



AORA/ABA - Joint Position Paper

Certified Compostable Packaging

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The Australian Organics Recycling Association (AORA) is the Australian organics recycling industry's national peak industry body. AORA works on behalf of its members to raise awareness of the benefits of recycling organic resources. It aims to function as an advocate for the broader organics resource recovery and beneficial reuse industries, and to represent their views in a constructive dialogue with policymakers. The Association envisages an industry in which best practice is shared, standards are maintained and surpassed, and a positive contribution to safeguarding the environment is made.

In order to divert food waste away from landfill and assist in the transition to a circular economy, AORA encourages the evolution and increased availability of certified compostable packaging. Notwithstanding different organic processing methodologies (i.e., windrow vis-à-vis in-vessel), certified compostable packaging will compost under appropriate organic processing management and controls and with longer maturation times, evident in windrow composting, certified compostable packaging becomes indiscernible from other organic feedstocks.

AORA also endorses the use of certified compostable caddy liners as part of the transition to FOGO (Food Organics Garden Organics) by local governments (i.e., councils) and their respective household residents. Certified compostable caddy liners provide a demonstrable incentive to residents to manage household food waste away from traditional waste streams and into their organics recycling bins and have been proven to be an effective and safe method for residual food waste disposal.

Certified compostable plastics suitable for microbial treatment in commercial composting or anaerobic digestion (AD), are those materials that conform to the Australian Standard AS 4736:2006, or for home composting are those that conform to AS 5810-2010.

In the case of commercial scale organics recycling, verification of certification and therefore conformance to AS 4736 is critical for organics recyclers to know that these materials will biodegrade in their facilities without interfering with normal processes and ensure they will not leave any physical or chemical residues in the finished organic output after processing.

AORA endorses the use of AS 4736 certified materials for the source separation of food waste in the home or commercial premises and also as a suitable alternative to otherwise non-recyclable packaging. Compostable coffee cups, capsules and compostable bags can all be successfully processed through normal organic recycling processes without concern of contamination.

Conventional plastics such as polyethylene are not certified compostable and are not biodegradable in any context. These materials are not suitable for organics recycling as they will not biodegrade and will remain in the organic output after processing leaving unacceptable physical residue

Other varieties of polyethylene containing additives, such as those called oxo-degradable or oxo-biodegradable are not certified compostable and are not biodegradable. These and their conventional plastic alternatives should not be used for food waste source separation or disposal of or with food waste or organics in a kerbside FOGO collection or home composting.

AORA strongly encourages increased controls and restricted availability/use on conventional plastics

which do not compost, especially those related to food. Unless there is a concerted effort by governments and related food industries to limit the use of these problematic plastics, the transition to certified compostable packaging will remain difficult to achieve, exacerbated by green-washing of non-certified compostable packaging and resulting in a continuation of contamination of organic feedstock streams with conventional plastics which do not compost, potentially rendering diversion away from landfill unlikely.

The Australasian Bioplastics Association (ABA) offers a verification program for individuals or companies that wish to have their claims of conformance to the Australian Standard verified. Further details on this verification process can be found at www.bioplastics.org.au

Whilst there are other Standards that cover commercial and home compostability throughout the world, these Standards are not equivalent to the Australian Standard. The Australian Standard contains an important ecotoxicity test for earthworm survival, which has been included to assure users of the recycled organics of zero residuals of the compostable plastics in the organic output.

Regardless of claims about benefits of biodegradable plastics, products that do not comply with AS 4736 should not be included in the inputs for organics recycling. Doing so may cause unacceptable physical contamination (small pieces of plastic including chips or film) and render the finished organics product worthless.

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