



2025 Audit Report





About the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)

The Australian Marine Conservation Society is Australia's leading ocean conservation organisation. AMCS is an independent charity staffed by a committed group of scientists, educators and passionate advocates who have defended Australia's oceans since 1965. Our paid and volunteer staff work every day to advance evidence-based solutions for threats to our marine wildlife.

AMCS projects such as the GoodFish Guide have become powerful drivers for change, equipping customers with independent information on seafood sustainability so that they can make informed decisions about what they buy. Our work extends across all the major threats to marine wildlife, including reducing ocean plastic pollution, protecting critical ocean ecosystems such as Ningaloo and the Great Barrier Reef, preventing destructive practices such as whaling and supertrawlers from harming our endangered species, and stopping new offshore oil and gas.

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About the Boomerang Alliance

The Boomerang Alliance was formed in 2003 with the aim of a zero waste society. We are a community-based 'peak organisation' representing 55 environment and community organisation members. Our primary focus is on government and stakeholder engagement to establish effective policies and practices that reduce waste and litter. Our extensive supporter base provides a community voice.

Our focus on plastic litter and waste has led to successful plastic bag bans, container deposit schemes and more recently the implementation of single-use plastic bans. As the organisation behind the influential Plastic Free Places program, we are well equipped to support supermarkets to reduce plastic thanks to our extensive experience working with cafes and food outlets to reduce problem takeaway plastics.

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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.

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Unwrap the details and explore more at unwrapped.org.au



Unwrapped 2025

Plastic pollution is one of the most urgent environmental crises of our time. It harms marine wildlife, ecosystems, and is increasingly being linked to human health issues.

Since 2023, the Australian Marine Conservation Society and the Boomerang Alliance have been investigating plastic use in Australia's major supermarkets, and pushing these billion dollar businesses to reduce their overreliance on disposable plastic packaging.

Our marine environments are facing unprecedented threats; coral bleaching, algal blooms, and marine heatwaves likened to underwater bushfires are all wreaking havoc. Plastic pollution and associated chemicals exacerbate these threats, reducing the resilience of precious ecosystems. The recent findings of Australia's first National Climate Risk Assessment made clear the escalating danger climate change poses to us, our ocean and coastlines.¹

Now in its third year, *Unwrapped 2025* exposes limited industry progress and a reluctance for Australia's biggest supermarkets to embrace real change to reduce plastic waste and associated climate impacts.



Snapshot of Australia's plastic crisis



Australia disposed of **1.23 million tonnes** of plastic packaging in 2023-24.²



Around **250 kg** of Australia's plastic **enters the environment every minute.**³



Australia has **not reached peak consumption** – the amount of disposable plastic packaging we use increases each year, and is projected to continue increasing.⁴



Emissions from Australia's plastic production, use and waste management, are **equivalent to 5.7 million cars on the road** every year.⁵



Packaging made up **57.8% of all reported litter** in Australia in 2024 – an increase from 55.2% in 2023.⁶



Almost every species group in the ocean has encountered plastic pollution; scientists observed negative effects in almost 90% of assessed species.⁷





Supermarket standings

None of the supermarkets were able to demonstrate adequate progress to receive a passing grade overall in 2025, with little demonstrable improvement to reduce plastic packaging.

The supermarkets ranked in the same order in 2025 compared to 2024; further evidence of supermarkets making only minor adjustments. Coles did not respond to requests for information, and its sustainability report again lacked sufficient detail. As in 2024, ALDI's practice of publishing its sustainability report over 11-months after the reporting period has resulted in poor scores across the board.

Table 1. Detailed supermarket performance in 2025.

	Transparency Weighting:	Plastic Reduction Weighting:	Reuse Weighting:	Recycling Weighting:	Policy, Planning & Governance Weighting:	Total Weighted
Supermarket	10% of final score	40% of final score	20% of final score	20% of final score	10% of final score	Score
woolworths	52%	38%	22%	29%	77%	38%
Melcash	4%	30%	23%	19%	57%	26%
coles	•	22%	22%	20%	21%	19%
ALDI	•	20%	9%	13%	14%	14%

Keu:







- * Insufficient data.
- ^ No response to survey, data derived from public reporting only.

Scores calculated using five weighted categories assessed through surveys, public disclosures, and sustainability reports. Full methodology available online.



Brand performance

Woolworths score remained stable. The supermarkets' progress has been slow in key areas, including the removal of unnecessary packaging and transitioning to reusable and refillable packaging for customers. Woolworths lost points for limited reporting and no reuse targets. Woolworths improved its score in plastic reduction (set deadlines to replace some plastic packaging, and removing some problematic plastics[^]), and recycling and recycled content (expanding its soft plastic collection scheme). Woolworths reduced virgin plastic use by 3,200 tonnes, but without reporting on overall plastic use, it's impossible to assess whether this represents an overall reduction.

^Refers to problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging as defined by APCO's nine priority materials. For more visit <u>unwrapped.org.au</u>

Coles' 2024–25 sustainability report identified AMCS as an organisation it had engaged with,8 yet interaction during 2025 was limited. Coles did not complete the audit survey, and results presented here rely on public data.

Coles gained points for offering soft plastic collection and recycling services in select stores, but lost points for lack of evidence of staff training, supplier support, and policies to reduce plastic packaging.

Coles' 2026–30 sustainability strategy focuses heavily on diversion of waste from landfill and recycling initiatives. Its "R3 Packaging Framework" lacks clear targets and tangible actions to reduce disposable packaging.

Metcash's structure differs from the other major supermarkets, acting as a wholesale and support for

independently-owned stores. As with the other supermarkets, Metcash controls packaging for own-brand products, yet is slow to make significant improvements to packaging on grocery items.

Metcash made significant reductions in its use of disposable pallet wrap, a major source of disposable plastic packaging. Metcash gained points for coffee pod recycling, improving transparency in sustainability reports, and increasing the proportion of products displaying the Australasian Recycling Label (ARL). Progress is gradual, but improving – in line with *Unwrapped's* recommendations.

For the second year, ALDI has placed last. ALDI Australia is not listed on the ASX and therefore has fewer public

reporting requirements. As of publication, and almost 12 months after its reporting period, ALDI Australia has not yet released its 2024 sustainability report. ALDI did not complete the audit survey, and results presented here rely on public data.

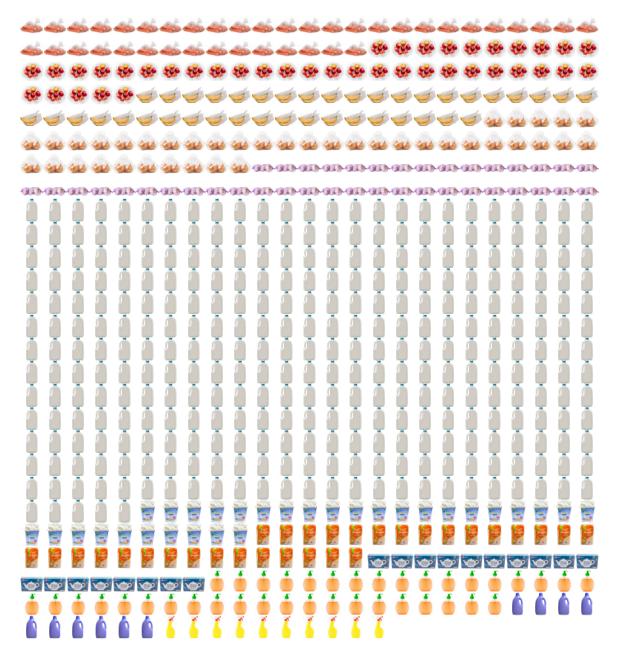
ALDI initially showed leadership, but since 2020, has discontinued its *Plastics and packaging* report, and no longer discloses its packaging footprint or progress towards reduction targets.

Same products, smarter packaging

Single-use plastic packaging dominates Australia's supermarket shelves, yet proven solutions already exist.

Common packaging in Australia

Example of annual disposable packaging use: A family of four buying common supermarket own-brand staples – including a selection of fresh produce, milk, cereal, rice, tea, handwash, detergent and cleaner – would use around 664 single-use packaging items each year.



Data note: Estimates are based on per-capita consumption and household purchasing habits to illustrate how reusable packaging could reduce waste. Fresh produce figures assume pre-packaged or bagged items, as these remain more common and often cheaper than loose alternatives.

An investigation into packaging for commonly-purchased grocery items found that it is difficult for customers to avoid disposable plastic packaging when buying own-brand products. International examples and industry best-practice show clear opportunities for supermarkets to improve.

Expanding reusable and refillable packaging can cut waste, prevent ocean pollution, and slash emissions. Research shows a 40-70% reuse target could divert up to 85% of plastic waste from landfill, and reduce associated emissions by 90%.¹⁰

Better-practice and international examples

Estimated total disposable packaging items: 10 (or none) per year when using reusable or refillable systems. Only concentrated surface cleaning tablets generate minimal packaging; all other items can be purchased packaging-free or refilled.



Key findings and recommendations

Online customers* can't opt-out of unnecessary plastic packaging

Online orders through Woolworths and Coles are packed inconsistently, despite both supermarkets claiming to have policies and staff training to minimise plastic packaging. Neither retailer allows customers to opt out of plastic produce bags for fruit and vegetables when ordering online, creating an unnecessary and avoidable barrier for customers trying to reduce packaging waste.

Twelve online orders were placed from each Coles and Woolworths across multiple stores and states. The results varied, particularly for fresh produce. Customers deliberately selected 'loose produce' options to avoid packaging, yet often still found their items placed in plastic produce bags, which were then placed within paper shopping bags. In over 50% of orders, at least one plastic produce bag was used for the fresh produce items – six carrots, onions, bananas and apples, and one bulb of garlic – rather than packing them loose into shopping bags.







Examples of online orders placed between July and October 2025





The main culprit for this packing practice was Coles. Most Coles orders used excessive plastic packaging. On more than one occasion, a single bulb of garlic arrived in its own produce bag, whilst other items were unnecessarily divided – with the same item split between several separate plastic produce bags. Only 2 of the 12 orders from Coles used no plastic produce bags at all. This level of over-packaging observed suggests a default reliance on plastic, even when no packaging was needed. Woolworths orders contained far less plastic overall, but customers purchasing loose fresh produce still have no way of opting out of plastic produce bags.

"It was absurd, I had 5 onions in one bag, and then another onion packed in its own bag. I thought by choosing loose produce I wouldn't end up with all this plastic rubbish"

Coles online shopper

With online grocery sales representing roughly 8% of the total market and expected to grow, these practices risk locking in unnecessary plastic waste, undermining customer efforts to avoid it.

Recommendation: give customers control over packaging choices for online orders

Supermarkets should introduce clear opt-in or opt-out options for plastic produce bags and other single-use packaging at online checkout. Customers should be able to choose reusable options, or select a 'package-free' preference by default, including options to avoid paper carry bags. Integrating these preferences with loyalty and digital systems would also allow supermarkets to track reductions and reward customers for low-waste choices. Supermarkets intending to move into the online order space should lock in sustainable practices from the beginning.

*Coles and Woolworths are the only supermarkets included in this audit that consistently offer online shopping.
ALDI Australia has indicated it intends to include this offering in the future, and some independently-owned IGA stores offer their own online offerings.

Some items are only available wrapped in single-use plastic

Shoppers undertaking in-store surveys reported that many grocery items can only be purchased in single-use plastic packaging. At ALDI, more than 20% of surveyed items had no loose alternative, compared with 12% at Woolworths and 4% at Coles. Mushrooms, carrots, onions and spinach all had reports of only being available in single-use plastic packaging.

Beyond produce, most Australian supermarkets still sell own-brand pantry staples and cleaning products exclusively in disposable packaging. Internationally, refill and reuse models for products such as rice, cereals, and surface cleaners are now mainstream.¹¹ Australian retailers have yet to adopt or scale these systems, despite customer demand for plastic-free options.

Recommendation: phase out unnecessary single-use packaging and expand reusable options

To drive meaningful change, Australia's supermarkets must establish clear, evidence-based targets to increase the proportion of fresh produce available without packaging, and own-brand products sold in reusable or refillable packaging starting with online orders and delivery.

Supermarkets are not transparent about plastic packaging

Despite repeated calls for supermarkets to set overall plastic reduction targets and publicly report their progress, as well as overall plastic packaging footprint, transparency has not improved. None of the major retailers have disclosed the total volume of plastic packaging placed on shelves since 2020, when ALDI last published its figures.

As ASX-listed companies, Woolworths, Coles, and Metcash are bound by strict financial reporting deadlines but are not legally required to disclose plastic packaging footprint – a major accountability gap. This absence of data prevents meaningful comparison, public scrutiny, and tracking of progress.

ALDI initially led the sector in 2020 by reporting on the volume of plastic packaging used in its own-brand products and outlining reductions required to meet its 25% plastic packaging reduction target by 2025.¹²

However, it has since discontinued this reporting, and no major supermarket has published comparable data. Internationally, supermarkets routinely publish such figures, improving transparency and driving measurable reductions.

Recommendation: set overall plastic reduction targets and publicly report annual plastic packaging footprints

Supermarkets should develop comprehensive sustainability strategies with clear plastic reduction targets, and report on progress in annual sustainability reports. In line with recommendation 12 from the Senate inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies, 3 supermarkets should be required to publicly disclose their total annual plastic packaging footprint. Reporting will allow customers, investors, and regulators to assess progress and hold retailers accountable for reduction commitments. Reporting should align with international best practice.

It's still costing customers more to avoid plastic packaging on fruit and veg

In 73% of supermarket surveys conducted by volunteer shoppers nationwide, loose fresh produce costs more than the equivalent item pre-packaged. This price difference continues to penalise customers trying to reduce plastic use.

Customer surveys reveal ongoing frustration at the limited range of loose, affordable produce – particularly smaller fruit suited to children's lunchboxes and "imperfect" lines such as Woolworths' *Odd Bunch* and Coles' *I'm Perfect*.

Supermarkets claim produce is sold prepackaged to increase shelf life, offer customers greater choice, and provide bulk-buy discounts.¹⁴ Yet councils, and food waste organisations still advocate for fresh produce to be sold loose to reduce food waste,¹⁵ by allowing customers to purchase only the

amount they need.¹⁶ Bulk discounts can be applied automatically at the checkout, as with multi-buy discounts, without the need for disposable plastic packaging. WRAP UK found plastic packaging had no significant impact on shelf life of fresh produce.¹⁷ Despite this, customers often go home with unwanted additional items that were not on their shopping list – hard to recycle, disposable, and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging.

Recommendation: stop charging more for loose produce, and expand packaged-free options

Supermarkets should expand the range of items available without packaging, and ensure price parity between loose and packaged fresh produce.

Supermarkets should prioritise removing unnecessary plastic packaging and increase access to smaller or "imperfect" loose produce options.



Supermarkets aren't transitioning to reusable and refillable packaging

Supermarkets overseas are demonstrating reuse is feasible¹⁸ and popular,¹⁹ and recent polling demonstrates eagerness for these systems in Australia.²⁰ New regulations in the European Union have sector-based mandatory reuse and refill targets. For example 10% of beverages must be in refillable containers by 2030, with an aspirational target of 40% by 2040, and large retailers with stores over 400m2 will need to dedicate at least 10% of their floor space to refill stations.²¹ In contrast, Australian supermarkets remain reluctant to scale up such systems in their own stores. Woolworths Group, Australia's biggest supermarket by market share, states it has no policy to increase the use of reusable and refillable packaging.

Recommendation: develop an evidence-based reuse and refill strategy

To drive meaningful change, Australia's supermarkets must establish clear, evidence-based targets for increasing the proportion of own-brand products sold in reusable or refillable packaging. Australian supermarkets should adopt international best practice and collaborate with government and suppliers to scale reusable packaging systems nationwide.

Results by category

Transparency

Transparency is consistently the lowest performing category. Woolworths and Metcash are the only two supermarkets to receive a score in this category in 2025.

Table 2. Transparency results 2023-2025

2025 Ranking	Supermarket	2023	2024	2025
1	Woolworths	5%	53%	52%
2	Metcash	5%	*	4%
3	Coles	10%	*	*
4	Aldi	33%	*	*

Plastic reductions

In 2025 there was minimal progress in the most critical category. Coles, Woolworths and ALDI all went backwards, while Metcash's score remained unchanged due to continued efforts to reduce single-use plastic pallet wrap. Woolworths reported a virgin plastic reduction of 3,200 tonnes, though this does not necessarily indicate an overall reduction in plastic use. Supermarkets remain reluctant to remove plastic packaging from fresh produce, which would significantly reduce the volume of plastic packaging.

Table 3. Plastic reductions results 2023-2025

2025 Ranking	Supermarket	2023	2024	2025
1	Woolworths	16%	33%	38%
2	Metcash	*	30%	30%
3	Coles	13%	27%	22%
4	Aldi	28%	21%	20%

Reusable packaging

Reusable and refillable packaging for customers remains almost absent from Australian supermarkets and sustainability strategies. Some stores offer self-serve dispensers for dry goods like confectionery and nuts, but the system is not in place for customers to use their own containers, nor are reusable options provided.

Woolworths previously offered own-brand concentrated cleaning tablets, but has since discontinued them. While all supermarkets utilise reusable produce crates and pallets in some areas of their operations, single-use remains the status quo for customer packaging.

Table 4. Reuse results 2023-2025

2025 Ranking	Supermarket	2023	2024	2025
1	Metcash	7 %	23%	23%
2	Woolworths	6%	36%	22%
3	Coles	19%	22%	22%
4	Aldi	9%	9%	9%

Recycling

Minor progress has been made across the big supermarkets in increasing the proportion of their packaging that is recyclable. Woolworths and Coles improved scores due to the roll out of soft plastic collection trials. Woolworths, Metcash and Coles all reported on the availability of waste collection and resource recovery services. Woolworths reported 31% recycled content in its plastic packaging, and Metcash gained points for an in-store coffee pod collection and recycling scheme.

Table 5. Supermarket recycling results compared from 2023-2025

2025 Ranking	Supermarket	2023	2024	2025
1	Woolworths	*	21%	29%
2	Coles	9%	8%	20%
3	Metcash	5%	13%	19%
4	Aldi	5%	13%	13%

Policy, planning, and governance

This category assesses internal company policies, staff training, and support and engagement with government initiatives to reduce plastic pollution.

Woolworths again ranked first in this category. Metcash gained points for supporting relevant government policies, as well as higher standards for the labeling of compostable packaging. Coles provided insufficient evidence of ongoing staff training for waste minimisation and resource recovery.

Table 6. Supermarket policy, planning and governance results compared from 2023-2025

2025 Ranking	Supermarket	2023	2024	2025
1	Woolworths	18%	76 %	77%
2	Metcash	6%	39%	57%
3	Coles	29%	32%	21%
4	Aldi	33%	35%	14%

^{*} Insufficient data to assess performance

Recommendations for government



While supermarkets must take responsibility for reducing plastic packaging within their operations, voluntary commitments alone will not deliver the scale or speed of change required.

The findings of *Unwrapped 2025* highlight systemic barriers that government intervention can remove — including a lack of transparency, weak accountability, and no legal framework, design standards or infrastructure to prioritise reuse and reduction over recycling. Strong, enforceable regulation is essential to ensure all major retailers contribute fairly to Australia's circular economy transition.

Recommendation 1:

Introduce eco-modulated extended producer responsibility (EPR) with mandatory reduction and reuse targets.

Australia's major supermarkets remain resistant to making the systemic changes needed to cut plastic waste. An eco-modulated EPR scheme would require producers to take responsibility for their packaging throughout its lifecycle, with fees paid, and adjusted according to environmental impact — rewarding reusable and low-impact packaging while penalising disposable and non-recyclable materials.

Mandatory sector-based reduction and reuse targets, supported by EPR revenue reinvested into shared collection and reuse infrastructure, would create a clear financial incentive for supermarkets to reduce plastic at the source.

Recommendation 2:

Require transparent public reporting of plastic packaging footprints (including online orders). In line with recommendation 12 from the 2025 Senate Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies, the government should mandate annual public disclosure of total packaging placed on the market, including own-brand and supplier products, and a separate line item for online fulfillment packaging such as produce bags and delivery materials.

In the UK, supermarkets with more than 250 employees must report the number of single-use plastic carry bags provided to customers each year,²² which is then reported on publicly.

Transparent, comparable reporting will enable customers, investors, and regulators to track progress, align with international best practice, and hold companies accountable for real reductions.



Recommendation 3:

Establish a national reuse and refill framework and invest in shared infrastructure.

Reusable and refillable packaging remains almost non-existent in Australian supermarkets. The government should develop national standards for reusable packaging formats and invest in shared, cross-brand infrastructure for collection, cleaning, and redistribution. Enabling supermarkets to participate in shared reuse systems will help scale these models nationally and deliver significant waste and emissions reductions.

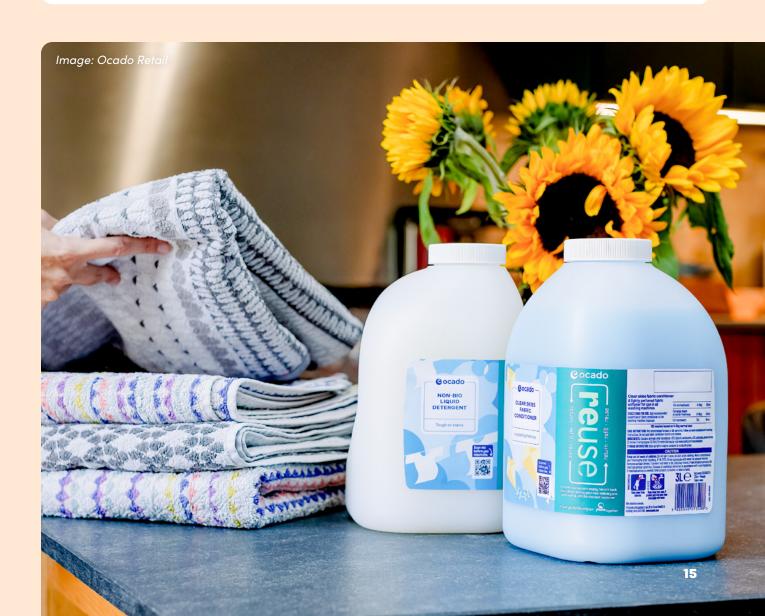
Recommendation 4:

Regulate online fulfilment packaging and give customers control over packaging choices. Online grocery orders are a growing source of avoidable plastic waste. National standards should prohibit unnecessary plastic produce bags, double-bagging, and over-packaging, while requiring retailers to provide opt-in or opt-out choices at checkout. Customers should be able to select reusable or non-plastic alternatives, or choose a "package-free" option by default.

Recommendation 5:

Enable fair industry collaboration and appoint an independent regulator.

The transition to reuse and refill requires collaboration across supply chains. The government should clarify competition and consumer laws to allow shared standards and pooled logistics between supermarkets and suppliers, while establishing an independent national regulator to set, monitor, and enforce packaging reduction and reuse targets.



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