

2024 Audit Report Summary



Overview

‘Unwrapped 2024 - Plastic Use in Australian Supermarkets’ reveals that Australia’s four major supermarkets continue to promote plastic-wrapped products, while avoiding environmental accountability.

Woolworths ranked first in the 2024 audit with an overall score of 38%, a marked improvement from its 2023 score of 10%. Metcash has also improved significantly, taking second spot with 23% after receiving 3% last year. Coles was third with 20% (15% in 2023), while Aldi plummeted from top spot in 2023 (with 20%) to last place in 2024 as it was unable to receive an overall score due to a lack of data and delayed reporting.

The most startling finding is that plastic-wrapped fruit and vegetables are cheaper than loose produce 73% of the time.[^] Shopper surveys

found that loose potatoes are over 50% more expensive than the same quantity wrapped in plastic. This provides a perverse incentive for supermarket customers to take home more needless single-use plastic packaging, and to buy in set amounts that may lead to unnecessary food waste.

‘Unwrapped 2024 - Plastic use in Australian Supermarkets’ is a snapshot of the supermarket industry. For the second year, the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) and the Boomerang Alliance have audited the four major supermarkets in Australia for their plastic usage. As plastic production increases, so too does plastic pollution¹ - and this year’s audit found that those responsible for producing and selling disposable plastic packaging are not enacting solutions at the required pace.

Detailed supermarket performance in 2024

Supermarket	Transparency	Plastic Reduction	Reuse	Recycling	Policy, Planning & Governance	Total Weighted Score
	Weighting: 10% of final score	Weighting: 40% of final score	Weighting: 20% of final score	Weighting: 20% of final score	Weighting: 10% of final score	
	53%	33%	36%	21%	76%	38%
	*	30%	23%	13%	39%	23%
	*	27%	22%	8%	32%	20%
	*	21%*	9%	13%	35%	*

Key: Not Good It's a start Good

* Insufficient data provided or publicly available to assess performance
 + Result subject to change with publication of 2023 sustainability report

Why Australia's Supermarkets?

Australia's \$131.7 billion supermarket industry is dominated by four main players, which are well placed to make substantial reductions to Australia's disposable plastic packaging footprint.

Single-use plastic packaging is particularly problematic as it represents a significant portion of litter in Australia, and harms our oceans and marine life. In 2023, plastics accounted for over 80% of litter collected by Clean Up Australia volunteers, much of which was plastic packaging.²

Key Findings

Plastic wrapped fruit and vegetables are cheaper than loose produce 73% of the time.

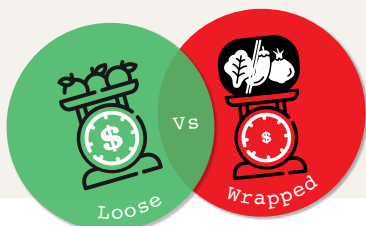
In July 2024, shoppers conducted surveys across Woolworths, Coles and Aldi and found that pre-packaged fresh produce was consistently cheaper than loose produce. Price differences ranged from a few cents up to \$1.48 per kilogram. This equates to around \$155 extra a year when buying just three loose items each shop for a family of four – almost as much as a weekly shop (\$168). Metcash was not able to be assessed as they do not run individual stores.

Transparency is lacking and reporting is still fragmented. This year saw marked improvements in supermarket-provided data, but none of the supermarkets disclose their overall use of single-use plastic packaging, nor do they reveal sufficient data to calculate reductions in their overall plastic footprint.

Reuse and refill are not increasing fast enough. There remains a lack of opportunity for customers to choose reusable packaging in Australian supermarkets. Globally, there are calls for an urgent transition to reuse – but that message has not translated to change in Australian supermarkets.

Supermarkets are still placing too much emphasis on recycling of packaging, not removal. All four supermarkets state they are working towards the National Packaging Target for all packaging to be recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025, yet not enough is being done to remove unnecessary and excessive packaging.

Customers do not have sufficient options to avoid plastic packaging. Surveys conducted by supermarket shoppers in July 2024 demonstrate a lack of choice for customers who are trying to avoid single-use plastic packaging. Supermarkets have ample opportunities to minimise or improve packaging, giving customers more choice.



Price difference of loose and pre-packaged fresh produce in supermarkets

	Av. Price/kg packaged	Av. Price/kg loose	Price difference pre-packaged vs loose	Price difference pre-packaged vs loose (%)
Potatoes	\$2.78	\$4.26	+\$1.48 / kg	+53%
Oranges	\$2.63	\$3.70	+\$1.07 / kg	+41%
Carrots	\$1.90	\$2.61	+\$0.72 / kg	+38%
Onions	\$2.96	\$3.76	+\$0.81 / kg	+27%
Apples	\$4.70	\$5.07	+\$0.37 / kg	+8%
Tomatoes	\$8.44	\$7.25	-\$1.18 / kg	-14% (cheaper loose)

Recommendations for Supermarkets

Recommendation 1:

Stop charging more for loose fresh produce



For two years in a row, supermarkets have been found to be charging more for loose fresh produce than the same item pre-packaged. Some food charities, including Woolworths' food rescue partner OzHarvest, recommend selling loose fresh produce so shoppers can buy what they need. However, for customers to have the genuine opportunity to avoid plastic, the products must be cost competitive.³

Recommendation 2:

Remove unnecessary plastic in fresh produce - prove packaging reduces food waste



Coles, Woolworths, and Aldi did not provide any research to justify their excessive use of plastic packaging in reducing food waste.

In the UK, food charity WRAP recommends uncut fresh produce be sold loose unless retailers can prove the packaging reduces food waste.⁴

Exploring other solutions – for example reusable tubs/buckets or reusable produce bags – could allow customers to purchase pre-set quantities, without single-use plastic packaging.

Recommendation 3:

Prioritise reuse for home delivery



Increasing reusable packaging requires systems change, but there are opportunities to start the transition, such as home delivery.

Customers could be provided with reusable crates for groceries to be packed into, removing the need for disposable bags. Reusable containers could be utilised for dry goods, deli items, and cleaning products.

Recommendation 4:

Phase out individually wrapped items packaged in plastic



There are still many examples in supermarkets of excessive packaging, such as individually wrapped items that are then wrapped in a plastic outer package.

Redesigning the inner individually wrapped packaging, the outer packaging, or both, will cut down on small, difficult-to-recycle plastic packaging that has a high potential for becoming litter. Examples include dishwashing tablets, teabags, cheese slices and multi-pack noodles. Bans on plastic packaging to group individually wrapped-items will soon come into effect in the European Union.



Supermarket Results

 	Highlight	Leading the way on removing problematic plastics Woolworths set and achieved targets to eliminate certain problematic plastics (as identified by APCO) by 2024.
	Lowlight	Not enough plastic reduction in fresh produce In 77% of cases, Woolworths is charging more for unpackaged fresh produce, higher than the overall supermarket average of 73%.
 	Highlight	'Waste Guidelines for grocery stores' document provides prioritised advice Metcash has developed guidelines for independent grocery stores to share best practice sustainability advice on waste management.
	Lowlight	Slow progress on phasing out unnecessary and problematic single-use plastic items Beyond items which have been regulated in some states and territories, Metcash has not demonstrated adequate progression towards phasing out priority problematic plastic items (as identified by APCO) by 2025.
 	Highlight	Reuse at South Australian deli counters Coles continues to allow South Australian shoppers to bring their own containers when shopping at the deli counter.
	Lowlight	Little evidence of plastic reduction overall Coles states it has eliminated some problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic items, yet little progress has been made on items beyond state and territory bans.
 	Highlight	ARL is displayed on the majority own-brand products Aldi now has the Australasian Recycling Label (ARL) on 85.8% of own-brand products, an increase from 78% in 2023.
	Lowlight	Significant delays in reporting period As at 14 November, Aldi has still not published its 2023 sustainability results. With limited data publicly available, Aldi has not been able to receive any further scores for this audit.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society and the Boomerang Alliance acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land and sea Country, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge that this land and sea Country was, and always will be, Aboriginal land and sea.

Scan to read the full Unwrapped 2024 Audit Report



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[^] Shopper surveys conducted across Woolworths, Coles and Aldi
 1 Cowger, W. et al (2024). Global producer responsibility for plastic pollution.
 2 Clean Up Australia. (2024). Litter Report FY23
 3 OzHarvest (2018). Media Release - OzHarvest urges consumers to fight food waste with new campaign
 4 WRAP (2022). Reducing household food waste and plastic packaging.