



# Messaging Guide

The Last Straw  
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## Campaign Summary:

The Last Straw is a campaign to end the use of plastic straws in hospitality venues around Australia. The Last Straw aims to tackle the issue from both sides- encouraging consumers to use less plastic straws, and encouraging businesses to give out less straws through staff training and options for straw alternatives.

## The Vision:

The Last Straw is aiming to facilitate a change of culture in the way we use and think about plastic straws in Australia. We see engaging hospitality venues as one of the biggest opportunities to start to make this change by re-training the industry to think about plastic straws and their environmental impact, and not just as a convenience.

We are also tapping into changing customer habits regarding plastic straw use and the growing trend of more sustainable and environmentally friendly choices when it comes to consumption. Our Australia is one where people place more importance on the future of our beautiful country than the convenience of using a straw for 10 minutes.

This is more than a trend. At The Last Straw, we believe that it makes no sense to continue to use plastic straws at the volume we do, and that big change can be made through small everyday actions driven by everyone.



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## The problem with plastic straws:

Plastic straws are an unnecessary convenience with a big impact. Disposable plastics contribute a great deal to the issue of waste worldwide, plastic straws being a major part of that. Over 500 Million plastic straws are used and thrown away every day, ending up in landfill or in our oceans. The problem? Plastic doesn't degrade in landfill conditions for at least 450 years, meaning that every piece of plastic ever made still exists on earth today.

In the ocean plastic degrades at an accelerated rate, down to the molecular level. Animals from whales to seabirds to the very smallest creatures of the ocean eco-system are ingesting plastics on a daily basis. Not only are some animals starving to death with stomachs full of plastic, we're finding increasing numbers of fish reaching our tables with toxic plastic embedded in their systems. By the year 2050 it is estimated there will be more plastic in the ocean by weight than fish. The alarming thing is the disconnect between what's in our hands and where it comes from or where it goes when we're finished with it. A single plastic straw might seem innocent enough, but multiply that by the billions of people that buy billions of drinks across the world every single day, and you start to get an idea of the scale of the problem. The Last Straw is about changing the attitudes and culture around plastic straw use and disposal, from consumers to venues.



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## How we plan to solve it:

The Last Straw aims to end the use of plastic straws in venues around Australia in two key ways:

- **Consumer engagement:** Mass public awareness of the impact of single use plastic straws, and a request for them to order their drink without a straw. Consumers may also campaign for their favourite local venues to become straw-conscious.
  - **Business engagement:** Venues sign on as members of The Last Straw, pledging to adopt a policy of only giving a straw out on request, or changing their straws to a re-usable alternative.
- This approach ensures that the problem of plastic straw consumption is being tackled from all sides. Ideally, this will see overall straw use decrease dramatically.

## Rubbish facts about plastic waste:

Plastic waste is a massive challenge. Mostly because of the sheer volume of disposable plastic waste that exists on the earth, but also because of the toxicity of the materials used to produce it. Plastic is designed specifically to endure the test of time. Literal islands of plastic waste form in the Gyres of the world's oceans, sucked into currents that see it accumulating especially in the Pacific. Google it. It's pretty bad.



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## Facts About Plastic Waste Continued:

Plastic does not biodegrade because it is not made of any plant based material. Instead, under the right conditions, it photo-degrades. This is an incredibly scary process in which under sunlit conditions plastic will break down quickly into smaller and smaller pieces, right down to the molecular level. Photo degradation of plastics is especially worrying when it comes to the ocean. Plastic mostly floats, which means consistent exposure to the right conditions for it to break down. So it's not just about the pictures of seagulls with plastic in their bellies or turtles that have beer rings around their shells, but the plastic as it gets smaller is making its way into the ecosystem and the food chain from the very bottom up.

In landfill conditions, plastic will only degrade after around 450 years. It is estimated that the United States alone uses 500,000,000 straws every single day. That's 500,000,000 straws that go to landfill where they will sit for longer than any of us will be walking this earth.

You get the picture. Plastic is bad.

Any tiny thing we can do to stop plastic waste like straws entering the oceans or clogging up our waste systems is a step in the right direction.



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## FAQs

Why not just ask businesses to stop using straws altogether?

The Last Straw is a campaign aimed at making sustainability accessible to businesses that may not have considered taking any steps to change their practices in that area before. Encouraging staff to adopt a policy of giving straws out on request only is a really easy and deeply impactful way for businesses to get involved in making a real difference in their straw use.

For businesses, changing from using so many straws is a big step and we want to make that transition as easy for them as possible, in order to get as many venues on board as possible.

The overall goal is for businesses to transition to re-usable straw alternative, but to make this viable for some businesses, they have to reduce their overall straw output first.

We're looking at a first easy step, an entry level to sustainable practice.

Why not just go back to using paper straws?

When looking at viable alternatives for plastic straws, we can't just assume that anything that isn't plastic will be better for the environment- we have to look at the whole life-cycle of the product. Doing a straight replacement of straw for straw is just replacing waste with waste. Paper still has to come from somewhere, and the world is already facing drastic problems with deforestation.



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## Paper straws- continued

There is also no bulk manufacturer (according to our research) of paper straws closer than the United States that supplies straws with the appropriate durability and health approval to use in venues. When a venue wants to use paper straws, we highly recommend they also take steps to reduce their overall straw use first and keep the use of paper straws minimal.

## What about biodegradable straws?

Bioplastics research and manufacturing is relatively new, and while there are some well-known biodegradable plastic alternatives, there is no bioplastic that exists that efficiently solves the plastic problem. Same with paper; at the same volume of use you're still just replacing waste with waste.

The embodied carbon of the Poly-Lactic Acid (PLA) straw in its manufacturing phase can be much lower than plastic, sometimes by up to 50%. But that's just in the manufacturing phase, not the entirety of the life span of the straw. The biodegradable qualities of PLA only come into play when it is composted in a commercial facility- the likes of which are not readily accessible to many venues. PLA cannot be recycled as it is an organic product. When put in with the rest of the rubbish PLA will not biodegrade in landfill as it only biodegrades under specific temperature conditions that landfill does not naturally provide.



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## Biodegradable- continued

There are also some products available at the moment that claim to be biodegradable, but that are simply plastic with an additive to excel degradation of the item. It just makes the plastic smaller, faster. Our recommendation is to do as much research as possible before using biodegradable, to use as little of it as possible, and to make sure you are disposing of them in closest to the correct way as possible.

## Sources and for more information:

- "500 Million Straws"

<http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/pft/2017/4/28/are-drinking-straws-dangerous>

- "More plastic than fish"

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/19/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-sea-by-2050-warns-ellen-macarthur>

- "Gyres, plastic ocean, why plastic is generally bad"

<http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2011/01/26/our-oceans-a-plastic-soup/>

- "PLA and Biodegradation"

<http://www.biosphereplastic.com/biodegradableplastic/uncategorized/is-pla-compostable/>

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