

WHY BUY RECYCLED?

Australians have embraced recycling and are motivated by the view that recycling can reduce waste and conserve resources. For many people, recycling also represents an easy and meaningful way to take environmental responsibility.

Australian recycling compares well to the rest of the world in terms of coverage of collection programs, the sophistication of collection and reprocessing technology, community participation rates, and the overall recovery rates of materials.

However the collection of recyclables needs to be complemented by the development of viable end use markets which “close the recycling loop” to ensure that recycling meets its foreseen environmental, social and economic benefits. Progress on viable end use markets will also impact on and improve price fluctuation for collected recyclables.

Consumers and ratepayers have not completely recycled when they sort their recyclables and place them out for collection. Recycling is complete only after that material has been reprocessed into new and useful products or materials and then sold again.

Fundamentally, recycling is about the three steps:

Step 1 – Sorting and collecting recyclables

Step 2 – Reprocessing collected recyclables into new products and materials, and

Step 3 – The sale and purchase of those new products and materials

It is this third step, “closing the recycling loop” through “buying recycled”, which represents the greatest challenge for the future. The economics of the Australian recycling system will not work unless “buying recycled” is driving demand for recycled content products (RCPs) and materials.

Australian businesses and governments have recognised the challenge and importance of “buying recycled” and this has stimulated significant efforts to promote and gain traction for the “buy recycled” concept.

The BRBA through its activities and in-house efforts represents the commitment of the business community. BRBA members can and do direct their purchasing power (\$30 billion) to ensure preference is given to RCPs and materials. Businesses can make a substantial contribution to the development of sustainable end uses for recycled material through the development of realistic purchasing policies and practices.

Governments have allocated funding to the development of secondary markets for recyclables, are developing “buy recycled” supportive public policy frameworks, and generally promote the “buy recycled” concept. Critically, Government is reforming its own purchasing practices to ensure that its massive purchasing power is harnessed in support of “buying recycled”.

Notable examples of Government initiatives in this area include the first Australian directory of recycled content products which has been developed by EcoRecycle Victoria ([include link here](#)); and the NSW Government’s introduction of mandatory Waste Reduction and Purchasing Policy (WRAPP’s) for all agencies of Government.

The critical factor in the success of the “buy recycled” concept will be the shifting attitudes and then behaviours of consumers and other purchasers. The combined task for BRBA, Governments and other interested parties is to demonstrate the benefits of “buying recycled”; to showcase the availability, quality and value of recycled content products; and to illustrate the ease with which “buying recycled” can be implemented.