



Rethinking Plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand

Make best practice standard practice

Panel convened by the Office of the
Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor,
Kaitohutohu Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua ki te Pirimia



Rethinking Plastics – Our recommendations.

He rangi tā matawhāiti, He rangi tā matawhānui

Our panel set out with a bold and broad scope – to find ways to reduce the size of the plastic shadow that is cast by modern life. Plastic is everywhere and to reduce our mountain of plastic waste we must pull every lever at once. We found many great ideas to build on and present them as case studies of best practice – we need to make best practice standard practice.

We need a National Plastics Action Plan.

Tackling the problem of plastic waste needs a systems change, a collection of adjustments – some large, some small – across all aspects of society. Kaitiakitanga can guide this change.

We need to embed rethinking plastics in the government agenda.

The evidence base to guide systems change is lacking – we gather as much information as we can in our report and identify key gaps and opportunities.

We need to create and enable consistency in design, use and disposal.

There is no silver bullet to fix our plastics problem. New materials and new machines, new recycling techniques, new uses for recycled materials, new business models, and perhaps most importantly, citizens who are ready to form a new relationship with plastics are all needed to shift to a more sustainable use of plastics.

We need to innovate and amplify.

Many ideas and innovations exist already and need to be accepted, scaled to context and location, and implemented as part of complex changing social systems.

Best practice is being demonstrated by some – best practice needs to become standard practice.

We need to mitigate environmental and health impacts of plastics.

We need to reduce plastic pollution at source by using less, reusing what we do use, and stopping litter.

There's a growing body of evidence about the impacts of plastic debris and micro- and nanoplastics in our environment and further research is needed.

Plastic pollution is a huge problem, but not the only thing that should be taken into account when deciding whether to use plastic. Options to replace plastic should be guided by the environmental, social and health impacts of a product across its whole life cycle.

We need to improve plastics data collection.

There is currently no coordinated or standardised approach to measure or report plastic use and disposal by material type in Aotearoa New Zealand. Data is a prerequisite for management and monitoring and working out what works.

What's covered in Rethinking Plastics?

Motivation for rethinking plastics:

The current state of play for plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand, highlighting key work that we build upon, and describing the guiding frameworks for the Rethinking Plastics project.

Changing our relationship with plastics:

Evidence and examples of ways that we can change our relationship with plastics, presented as possible actions that central government, local government, sectors, businesses, communities, the education system and individuals can take, as part of a global community.

Ideas for a more sustainable future – embracing innovation:

Innovative ideas that can help us shift to a more sustainable use of plastics. These are framed as actions that align to the 6Rs – rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and replace – plus options for disposal as we move towards zero plastic waste.

Plastics and the environment – life-cycle assessment and beyond:

Demonstrating the importance of thinking about the environmental impacts of a product through its whole life cycle – not just disposal – and a summary of the growing body of evidence around the environmental impacts of plastic and what this means for Aotearoa New Zealand.

To what extent can we quantify Aotearoa's plastic? New Zealand's data challenge:

Drawing on publicly accessible data, we attempt to quantify plastic flows through Aotearoa New Zealand, highlighting knowledge gaps and what data are needed to inform plastics action across the country.



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