

# MEDIA RELEASE



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***Australians can have confidence when recycling aluminium cans –  
but there are opportunities to do better.***

Ever wondered what happens to the aluminium cans you recycle? A recent study by the International Aluminium Institute has revealed that the majority of aluminium cans recycled by Australians are being used to make a new generation of aluminium cans, closing the can-to-can recycling loop.

The Australian Aluminium Council has, today, released the findings of the study which analysed regulatory schemes, collection infrastructure, recycling and landfill rates and regional trade flows of used beverage cans (UBC) scrap to help understand what happens to cans in Australia after they are collected and exported.

Australians consume more than 9 billion aluminium cans per year and that figure is set to increase. Given aluminium's high levels of recyclability and diverse applications, cans will continue to be the package of choice consumption is projected to increase by 25 per cent between 2020 and 2030 (to 11 billion cans annually). But with Australia having limited domestic recycling capacity, it hasn't always been clear what happens to these cans at the end of their life.

Confirming why it was important for Australia to be part of this study, CEO of the Australian Aluminium Council, Marghanita Johnson, said "We know Australians want to do the right thing with their recycling – and to have confidence that every aluminium can which is placed into a yellow top bin or deposited through a container deposit scheme is recycled – even if this recycling takes place offshore. We wanted to verify the data and give Australians this confirmation – and this study has done that."

Ms. Johnson added "Many people know of Australia's primary aluminium industry including bauxite mining, alumina refining, aluminium smelting and downstream processing including extrusion. However, people are often unaware that the closure of Australia's car industry a decade ago was accompanied by a closure in the two aluminium rolling mills which also provided Australia with domestic aluminium recycling capacity. Since then, aluminium cans and other scrap have been exported for recycling."

Marlen Bertram, the International Aluminium Institute's Director of Scenarios and Forecasts said "The deep dive into the Australian aluminium can recycling flows revealed that, while very few cans are recycled in Australia, we have confidence that they are being recycled in countries like South Korea, Thailand and Saudi Arabia. Of the recovered cans, the majority (65%) are going back into making a new generation of aluminium cans, closing the can-to-can recycling loop."

Ms. Johnson said “Australia will have container deposit schemes in place in all States and Territories by the end of the year and already has a voluntary extended producer responsibility (EPR) scheme - which helps Australia to reach a can recovery rate of 74%. But this means that around a quarter of cans are ending up in landfill – and this is a waste of all the resources and energy which go into making each and every can.”

“However, this study shows that, even with the advanced policies and collection infrastructure for recycling in Australia, there are opportunities to do better – and that there are actions which can be taken individually and collectively to help improve the rate of can recycling, to reduce contamination, and to increase can-to-can recycling rates. The report highlights key improvement levers including better awareness about the benefits of aluminium can recycling, investment in infrastructure and quality waste streams”.

Recycling of scrap aluminium has a huge role to play in the decarbonisation of the global aluminium industry as recycling uses only 5% of the energy required for primary aluminium production. To contribute to this, it is crucial to ensure the effective and efficient recovery of all cans that are sold in Australia.

Rick Ralph, Chief Executive Officer of the National Waste & Recycling Industry Council said “Australians have always wanted to do the right thing and recycle their cans. This study can help instil confidence that all cans that are collected for recycling actually get recycled. It also shows that Australia has the right policy levers in place – and with a few tweaks Australia’s aluminium recycling rates can be even better.”

Ms Johnson said “The report outlines how, by working together, Australia should be able to reach recovery rates of >90% in the next 5 years. But to do this, we all need to make every can count.”

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You can read more about the findings of this study:

[Global Fact Sheet](#) - Aluminium Can Recycling in the United Arab Emirates and Asia Pacific: A Review Of Waste Management Maturity In Six Countries.

[Australian Fact Sheet](#) - Aluminium Can Recycling in Australia

[Aluminium Cans Market Assessment - Australia](#)

[Aluminium Cans Improvement Levers – Australia](#)

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## **ABOUT THE COUNCIL**

The Australian Aluminium Council (the Council) represents Australia's bauxite mining, alumina refining, aluminium smelting and downstream processing industries. The aluminium industry has been operating in Australia since 1955, and over the decades has been a significant contributor to the nation's economy. It includes six mines which collectively produce over 100 Mt per annum making Australia the world's largest producer of bauxite. Australia is the world's largest exporter of alumina with six alumina refineries producing around 20 Mt per annum of alumina. Australia is the seventh largest producer of aluminium, with four aluminium smelters and additional downstream processing industries including more than 20 extrusion presses. Aluminium is Australia's highest earning manufacturing export. The industry directly employs more than 19,000 people, including 6,600 full time equivalent contractors. It also indirectly supports around 60,000 families predominantly in regional Australia.

## **RECYCLING IN AUSTRALIA**

The closure of Australia's car industry a decade ago was accompanied by a closure in the two aluminium rolling mills which also provided Australia's primary remelting capacity for aluminium recycling.

As aluminium smelters cannot safely accept general contaminated scrap, specialist metal recyclers currently collect and export both pre and post-consumer scrap for recycling. There are currently some limited small scale recycling initiatives within the domestic industry.

Within the existing industry, pre consumer scrap may offer simpler, more cost-efficient feedstock for recycled billet product and may offer an initial entry point into increased recycled content for Australian supply chains and the industry is currently exploring this opportunity, in the hope it may lead to future developments.

## **ABOUT THE STUDY**

The [study](#) was commissioned by the [International Aluminium Institute](#) (IAI) and co-funded by [Emirates Global Aluminium](#), [Crown Holdings](#), [Australian Aluminium Council](#) and [Novelis](#), into the benefits of aluminium can recycling. The study, conducted by global management consultants Roland Berger, analysed waste management and regulatory schemes, collection infrastructure, recycling and landfill rates, volumes put on market, usage trends, overall performance, used beverage can trade, material flows and future targets in each of the targeted countries, including Australia. The six countries, Australia, Cambodia, South Korea, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam; provide representative insights into can usage, collection, and processing across different countries and cultures as well as regional trade flows of used beverage cans (UBC) scrap.