

# Single-use plastics and chemicals during the COVID-19 pandemic



Tourism businesses have had to adapt their operations to meet the safety requirements necessary to operate during a pandemic. Some of these changes have impacted the quantity of waste and the type of cleaning products used by operators. Some of Ecotourism Australia's certified operators have expressed concerns regarding the requirements of their certification. Please note:

- Changes made to comply with government endorsed COVID safe plans are accepted within the certification guidelines.
- Although Ecotourism Australia does not encourage the use of single-use items or chemicals, their use does not go against our certification criteria should it be for safety purposes or to follow national, state/territory and/or local regulations. However, the use of single-use items or chemicals should be a temporary solution to be reviewed on a regular basis.
- Certified operators should review their plans when they make changes to their operations, which may involve (but is not limited to) updating their environmental risk assessment and waste management plan.
- Certified operators are still expected to follow the reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle principles whenever it is safe to do so, within the national, state/territory and local regulations, and financially possible. As per their certification, they should have considered the following (non-exhaustive list):
  - Giving access to information digitally rather than using print materials
  - Informing visitors about items they can bring to help reduce waste (e.g. water bottle, reusable mask, reusable cutlery)
  - Educating staff and/or visitors about the quantity that should be used (e.g. for hand towels) and how to treat waste (e.g. separate bin for compostable items)
  - Purchasing eco-friendly alternatives (e.g. plastic made from plants, paper sourced from sustainable plantations, use of recycled materials), taking into consideration local waste treatment options (e.g. commercial composting solutions, recycling)
  - Reducing transport and packaging by purchasing from local and sustainable suppliers (e.g. bulk purchases, reduced packaging, refillable containers) and providing feedback to suppliers so that they can improve their operations

According to a report from the Australian Government published in September 2019, less than 10% of the plastic used in Australia in 2017-18 was recycled. The increase in plastic waste and chemicals due to the COVID-19 pandemic shows the importance of having access to sustainable alternatives and suitable waste management systems. Ecotourism Australia commends the efforts made by some local governments (e.g. in Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) to phase out a range of single-use plastic items and we are calling for further action to address plastic pollution and waste treatment challenges in Australia. These issues are critical to protecting our environment, wildlife and human health. Our ECO certified operators are leading the way with their outstanding efforts to reduce their waste, and we need the support of our state/territory and local governments to beat plastic pollution.

Further reading:

[Global Tourism Plastics Initiative \(2020\) - Recommendations for the tourism sector to continue taking action on plastic pollution during COVID-19 recovery.](#)