditch packaging altogether but to make smarter choices that protect your products, save money and cut waste. This could involve changing supplier packaging, trialling reuse models or reducing the amount of packaging passed on to customers.

# What smarter choices look like

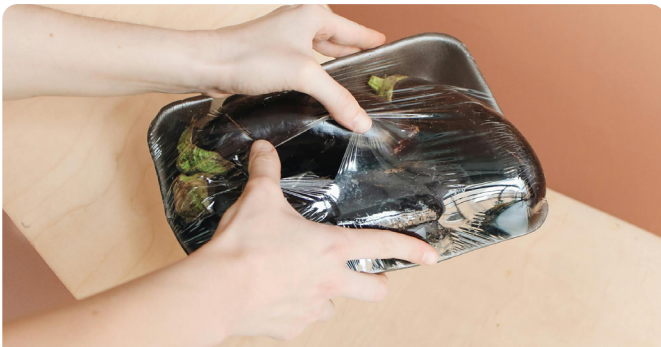


The value starts with understanding what packaging your business handles each day and where it ends up.

Before plastic became widespread, products were delivered in paper, glass and natural materials. When plastic entered the market it offered a cheaper and faster option, but those short-term savings came at a long-term cost to the environment.

Now the industry is changing again, as reuse and recyclable packaging models are explored. Take milk as an example. It can be delivered in crates that are collected and reused by the supplier. That means little to no waste and minimal added cost to the venue.

## Types of packaging and what happens next



### SINGLE-USE

Soft plastics, polystyrene and compostable packaging.

Usually sent to landfill, where disposal levies keep rising each year.



### RECYCLABLE

Cardboard, paper, and HDPE plastics.

Can be recycled into new products and reused by suppliers or venues, keeping them in circulation for longer.



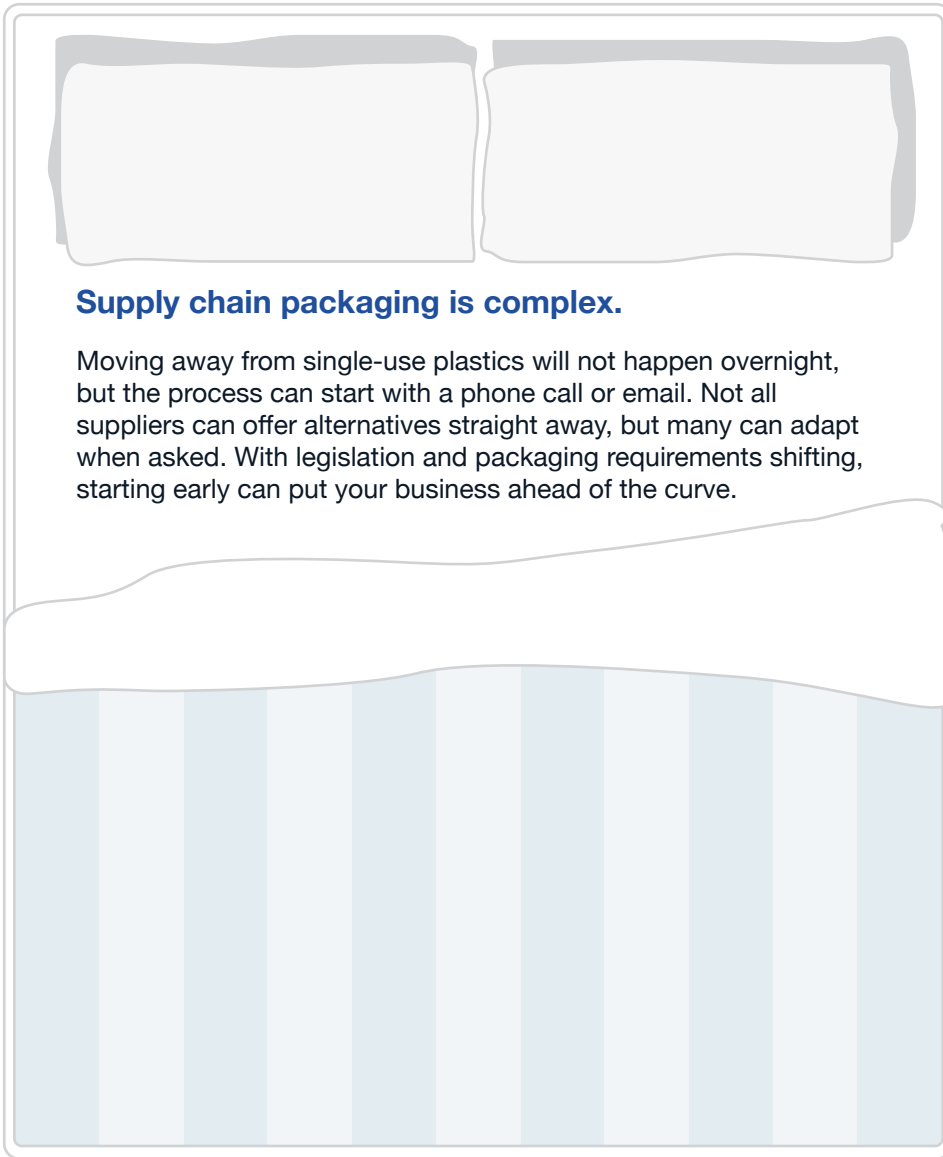
### REUSABLE

Glass, crates, refillable pouches, or containers or cups for customers.

These stay in circulation and avoid waste altogether, saving time and money in the long run for a business by reducing collection of general waste bins.

Recyclable and reusable packaging are good for business and the environment. Trialling one model can help to reduce the volume of waste in your venue.

# Changing packaging is not like changing your bedsheets



## Supply chain packaging is complex.

Moving away from single-use plastics will not happen overnight, but the process can start with a phone call or email. Not all suppliers can offer alternatives straight away, but many can adapt when asked. With legislation and packaging requirements shifting, starting early can put your business ahead of the curve.

## What this looks like in practice



Products are delivered in plastic wrap made from recycled plastics or natural materials.



Vegetable boxes are delivered in recyclable cardboard (not waxed).



Coffee beans, or other relevant products are delivered in reusable containers which are stored momentarily, then collected and reused by the supplier.



Customers are offered products in food containers or cups that are provided back to the venue, washed, and reused.

## Why this is good for business

- Staff spend less time unwrapping soft plastics
- Less waste entering landfill, typically the more expensive waste stream
- More recyclable materials recovered
- Lower long-term spend on customer packaging

# Setting your team up for success

## 1. Cut down on single-use packaging

### GOOD

List the products you buy, who supplies them and the packaging they arrive in.

### BETTER

Choose one product delivered in single-use packaging and ask the supplier whether the amount of packaging can be reduced.

### BEST

If the supplier is open to change, ask whether they can switch to cardboard, paper-based packaging or packaging with recycled content. Do this product by product rather than trying to change everything at once.

## 2. Try reusable packaging

### GOOD

Using the list, you created, identify which products could be delivered in crates, tubs or glass containers, such as milk, coffee beans, bread, pastries or produce.

### BETTER

Review your venue layout and set aside space to store reusable packaging until it is collected on the next delivery.

### BEST

Trial a reusable model with one supplier, then expand it where practical.

## What success looks like

### GOOD

Single-use packaging is minimised or replaced with a recyclable option.

### BETTER

Cardboard recycling increases in your venues. Plastic waste in your landfill bin decreases.

### BEST

For suppliers that offer reusable delivery packaging methods (e.g. crates), packaging is stored and collected efficiently. Customers are offered a reusable takeaway option that can be easily returned.

Remember that not all suppliers will be available to provide a resolution straight away, but the potential benefits in cost savings, staff efficiency and waste reduction make it worth pursuing.

In the wise words of Bilbo Baggins (The Hobbit), adventure awaits.

## Case Study

# Cercle Reusable Cups

## Location

One Farrer, Sydney CBD

## Overview

Cercle Cups is a reusable cup system that allows cafés to provide takeaway cups that can be dropped off later in the day. The cups are then collected, washed and returned for reuse, reducing waste and the ongoing cost of disposable cups.

## Who did Cercle work with?

Cercle worked with four cafés and 10 tenants at One Farrer, using drop pod stations, signage and on-site washing machines to support the system. With clear communication from staff and managers, each café reduced its use of takeaway cups.

## What did Cercle change?

Clear communication between café and customers on how the system worked.

Offering reusable cups before disposable takeaway packaging.

Visible drop-off points so customers knew where to return cups.

Access to washing facilities for Cercle or the Café to use (internally) so cups could be reused the next day.

## The Result

To date, Cercle Cups have been used 263,825 times, with data shared with cafés and strata to help maintain momentum.

## Acknowledgement of organisations supporting the Circular Economy and Sustainability Toolkits developed by Edge Impact, supported by the City of Sydney.

Edge Impact acknowledges the organisations who contributed their expertise and practical insight to the development of these toolkits. Through consultation and detailed feedback, they identified key barriers and enablers to circularity in hospitality and shared best-practice examples from their own operations.

Their input has strengthened the relevance and impact of this work.



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