



Submission

**Western Australian Government Review:
*Let's not draw the short straw -
reduce single-use plastics***

12 July 2019

About

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia's key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The members include:

- Costa Group,
- Perfection Fresh,
- Montague,
- One Harvest,
- Pinata Farms,
- Fresh Select,
- Mitolo Group,
- Mackay's Banana Marketing,
- Driscoll's,
- 2PH Farms,
- LaManna Premier,
- Rugby Farming,
- Freshmax, and
- Fresh Produce Group.

These businesses represent:

- half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce (fruit and vegetables) sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total,
- a quarter of the volume of fresh produce grown in Australia - 1 million of the 3.9 million tonne total,
- more than a third of fresh produce exports - \$410 million of the \$1.2 billion export total,
- more than 1,000 growers through commercial arrangements, and
- more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and
- up to 25,000 employees in the grower network.

The key issues the AFPA is focusing on include:

- packaging and the role it plays in product shelf life and reducing food waste landfill,
- labour and the need for both a permanent and temporary supply of workers,
- market access to key export markets for Australian produce,
- product integrity both within and outside of the supply chain,
- pollination and research into alternative sources, and
- water security, including clear direction as to the allocation and trading of water rights.

The AFPA's aim therefore is to become the first-choice fresh produce group that retailers and government go to for discussion and outcomes on issues involving the growing and supply of fresh produce.

Products grown by AFPA Member companies include:

Apples	Broccoli	Fioretto	Oranges	Strawberries
Apricots	Broccolini	Green Beans	Peaches	Sweet Corn
Asparagus	Brussel	Herbs	Pears	Table grapes
Avocado	Sprouts	Lemons	Pineapples	Tomatoes
Baby Broccoli	Butternut	Lettuce	Plums	Water Cress
Baby Corn	Pumpkin	Mandarins	Potatoes	Wombok
Bananas	Cabbage	Mango	Cucumber	
Beetroot	Cauliflower	Mushrooms	Raspberries	
Blackberries	Celery	Nectarines	Salad leaf	
Blueberries	Cherries	Onions	Spinach	



Summary

Australian consumers are concerned about the impact of plastics, from all sources, on the environment and the relative impact of their different purchasing decisions. For fresh produce, packaging plays an important role in the integrity and protection of food as it travels through supply chains from farm to plate. Critically, product protection should be the primary goal of packaging as food waste generally accounts for a larger proportion of the life-cycle environmental impacts of the food-packaging system.

In order to meet the public policy objectives of supporting Australians and increasing our overall sustainability, governments can work with industry on:

- developing environmentally friendly packaging solutions,
- encouraging the reduction of non-essential packaging, and
- supporting the collection, processing, recycling and reuse of packaging materials.

The Alliance asks all parties to ensure that any action to 'improve' current practices fully considers the complexity of current arrangements and ensures that the proposed action is of overall environmental benefit over the long term.

Introduction

Australians have a strong track record in addressing litter through initiatives such as *'Keep Australia Beautiful'*. Australian consumers are concerned about the impact of plastics, from all sources, on the environment and the relative impact of their different purchasing decisions. Fresh produce packaging has been a focus in the public discourse however unlike many other products, fresh produce has a relatively short shelf life and product packaging helps to maintain shelf life and reduce food waste.

For fresh produce, packaging plays an important role in the integrity and protection of food as it travels through supply chains from farm to plate. Critically, product protection should be the primary goal of packaging as food waste generally accounts for a larger proportion of the life-cycle environmental impacts of the food-packaging system.

Industry Approach

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (the Alliance) recognises there is concern about the level and type of packaging that is used for fresh produce and has prioritised packaging as one of the six key issues to address for the future of the fresh produce industry. Individual member companies have been working through their packaging options for more than 3 years to increase recyclability and reduce non-essential packaging.

The Alliance will soon release research on the role of packaging for Australian fresh produce, which highlights that packaging plays an important role in addressing food waste in the supply chain and increasing product shelf life. The research was commissioned by the Alliance and was aimed at examining and understanding the role packaging fulfils in minimising food waste, and maximising quality control in order that Australian consumers can eat fresh quality produce on a regular basis.

The Alliance also recognises that it must work to reduce packaging where it reasonably can and to identify forms of packaging which provide greater opportunity for not only recycling, but also the manufacture of plastic packaging from recycled content.

This research is also important when considering that an estimated 7.3 million tonnes of food valued at \$20 billion is lost or wasted in Australia every year. This is at a time of growing rates of obesity in our



adult and child population due to poor dietary intake of fresh fruit and vegetables, leading to the development of preventative and chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes.

Health and Nutrition

Despite the known benefits, consumers do not take in sufficient quantities of fruit and vegetables. The latest National Health Survey found that just over half (51.3%) of Australian adults met the guidelines for the recommended minimum 2 daily serves of fruit (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Over recent decades the rates of chronic disease, including type 2 diabetes, have been increasing both in adults and children (Obesity Policy Coalition, 2018).

It is predicted that, by 2023, health expenditure for type 2 diabetes will have risen \$1.4 billion to \$7 billion per year, due mostly to increasing weight gain (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013). If current Australian trends continue, an estimated 83% of men and 75% of women aged over 20 years will be overweight or obese by 2025 (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013). Therefore, it is important to utilise strategies which ensure access to food that is nutritious, both for the individual and in addressing broader public health issues.

A primary objective of food production is to ensure a safe and acceptable product to be delivered to market. Packaging may serve to transport nutritious produce, such as fruit and vegetables, safely to consumers all over Australia with minimal waste. If people are to consume more fruit and vegetables and in turn reduce their risk of contracting chronic diseases, it is therefore important to provide consumers with a product which is of a high quality and maximises its shelf life.

A way forward

If we are aiming to '*reduce the environmental impacts of Consumer Packaging*'¹ and increase the overall sustainability of our economy, then we need to consider the overall impact of our decisions rather than individual issues in isolation.

For example, in fresh produce there are conversations about changing material types to address consumer concern but the replacement material may have a more significant environmental impact. The Alliance encourages all supply chain participants and governments to consider consumer behaviour in the development of new regulation, policy proposals and requirements for consumers.

The Alliance will be releasing new research and industry commitments in the coming weeks and we look forward to sharing that information with the Western Australian Government to inform consideration of regulation, policy and procedures. Through our work it has become clear that further work is required to understand consumer behaviour, particularly in the home, to better provide consumers with products and services that meet their needs in the most sustainable manner.

In order to meet the public policy objectives of supporting Australians and increasing our overall sustainability, governments can work with industry on:

- developing environmentally friendly packaging solutions,
- encouraging the reduction of non-essential packaging, and
- supporting the collection, processing, recycling and reuse of packaging materials.

The Alliance asks all parties to ensure that any action to 'improve' current practices fully considers the complexity of current arrangements and ensures that the proposed action is of overall environmental benefit over the long term.

¹ Australian Packaging Covenant 2017 <https://www.packagingcovenant.org.au/documents/item/1037>

