

## **Case Study - Australian Wooden Boat Festival Waste Reduction and Composting**

Hobart's annual Australian Wooden Boat Festival has set sail on a remarkable journey toward sustainability, cutting their waste-to-landfill to nearly zero with innovative waste management practices.

By teaming up with the Scouts to educate attendees on sustainable waste disposal and making the switch to 100% compostable foodware, the festival is steering towards a plastic-free future.

Kelvin Aldred, the event's Waste Management Coordinator, talks about these green initiatives and how festival-goers are embracing this shift.

### ***What is the Australian Wooden Boat Festival?***

“The Australian Wooden Boat Festival was started over 30 years ago by two avid and enthusiastic wooden boat builders and sailors. It's grown from those times, when it was a very small event. Now, every second year the event attracts over 220,000 people. 40% of those people come from interstate or overseas. All up we have about 500 boats on the water and on the shore.

There are around 60-80 vendors that sell everything from paints to outboard motors. We have around 60 food and refreshment vendors too. It's a family friendly event with puppet shows, rides, and games on the lawns of Government House. The Australian Wooden Boat Festival is a free and open event to all Tasmanians and visitors.”

### ***Tell us about the waste reduction initiatives you have in place?***

“We started on waste reduction back in 2013, which was the first year the Scouts came onboard to help with our recycling, table cleaning, and overseeing site cleanliness. It was in 2015 that Dick Smith sponsored our recycling program, and that was the first year that we really started to supervise what went into each bin. We then started to record how much we collected in the way of recycling and how much we reduced waste to landfill.

We’ve continued to build on that since, and are at the stage now where we know our waste quantities down to the last kilogram, including our new compost waste stream. We convert our compost quantities to determine how much greenhouse gas emissions we’ve saved. For each festival, we aim to find out what the reduction in recycling and waste to landfill is compared to the previous year.

At our boat owners welcome function we’ve made sure that the food and beverage we serve is of low volume and just enough for the 250-300 people we expect to attend. All food at the function is served on washable plates and platters, which has been working well.

We also have one of our vendors tow a billy-cart around each of the wharves at the festival site and sell cheese platters in compostable containers. It’s a start, but you’ve got to start somewhere. Just like we started back in 2013 on our recycling program.”

***What made you decide to switch away from single-use plastics?***

“Seeing the amount of waste that was going to landfill and knowing that, through simple education and behaviour change initiatives, we could change that.”

***What were the challenges when implementing your waste reduction initiatives?***

“We have found that if we don’t supervise what goes in the bins, people don’t always get it right. Our biggest challenge at every festival, without exception, is the

contamination of our waste streams. Without supervision of the bins by our bin monitors, our waste management program is a complete failure.”

***What did you do to overcome these challenges?***

“We got the Scouts on board to help with the bin monitoring and waste management program. A part of this was going out to all of our Scout groups to ask for suggestions on what we could use as a slogan for our program. We really wanted to give the Scouts across southern Tasmania some ownership of this.

In response, we received two A4 books full of suggestions of a logo and slogan that we could use on bins, hi-vis vests, and on advertising material for the event. What the Scouts came up with, which we launched at the last festival, is “Sort it out for the Scouts”. It’s on all their hi-vis vests and on every table when you sit down and have a meal or a drink. All of the high-use bins on the site will always have a Scout, a Guide or a Joey monitoring the bins and letting you know what bin to put your rubbish into.”



Scouts at the Wooden Boat Festival showing the ‘Sort It Out’ signs to patrons explaining what items go into which bin

### ***How much plastic waste have you avoided as a result?***

“At the last festival we had on site eighty 240 L capacity compostable bins. Each day they were emptied and we recorded the waste quantities. At the end of the festival we worked out that we had diverted 15,000 kgs (or 15 tonnes) of organics from landfill, which made up 10,500 kgs of compost. All up, we avoided 7,650 kg of carbon emissions. And we’re obviously looking to increase that at this year’s event.

Another change we’re making next year is that at some of our bin stations where we’d usually have a recycling, general waste, and compostable bin, we’re only going to have two compostable bins and one recycling bin. We’re going to see how that goes in a number of supervised stations, because we think generally, unless people come with a plastic water bottle or a can of coke, those things should be compostable or recyclable if purchased on-site.

What we don’t have at the moment is the breakdown between food and drink containers going into compost. We do know that by far the greatest amount of compostables is in plastic drinking cups.”

### ***What surprised you most about how people responded to the initiatives?***

“The biggest surprise is to see the public’s reaction to young kids walking around collecting waste off of the tables, not just relying on patrons to take it to the bins themselves. I think it’s the involvement of the Scouts that gives us the greatest energy and the greatest benefit with everything we do with our waste management program.

One of the wonderful things about the Scouts being involved is that when you put a hi-vis vest on a young Joey who is seven years old, and he asks an adult to please put their waste in the right bin, you’d be amazed at the effect that has on the site’s cleanliness generally. Adults and people see around the children leading the way. It has a huge impact on the attitude of the public.”

***What would you say to other events thinking of doing something similar?***

“Always try to learn from others. We’re always keen to learn from other people, and at the moment we are sitting down with other events to find out how they have transitioned to reusable, washable items. If we can learn from other examples, that’s what we want to be doing.”

***What’s next in sustainability for the Festival?***

“I’m looking forward to next year to see the improvements we will have from our new initiatives, compared to 2023.

We’d love to get to the stage where we have washable drink vessels at the boat owners welcome function, and we’ll certainly be exploring that for this festival.”