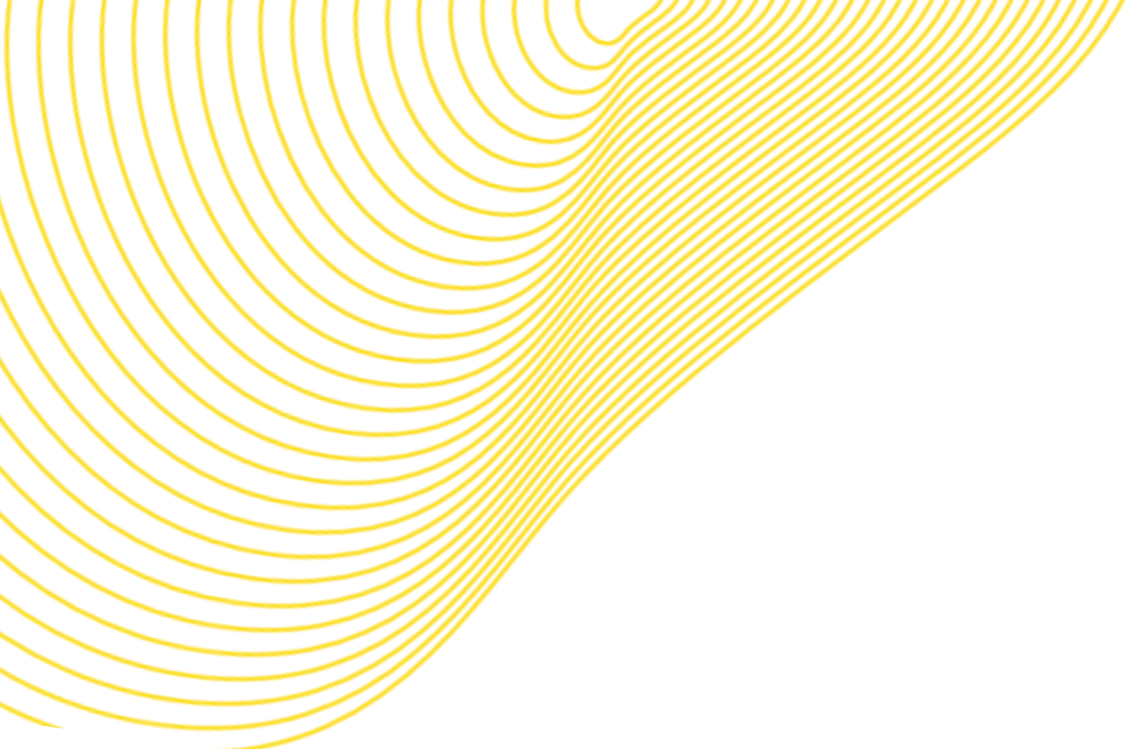


Navigating UNSW's waste system

August 2025





Acknowledgement of Country

UNSW respectfully acknowledges the Bidjigal clan of the Dharawal Nation, alongside the Biripai, Dharug, Gadigal, Gumbaynggirr, Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri peoples, on whose unceded lands we are privileged to learn, teach and work. We honour the Elders of these Nations, past and present, and recognise the broader Nations with whom we walk together. UNSW acknowledges the enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to culture, community and Country.



Agenda

1. Why the change
2. What has changed
3. How to bin it right
4. Reducing before recycling
5. Q&A

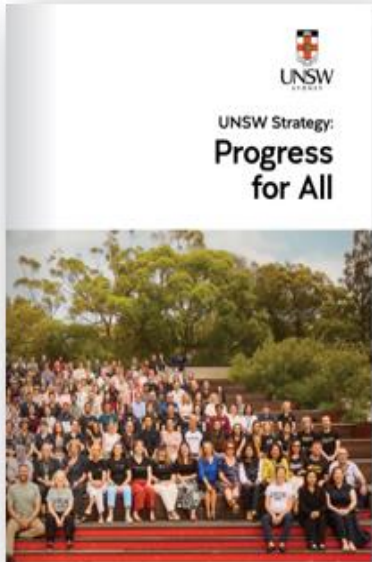


Why the change

- **End of 2023:** NSW EPA food organics restrictions banned compostable packaging and paper towels in food organics bins.
- **Q1 2024:** KENS waste audit at waste collection points
 - **43%** contamination of the yellow mixed recycling bins (paper, takeaway container, or soft plastic)
 - **20%** of general waste bins recoverable as food organics

Objectives of this change:

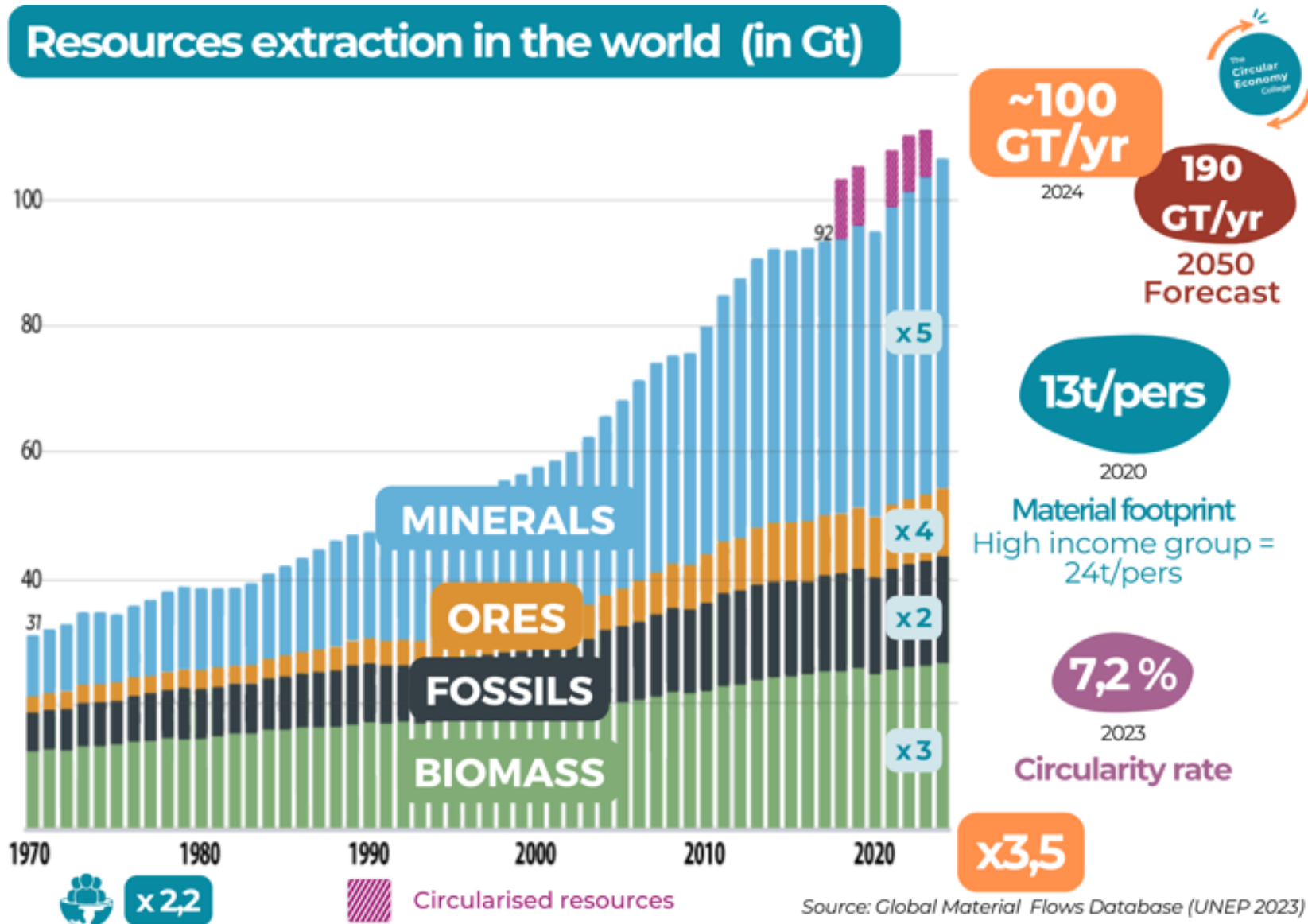
- Reduce waste generation by incentivising waste avoidance or reuse practices
- Recover resources
- Keep waste out of landfill



We will be leader in our contribution to the Societal Impact Goals:

- Achieve net zero emissions by 2050.²
- Restore 30% of ecosystems in areas of particular importance for biodiversity to improve planetary health.
- Reduce waste generation by 30% through prevention, recycling and reuse.

Waste was once a resource



Equivalent to a
10 m wide and
250 m high wall
around the earth

What has changed?

Outdoor areas

From three to two bins



Why no large food organics or recycling bins?

- High risk of contamination with takeaway packaging.
- 5% maximum contamination allowed. If higher, the entire bin content goes to landfill.

What has changed?

In the office

From "Food and compostable packaging" to "Food organics"



Updated labels for clearer instructions



Bin it right poster

Bin it right!

Together, let's keep resources in use and support a sustainable campus.



General waste	Glass, metal & plastic containers	Food organics	Paper & cardboard
 Food containers & lids	 Soft plastics	 Steel & aluminum cans	 Glass bottles & jars
 Disposable cups, lids & cutlery	 Non-recyclable items	 Plastic bottles	 Fruit & vegetable scraps
 Coffee grounds	 Meat & dairy	 Paper	 Cardboard
 Newspaper	 Magazines	 No e-waste and batteries.	 No soft plastics, takeaway cups or paper.
 No packaging, napkins or tea bags.	 No food packaging or soiled paper.		

Bin it right - in the office

Food organics

Unsure? Use the red bin.

✔ Yes



Food leftovers unpackaged



Fruit & vegetable scraps



Coffee grounds



Meat & dairy

⊘ No



Disposable cups & lids



All packaging & cutlery



Tea Bags



Napkins

NO

Takeaway packaging (red bin)



NO

Paper towels, serviettes



NO

Tea bags





Where does it go?

Anaerobic digestion at Earth Power in Western Sydney to produce electricity and soil improver.

More details at unsw.to/waste



Bin it right - in the office

Glass, metal & plastic containers

Unsure? Use the red bin.

✔ Yes



Steel & aluminum cans



Glass bottles & jars



Plastic bottles

⊘ No



Paper & cardboard



Soft plastics



Disposable cups & lids



Food waste

NO



NO

Biscuit sachets (red bin)



Takeaway packaging (red bin)



Paper and cardboard (blue bin)



Paper towels, serviettes



Where does it go?
Recycled at Visy Recycling (Smithfield)

Bin it right - in the office

Paper & cardboard

Unsure? Use the red bin.

✔ Yes



Paper



Cardboard



Newspaper



Magazines

⊘ No



Plastic coated



Drink cartons



Food containers



Napkins & tissues

NO

Takeaway packaging (red bin)





NO

Paper towels, serviettes



Milk or juice cartons



Where does it go?
Recycled at a paper mill in Botany Bay

More details at unsw.to/waste



Bin it right - in the office

General waste

Unsure? Use this bin.

✓ Yes



Food containers
& lids



Soft plastics



Disposable cups,
lids & cutlery



Non-recyclable
items

⊘ No



Food waste
Unless no green bin.



Paper & cardboard
Unless no blue bin.



E-waste



Batteries

Items placed in this bin are sorted
at a material recovery facility.

NO



NO

Batteries



E-waste



Where does it go?

Sorted into three streams at a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) operated by Doyle Bros in Fairfield East.

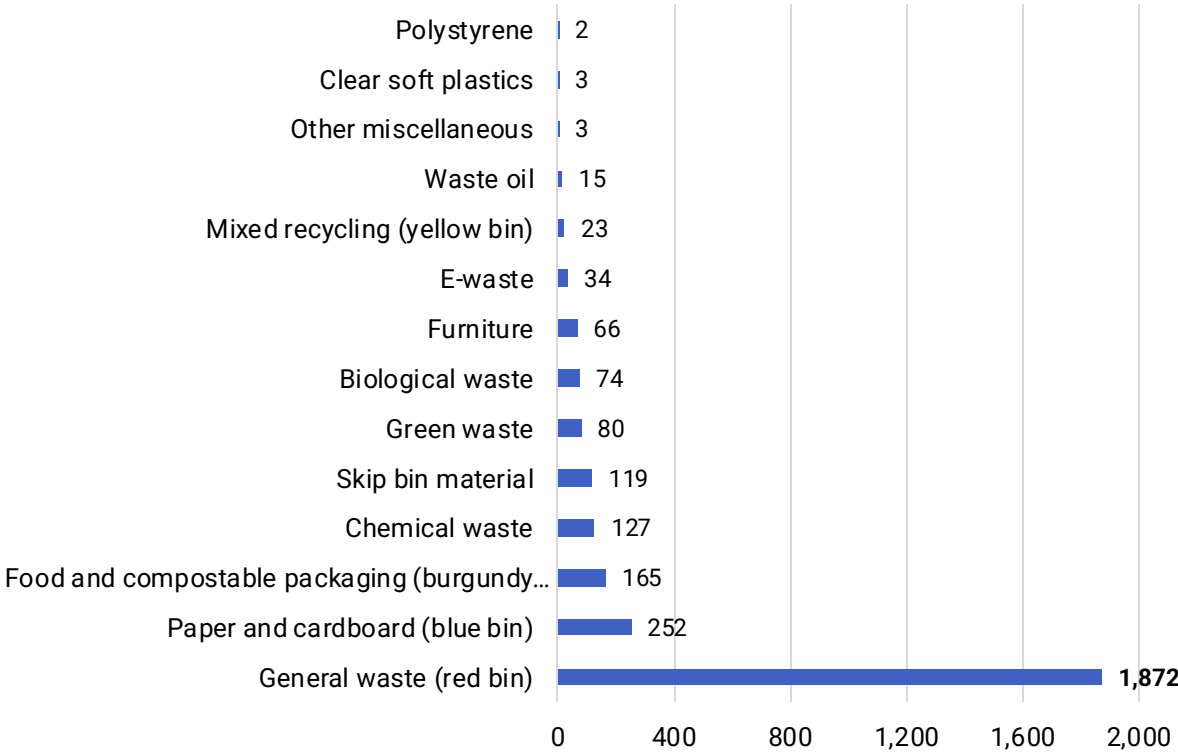
- Recycling streams:
 - paper and cardboard
 - hard plastics
 - metals
- Processed Engineered Fuel (PEF)
- Landfill

More details at unsw.to/waste

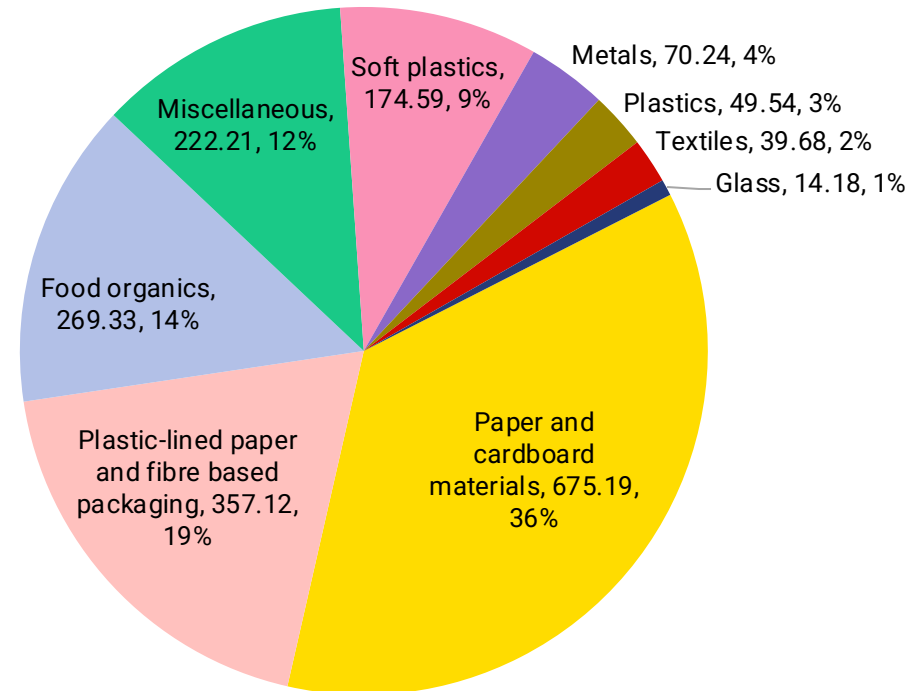
Recycling is good. Reducing is better.



Waste sources by weight (tonnes) at UNSW in 2024



General waste (red bin) weight distribution (tonnes)



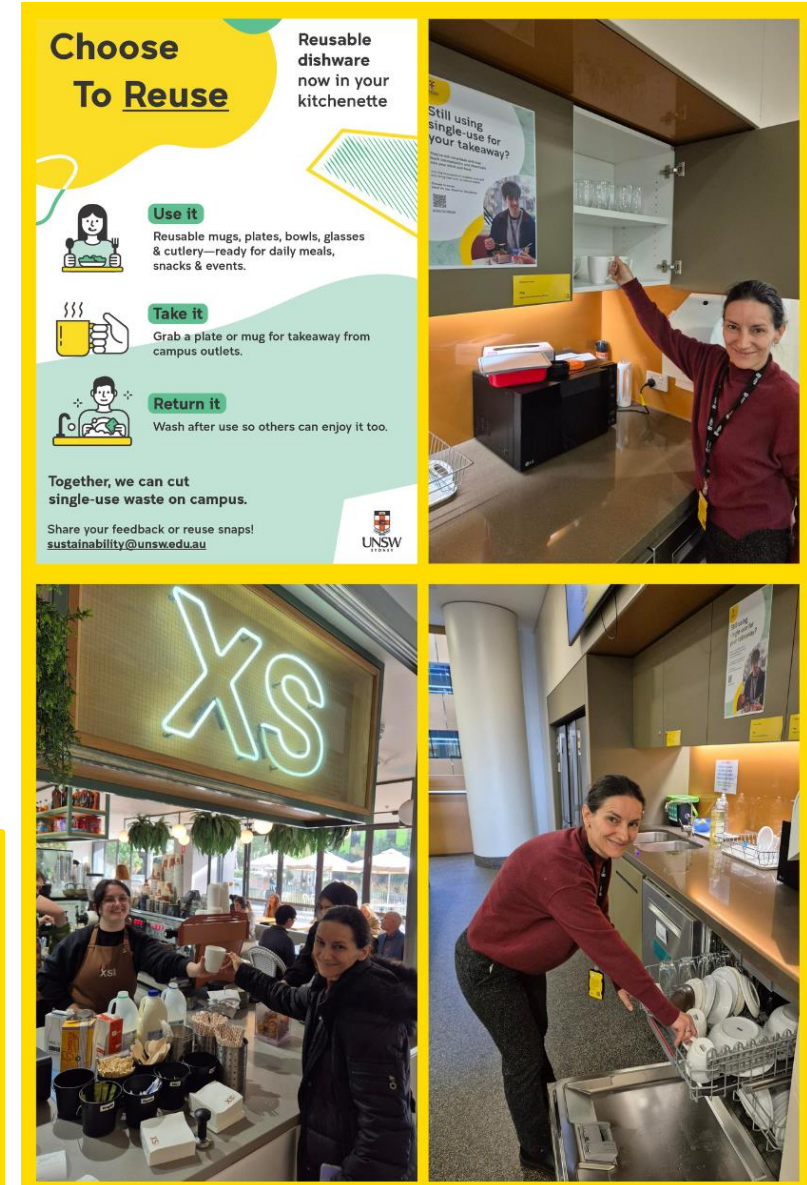
Most of the red bin waste comes from single-use packaging. **Reuse habits** can change that.

The best waste is no waste!

"Refuse and Reduce" before *"Reuse and Recycle"*

Ask yourself:

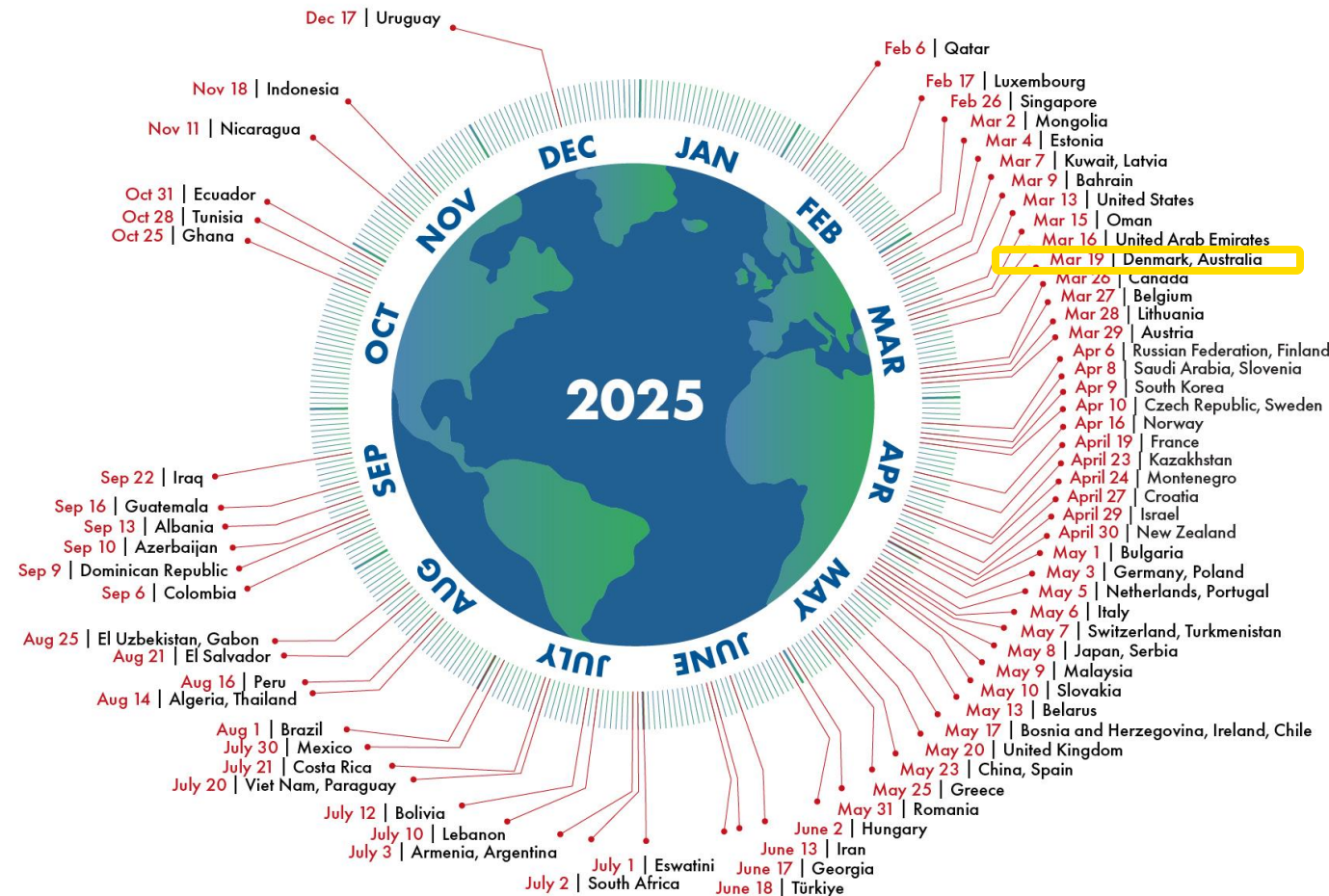
- Do I really need this, or can I do without it?
- Can I go packaging-free?
- How much do I really need?
- Can I borrow or find a second-hand alternative for my next purchase?
- Can I repurpose something I have to serve this purpose?



Let's push Earth's overshoot day back!

Country Overshoot Days 2025

When Earth Overshoot Day would land if all the people around the world lived like...



For more information, visit:

<https://overshootday.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days/>

Source: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts, preliminary 2025 Edition
York University, FoDaFo, Global Footprint Network, data.footprintnetwork.org



How many Earths would we need, if we live like those residents?



Source: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts 2022

Additional countries available at overshootday.org/how-many-earths

Thank you!

sustainability@unsw.edu.au

