



Towards Zero Waste

TAMMY LOGAN:

Hello welcome, and thanks for joining our Summer By The Sea program, Towards Zero Waste. I'm gonna be your presenter today. My name is Tammy Logan and I have a sustainable living blog called Gippsland Unwrapped. So Gippsland Unwrapped consists of a website and some social media channels, where I share mostly waste-related stuff, so how to reduce your waste quite significantly, and hopefully in the process also demonstrate how small everyday actions by individuals, can really make a big difference. Now where I'm presenting to you from today, my home is on Bunurong country. So I'd like to pay my respects to the Traditional Owners of the land, the Bunurong people, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

I actually have quite a long history with Summer By The Sea, going back almost twenty years when I got my first job out of university with Water Watch at the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. So I quite like this program.

Now each year, Coastcare and Parks Victoria partner with a whole range of organisations to deliver some really engaging, educational activities across Victoria's coastal and marine areas, and the aim is to really teach people about how special and rich in natural and cultural values these areas are, but to also let them know about the issues and threats that are affecting them. And another aim is to really try and build people up, so that they adopt responsible behaviours to look after these places, advocate for good management, and share their knowledge with lots of other people. So I'm actually, I'm really proud to be a part of this program once again, this year.

Now, today's presentation is going to go for about fifteen to twenty minutes and I'm just gonna share as many ways as I can fit in during that time of how you can reduce your waste quite significantly. So I've been doing that for the last five years and have been able to reduce my waste to be able to fit into a one litre jar for the course of a year.

Now obviously zero waste is not actually possible in this economic environment that we live in, which is really linear in terms of take, make, and dump, but there's no reason why we can't start transitioning to a more circular economy and getting started as best we can. And why would we actually want to do that? Well, the average Australian individual throws away one point five to two tonnes of waste per year. Or put another way, the average family could fill a three-bedroom house with the amount of rubbish that they throw away each year. So this waste obviously depletes our natural resources, results in habitat destruction, generates lots of greenhouse gases through the production, and the distribution, and the consumption, and then the disposal into landfill sites of all of these goods. So, it also results in quite significant levels of pollution.

Now unfortunately large amounts of plastic rubbish are ending up in our marine and coastal environments and it's killing our wildlife through entanglement and ingestion.

Now sixty percent of seabirds studied so far have been found to have plastic in their gut and scientists expect that to increase to ninety nine percent by 2050. And in fact some chicks are dying without ever having left the nest because their mothers are bringing back plastic to feed them.



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Which is really quite sad, and there's lots of other marine species now such as dolphins, and whales and turtles, and fish that are all being found to have plastic in their gut, so it's a really huge problem. And all of these marine deaths obviously disrupt the ecosystem, and it's an ecosystem which we depend on.

Now not only that, when plastic is in water, it acts like a sponge attracting other chemicals to itself, so the toxicity of pieces of plastic increases and gets passed up the food chain when small animals eat it and again, we're part of that food chain. So we really need to remember that every piece of plastic that's ever been made still exists out there somewhere today. It's a material that's designed to last forever, but we're using so much of it just once for a few seconds or a few minutes before we throw it away. And in fact, ninety five percent of plastic is only used once.

Now this is just an abuse of this technology, we're just not valuing it the way we should. But the good news is, there's lots that we can do to address this issue and advocate for a more circular economy where there is no such thing as waste. So by making better choices, think small everyday actions, we let government and business know that we're ready for change. So we send the message that we don't want to be part of the problem and we don't want to support those who are either.

Now governments need to see that people are ready for change because if they try to introduce change and the people weren't ready for it, then there'd be a huge backlash, and we know that they don't like that. And businesses, especially local businesses, can't afford to lose people who vote with their dollar, so we really do have some power there.

Now another important thing about doing your bit and leading by example, is that social psychology research tells us that this changes other people's behaviour as well. So by acting, in a pro environmental way, you help provide the social proof that other people need to see a behaviour as acceptable. So you know, this might lead them to take up the behaviour themselves later, they might have been thinking about it, but we're too nervous, or it might just mean that they'll be more accepting of some legislation change down the track. It's really about creating new social norms. Humans find it really hard to resist social norms, which is why it can be so hard to act in a counter-cultural way in the first place.

Now I'm going to jump into how to reduce your waste. So, you know, it's tempting to just jump into a list of things that you could do such as make sure you've got your reusable water bottle and your reusable cup and your reusable straw and so on, but I think it's more important to start by trying to understand the waste hierarchy. So the waste hierarchy is a model which tells us which has the most benefit in terms of reducing waste and you might have heard of a condensed version of this called the 3Rs back in school or at some other time in your life which stands for reduce, reuse, recycle. But did you actually realise that it is a hierarchy and so reduce is more important than reuse, and reuse is more important than recycle in terms of environmental benefits? So there's actually more expanded versions of this that contain more detail, and there's slight differences between some models, but I



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find this 'Five Rs' one is easy to remember, and still gives people the right idea, and it starts at the top there with refuse, as the most important thing that we can do to have the biggest environmental impact. So you know, refuse whatever we don't need, the idea is really simple, if I don't bring any rubbish in to my life, then I don't have any rubbish to throw away later on. So looking at stopping it at the source.

And then thinking about, you know, reducing anything that you can't refuse outright, and then once you have something in your life, you wanna reuse it as much as possible. Reuse it in its current form, make sure it's repaired as much as possible or is repairable in the first place, and then if it can't be used in its designed form, then look at repurposing and upcycling to keep the materials in a productive economy. Then when something is no longer useful anymore, or hasn't got any life left in it, then we wanna look at recycling the materials that it's made up of.

If it can't be recycled, then we wanna be able to ensure that it can rot in compost. And after all of these things, you'll find there's just a very small amount of stuff leftover that would have to go to landfill or be treated in some other way. So a lot of people really just think that waste management is about recycling, but you can see from this that it's only a small part of the puzzle and it's not the most important part at all, and that is because it is so resource intensive, it takes a lot of resources to recycle stuff. So yeah, so we just, we need to keep that in mind, it's obviously a lot better than using virgin resources, and it's something that we should do and we should get right, but we really also need to focus on the avoidance things first, so refuse, reduce, and reuse.

Now, another diagram that I find really useful is this one called 'Buyerarchy of Needs', which is just a diagram that helps us understand how we can then reduce our consumption of stuff, and therefore the amount of virgin resources we use, and the amount of waste that we generate.

Now this time it starts at the bottom, with "use what you have" already as the most important thing that you can do, and has the highest environmental benefit, but I actually like to go a step further than that and ask myself, do I really need it in the first place? So if you're being honest with yourself and you think you want something, and then you say, well do I really need it? Then you're probably going to find your answer is no, and so you can forget about it and move on, but if you find that you still have this particular need, and it's identifying the need, not the thing, then you can look up what you have that can fulfil that need, and so I often find that I have things around the home that I can reuse as they are or I can repurpose or make into something else to fulfil my needs.

And then if I don't have anything that I can use already, then I'm gonna start looking at, well can I borrow it from someone, can I borrow it from some sort of library like a tool library, toy library, all of those sort of things, can you rent it from somewhere, can you swap with a neighbour or a friend? And then I'm gonna think about, well can I get it second hand from somewhere, you know, buy from a second-hand shop or an op shop, or something like that. Can I make it myself? So even though



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makes, there I actually think that "make" should be more sort of down where it's "use what you have already", because it just seems to fit better there for me.

And as a very last resort, then we're buying something new. And when I do decide to buy something new, I'm thinking a lot about well, what is the lifecycle of that thing and what is the environmental impact of that life cycle, so there's all different stages of production through to its end of life and disposal. So a lot to think about there.

Now I find that particular approach to fulfilling my needs really rewarding because it allows me to be creative, it reduces my reliance on money, I build my self-reliance skills, and connects me more with my community usually as well because you start talking to people and swapping and those sorts of things.

So this slide just shows a couple of examples at how I might do those sorts of things. So if we start with the bath towel example, so the bath towel is made of cotton, as they get older and well used, they get a bit holey, so I'll cut them down into, to use as tea towels and dish cloths. So I don't actually have any other dish cloths or tea towels in my house, they're all made from old towels, and then because they're made of cotton, as they get washed and reused and older and older, they get thinner and holey and then eventually you can just pull the fibres apart and put it in the compost because it is cotton and natural material, it's not synthetic. So nothing going to landfill.

Now my daughter at one stage wanted a swing when we moved to a new house and we had an old tyre and some rope so we put that up, so you know, you can often meet your needs very quickly when you do things this way. People often think you have to do a lot, spend a lot of time making and that sort of thing, but it's often much quicker. Old socks can be turned into hair ties, old jumpers and scarves can be turned into cushion covers, and old curtains can be turned into reusable produce bags.

All right, so I'm going to get down into some more detail and into some practicalities about what to do if you're just starting out. Where should you start? And I would say the very first thing that you need to do is a bin audit, actually go through your bins and see what things are coming up as a huge waste item for you. So put it into categories and, you know, do you have lots of soft plastic, do you have lots of glass bottles and so on? And then work out what the, tackle those things. But in saying that, council audits all over Australia have found that most of what people are putting in their landfill bins is actually compostable waste. So about forty percent on average.

So if you wanna reduce your landfill waste really fast, deal with your compostable material in either a home compost bin or a council compost collection facility. And by doing that, you will reduce your waste by a half almost immediately, which is a really good way to feel good about what you're doing and have a big win, and then focus on the other stuff.



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So you can compost all sorts of things, the natural materials, and this part here is really just to represent the fact that a lot of people think that landfill sites are big composting units, but that is not actually true, they're more like tombs that preserve food because there is no, they're so tightly compacted that there's no air, and there's no water, and there's no dirt, and there's no microbes that do all the breaking down and so when they do archeologic digs of landfill sites, they found these ten year old carrots, twenty year old lettuces, and forty year old hotdogs amongst a lot of other things. So if you put those things in a home compost bin that's working well, then they'll probably be gone in about a week's time, so yeah, not only that, but land, compostable stuff in landfill sites generates a whole lot of methane gas, which is twenty five times worse than carbon dioxide.

Now the other thing that the audits found is that ten percent of what people are putting in their landfill bins is actually recyclable stuff, so really get better at recycling and understanding what your particular councils can accept in their recycle bins, but also be aware that there's a lot of stuff outside of the curbside recycling collections for recycling items.

So for instance down the corner here we've got old, unwanted, and out of date medicines, which can go to back to pharmacies for just proper disposal so that they're not in landfill, x-rays can go back to imaging centres where they go off to recycling, the silver gets extracted and it's used in electronics, and jewellery making, we have batteries can go to places like ALDI and transfer stations, paint can go back to paint collection points, oral dental care products can go to TerraCycle collection points, and e-waste is now banned from landfill, so there are a lot more e-waste collection sites around the state now. So look up your local e-waste collection point, it's usually a transfer station where anything with a plug, a battery or a cord, can go off to recycling.

And of course then there's things like soft plastics can be collected and sent to the supermarkets who collect those stuff and send it off for recycling as well. So you really want to get good at composting, get good at recycling, and then really focus on your refusing, reducing, and reusing.

So here are some ways that I've, that I do that. So I'll start up in the top corner there, so they're my homemade bread bags, which I take to the baker and buy my bread in, also taking a keep cup with me when I go places and it can be used for all sorts of stuff, not just coffee, or you can sit down and have your coffee, you can take your own bags to shopping centres, but if you've got a bulk store near you, then you're winning because you can get lots of different types of food and household products in your own bags and jars that you can just keep washing and bringing back.

Have some cutlery with you or reusable straw if you like to use straws, I find that I don't use my reusable straw very much. And I made out of some old jeans, a little pouch to keep that in, along with a cloth napkin and I keep that in handbag or glove box. Also containers, I can take to the butcher and the deli to get various foods, and then there's a picture inside my fridge there that just shows some ways that you can avoid cling wrap, that you can use plates on top of plates you can use



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containers, you can use tea towels, you can use bees wax wraps, and there's a greener wraps, there's lot of sort of options out there now for avoiding cling wrap.

And moving on into the bathroom, then you can make swaps like getting rid of shampoo and conditioner, and using shampoo bars, which either come unpackaged or just in a box. Same with face wash, body wash, you can use just a face washer instead of exfoliator, you can use bulk-bought oil as moisturiser, we now have compostable Band-Aids and compostable earbuds, and almost completely compostable toothbrushes.

And moving into the laundry, just move that out of the way, oops, oops, oops, there is my stainless steel pegs, which I absolutely love, they're fantastic, but you can also get bamboo pegs and wooden pegs as well. And then this here, these are some little bars of soap which are basically stain sticks, so you can rub them on the stains on clothing and that will come out, you can take your own bags and containers to get washing powder, or if you look, limited to the supermarkets, there are some brands in there that just have a cardboard box, they don't have plastic bags or plastic scoops within them so you can then just recycle or compost that, and other things, just avoiding plastic, so having wicker baskets, that's a nappy bucket that I've had for fifteen years or so, or twelve years more like. And then things like my ironing board, padding, and covers are made from old sheets.

And just some quick home office ones, under here we've got highlighter pencil instead of plastic highlighters, so you know, the shaving are all completely compostable. Then we have some pens that are made of steel and wood, which makes them easy for recycling and composting, they also have replaceable ink cartridges, and then things like whiteboard markers that have refill options, they're also made of aluminium and recycled plastic, so yeah, they're reusable, repairable, refillable, and recyclable, they're great. And then you can get things like USB markers, markers, USB sticks made from recyclable cardboard, and sticky tape that is biodegradable.

But one other thing that I think is really important to mention is to really focus on collecting moments and not things. So, research shows us that beyond basic necessities, "things" don't make us any happier. It's the experiences and the relationships that we have with people, so you know, focusing on those things is a good way to live.

Now I also just wanna be really clear that I am not perfect, there is no one who is perfect, I do still buy things in packaging and I still consume things, but I try to do it in a much more mindful and environmentally friendly way. So doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Now I hope I've given you guys some inspiration to go and try some new things, and an understanding of how your small, everyday actions can really make a difference, but if you need any more ideas, or you want more detail and stuff, definitely head to my website for that information, and also make sure you go and check out the other activities in the Summer By The Sea program, because there's a lot of fantastic stuff happening, and make sure you contact your Coastcare



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Facilitator, if you want any more information about becoming a volunteer or joining some sort of a group.

So thank you once again for joining me today in this Summer By The Sea presentation on Towards Zero Waste. Thank you.