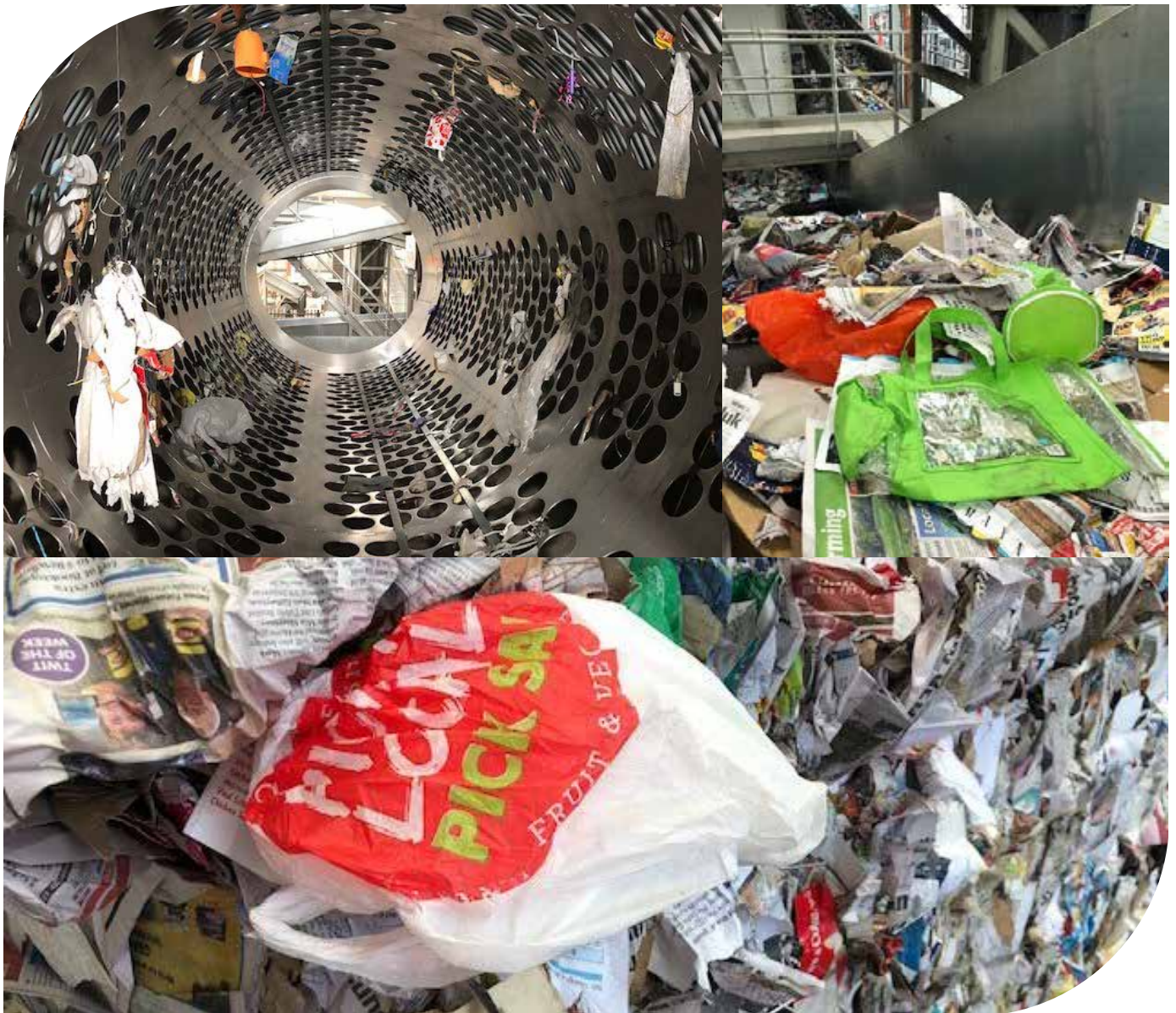


NAWMA FACTSHEET: PACKAGING

February 2020



Clockwise: soft plastics caught in trommel, soft plastics contamination on paper sort line, soft plastics contamination in finished goods

Single use plastics are a fast-growing waste stream. Soft plastic packaging is a major source of contamination at the NAWMA Material Recovery Facility (MRF), which is purpose-built to recover high quality materials that can be reprocessed into secondary raw materials¹.

Current overview

One of the main reasons that soft plastic packaging is such a problem at NAWMA's MRF is that the material behaves in the same way as paper in the machinery meaning sorting equipment cannot separate it and it becomes trapped in paper bales rendering them at risk of becoming unsaleable.

Plastic packaging can also become lodged in the MRF equipment leading to plant downtime and even damage to equipment.

Given the dynamic and fast-paced operating environment, the contaminated status of the material and the variety of polymers from which it can be made, it is not possible to recover soft plastic packaging material at NAWMA's MRF. As a result, this potential resource is lost from the circular economy and is automatically relegated to landfill. This means that more virgin natural resource (i.e., petroleum) needs to be extracted from Earth to continue to make these non-recyclable products.

“Everything around us has been intentionally designed by someone. The most important decisions about a product – what it is going to be made of, how it is going to be used, and what is going to happen once it’s no longer in use – are all made at the design stage, and this is precisely why design is so important.

Today, designers have an amazing opportunity to be part of building a restorative, regenerative future; a future where we can recover materials and feed them back into the economy.”

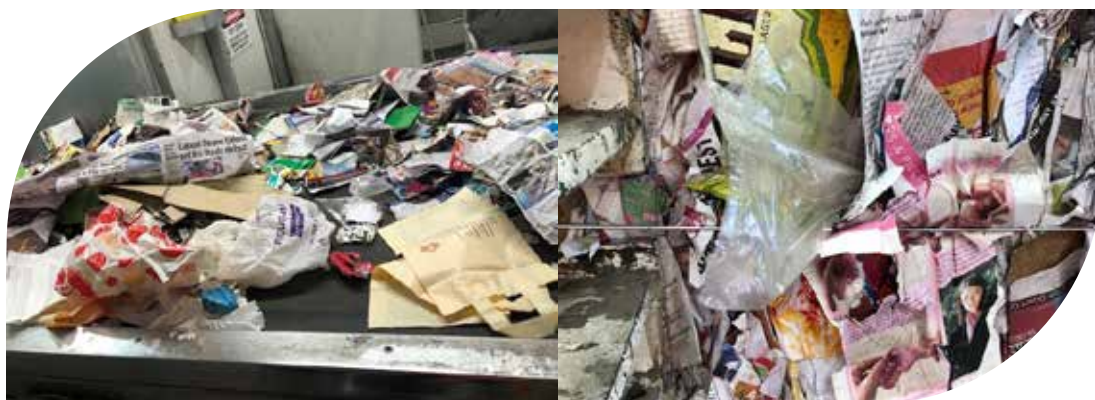
Ellen MacArthur Foundation

Some possible solutions

- Make packaging from readily recyclable material – considerations include using food-grade quality plastic such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and ensuring cardboard is not coated with plastic².
- Employ the use of the *Australasian Recycling Label* to assist consumers with correct end-of-life disposal of packaging. If a soft plastic is not readily recyclable via the kerbside service, then consumers must know not to dispose of it into the recycling bin.
- Design products with minimal or no packaging.
- Make packaging from 100% recycled material and be able to promote the environmentally-friendly features of the product.
- Make packaging from material that is 100% compostable at local composting facilities where packaging will be directed after use.

References – February 2020

1. Secondary raw materials such as crushed glass and recovered plastic containers are substitutes for virgin raw materials from nature such as sand and petroleum. Using secondary raw materials in manufacturing significantly reduces environmental impacts.
2. Products that are comprised of composite material such as plastic lined cardboard are difficult and sometimes impossible to take apart to extract into their component products.



Left: soft plastics contamination on paper sort line, Right: soft plastics contamination in finished goods