



Bettercup Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Opportunities in the Circular Economy

Submitted by: Bettercup

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1. Introduction to Bettercup

Bettercup is a leader in the fight against single-use plastic in Australia, providing reuse systems for events and venues that have successfully eliminated over 419,000 kgs of single-use waste. We have supplied over 2.1 million reusable cups to the industry and have an estimated 500 uses per reusable cup, proving that reuse models can significantly reduce waste and environmental impact.

Founded by Christie and Sam, Bettercup was born from firsthand experience in the events and sustainability sectors. Sam was inspired by seeing overflowing waste bins at festivals and recognising the success of reuse models overseas, while Christie leveraged her background in marketing, project management, and sustainability leadership to build a scalable business model in Australia. Together, they developed an Australian-made, circular solution to replace disposable plastics at scale.

We are not just advocates for the circular economy—we are practitioners with direct, hands-on experience implementing reuse models across the country. We have worked with councils, venues, and large-scale events, helping local governments transition away from single-use plastics while ensuring practical and scalable solutions for operators.

2. Circular Economy Success Stories & Measures of Success

Bettercup's Impact in Circularity

Bettercup has been at the forefront of embedding reusable systems in high-footfall environments. Our work has demonstrated:

- Economic benefits: Lower costs for event organisers in the long term, reducing reliance on purchasing single-use plastics.
- Environmental impact: Prevention of hundreds of tonnes of single-use plastic waste from entering landfill or the environment.
- Consumer behaviour change: High return rates and positive user adoption

Measuring Success:

- The number of single-use plastic items eliminated.
- The return rate of reusable cups.
- The operational efficiency of implementing reuse at scale.

3. Priority Opportunities for the Circular Economy

Australia's Potential for a Circular Economy in Events & Hospitality

The events and hospitality industry is a high-impact sector where single-use plastics dominate. We see three primary opportunities:

1. Government-supported infrastructure for reuse systems: Reuse needs centralised washing facilities to be viable at scale.
2. Financial incentives for businesses adopting reuse: Investment in local washing and logistics networks is needed to make reuse more accessible.
3. Standardised regulations favouring reusables over single-use recycled plastics: Government procurement should prioritise reuse over recycling.

4. Hurdles & Barriers to the Circular Economy

Despite our success, key barriers remain:

- **Cost & Risk:** Upfront investment in reuse infrastructure is needed to support businesses making the transition.
- **Regulatory Constraints:** Policies still favour single-use recycled plastics instead of promoting full reuse systems.
- **Lack of Information & Coordination:** Many event organisers and councils need clearer guidelines, funding pathways, and infrastructure support to integrate reuse solutions.
- **Disproportionate Investment in Recycling:** Government funding has largely prioritised recycling infrastructure rather than reuse, despite reuse delivering greater waste reduction, cost savings, and environmental benefits in the long term. While recycling is an essential component of the circular economy, it should not be the default approach at the expense of investing in scalable reuse solutions. A rebalancing of government incentives towards reuse is necessary to achieve meaningful systemic change.

Bettercup recommends government-supported reuse pilots and clearer policy frameworks to scale circular systems effectively.

5. Governments' Role in Supporting Reuse in the Circular Economy

We urge policymakers to:

- Provide financial incentives for reuse adoption (e.g., grants, tax benefits).
- Regulate against single-use plastics in favour of reuse (not just recycled single-use alternatives).
- Facilitate collaboration between businesses, councils, and washing infrastructure providers to make reuse scalable.
- Include reuse mandates in government procurement policies to set the standard for events and public venues.
- Implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes that incentivise businesses to transition to reusable models by placing responsibility for waste reduction on producers, rather than consumers or local governments.

- Engage with experts and practitioners actively implementing reuse models, rather than allowing large corporations with vested interests in single-use models to dominate the conversation and shape policy.

6. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Reuse Models

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is an essential policy mechanism that should be leveraged to drive the adoption of reusable systems. Current EPR schemes primarily focus on recycling rather than reuse, which does not effectively reduce plastic production and consumption. Bettercup recommends that EPR policies:

- Incentivise businesses to design for reuse rather than single-use recycling.
- Mandate take-back and reuse programmes in high-waste industries such as events, hospitality, and food service.
- Hold producers accountable for end-of-life product management, ensuring that companies actively participate in reuse schemes rather than shifting responsibility onto consumers or local councils.
- Include financial penalties for businesses continuing to rely on unnecessary single-use plastics and rewards for those implementing circular solutions.

Additionally, many reusable products in the Australian market are imported, with limited supply chain transparency. This raises concerns about:

- Ethical production practices: Without clear oversight, imported products may come from unethical labour conditions.
- Supply chain emissions: The carbon footprint of imported reusables can be higher than locally manufactured options.
- Product quality and safety: Many imported reusables do not meet consistent food-grade standards, increasing the need for local production.

Bettercup has invested in local Australian manufacturing to produce high-quality, food-grade reusable products. We urge policymakers to:

- Support local manufacturing incentives to reduce reliance on imports.
- Introduce stricter transparency requirements for imported reusable products, ensuring ethical and sustainable sourcing.

- Expand EPR schemes to include importers of reusable goods, ensuring they are accountable for their environmental and social impact.
- Prioritise collaboration with industry leaders actively delivering on-the-ground reuse solutions, ensuring policy is shaped by those with practical expertise rather than large corporations that may dilute true circularity efforts.

By integrating EPR into government waste reduction policies, Australia can move beyond recycling as the default and transition towards a true circular economy based on reduction, reuse, and resource efficiency.

7. Conclusion

Bettercup has demonstrated that reuse works. However, to scale impact, we need policy support, investment in infrastructure, and a regulatory shift that prioritises reuse over single-use plastics. We urge the Productivity Commission to consider reuse systems as a primary solution in the transition to a circular economy and to integrate reuse mandates into policy recommendations.

We welcome further discussions and can provide additional case studies, impact metrics, and operational insights.