

**Submission  
No 18**

**INQUIRY INTO WASTE AVOIDANCE AND RESOURCE  
RECOVERY AMENDMENT (PLASTICS REDUCTION)  
BILL 2021**

**Organisation:** Sincere Medical Australia (SMA)

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## Introduction

Sincere Medical Australia (SMA) is a dynamic, award-winning research and design , manufacturing and distribution company providing biodegradable medical consumables under its EcoAid brand. We are constantly changing and expanding our line of products to fully meet consumer needs for sustainable products.

NSW Treasury awarded SMA the Innovation award for its forthcoming antiviral plant based products which will further help reduce the volume of plastic waste and also reduce the cross infection around the hospital.

SMA believes that the best way to reduce plastic waste is to eliminate it at the point of generation. As the pioneer of biodegradable medical hollowware, EcoAid is a recognised leader, supporting our community to solving key environmental and health challenges. We are committed to the development and distribution of medical products made from biodegradable, environmentally-friendly materials and displacing the single-use plastics which are so ubiquitous and all-pervasive in the health sector that they are seemingly unavoidable.

EcoAid plant-based medical products are Australian-designed and have been developed in collaboration with medical professionals. These products are an innovative single use environmentally-friendly, fit-for-purpose and cost-effective alternative to conventional plastics. SMA is on the various state supply contracts and has been supplying NSW Health since 2006. By way of example, The Princess Alexandra Hospital has adopted our biodegradable hollowware and since 2015 replaced 680,000 single-use plastic dishes thereby saving over 2.7 tonnes of plastic waste from landfill. As SMA currently supplies over 500 hospitals, these benefits have been multiplied across the country.

Over the last 3 years EcoAid has sold more than 28,700,000 products nationally and in the process, have replacing single-use plastic products thereby saving over 700 tonnes of plastic waste from landfill (more than 1,000 over past five years) as well as saving savings in greenhouse gas emissions.

SMA's sustainable kidney dishes were featured at recent news (February 2021) while Prime Minister Scott Morrison visited the Vaccination Hub at RPA in Sydney.

(<https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-vaccine-hub-sydney-inside-look/e075153c-4c0b-49ec-a6f5-95184fe7e0b0>) Shortly thereafter NSW Health started utilising SMA's kidney dish and injection tray in its vaccination hubs across the state.

EcoAid strongly support the restriction and prohibition of the manufacture, production, distribution, sale and supply of certain single-use and other plastic products for the health sector as plastic is piling up in our natural environment and posing a risk to human health. The health sector should lead the way in reducing this risk to human health.

## Industry Issues

**Plastics are a long-term waste problem:** “The plastic that is littered today will still exist in hundreds or even thousands of years’ time—possibly longer. Even when plastic does break down, it doesn’t go away, it often becomes microplastics or nanoplastics, which can adsorb dangerous chemicals. The plastic itself and the chemicals attached can be breathed in, absorbed through the skin or ingested. If we don’t improve how we manage plastic now, plastic pollution will only increase, causing more damage to our environment and increasing the risk to human health, now and for generations to

come". Source: Cleaning Up Our Act: Redirecting the Future of Plastic in NSW, Discussion Paper, March 2020, Matt Kean MP, p. 3.

**The hospital plastics problem:** Practice Greenhealth, a non-profit that works to make hospitals more sustainable, estimates that 25 percent of the waste generated by a hospital is plastic. A study on a single hysterectomy found that the procedure can produce up to 20 pounds of waste, most of which is plastic. Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/can-medical-care-exist-without-plastic>

According, the reduction in the use of single use plastics and the use of biodegradable hollowware is critical in reducing plastic waste to landfill and greenhouse gas emissions.

**Regulatory guidance:** The products which are replacing plastics typically use sugar cane, bioplastics, or paper as the primary ingredients. However, there is no clear guidance from the Therapeutic Goods Administration in relation to acceptable materials for plastics replacement. The provision of more regulatory guidance and a more certain regulatory environment for acceptable materials for plastics replacement will provide greater incentive for plastic substitution, as well as potentially reducing the time to develop and commercialise sustainable products.

**Composting:** A critical element in closing the loop is the composting of the sustainable substitute products. The current situation is largely unknown and sustainable product innovators need guidance and a framework for composting of plastic replacements.

**Slow adoption of single use plastics by health organisations:** Hospitals are often slow to adopt new technologies and the approval process for adoption can be slow and tortuous.

**Pricing:** The cost of conceptualising, developing and selling biodegradable products, particularly in the early commercialisation stages, may lead to a slight price premium which either slows or stops adoption. As sales increase, the cost of production can be lowered to a price competitive level. Government mandates or government incentive are required to encourage product innovators and facilitate early adoption.

## Industry Solutions

EcoAid has developed a range of environmentally-friendly, fit-for-purpose and cost-effective alternative to conventional plastics.

## Recommendations

**Mandate adoption:** Mandate an escalating annual percentage of adoption of single use plastic replacement products for plastics by hospitals starting from 20% in 2022.

**Composting:** Develop a framework and methodology for the recycling of biodegradable sustainable hollowware and, where appropriate, clinical waste which is potentially, hazardous, and put in place policies, incentives and structures to encourage and facilitate a closed loop for the sustainable hollowware.

**Government incentives:** Provide Government assistance and incentives to (a) encourage product innovation for the replacement of single use plastics within the NSW Health system, (b) provide policy guidance and assistance and incentives for health entities in NSW to increase adoption of sustainable hollowware.

**Identify barriers to adoption of sustainable hollowware within the healthcare sector and strategies to address the barrier**

**Understanding the scope of the plastics problem:** Conduct an audit of the health system to gauge the volume and type of single use plastics used as well as the level of usage of sustainable substitutes

**Review all hospital sustainability policies** to assess the adequacy of their policies and performance targets to reduce the use of plastics within hospitals as well as their performance against those policies and targets.

**Agreed savings metrics:** In order to capture the benefits of from plastics substitution, it would be helpful to have agreed metrics regarding greenhouse gas emission savings.

**Development of an innovation hub:** Develop an innovation hub to encourage innovation for single use plastic substitution, particularly in healthcare. Research and development also needs to be encouraged in universities and other research organisations to develop sustainable technologies. Part of this process could be in mapping capability within research organisations and business.