

Answers to our most frequently asked questions

During July 2021, ACOR ran Recycle Mate information sessions for recycling stakeholders across every state and territory. 185 participants representing 145 organisations attended these sessions. This document is a summary of answers to participant questions.

About Recycle Mate

Q Who is behind the Recycle Mate initiative?

A Recycle Mate is an initiative of the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR) with funding support from the Australian Government's Environment Restoration Fund program and the NSW Government's Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Waste Less Recycle More initiative. Adaptation Environmental Support is the program delivery partner.

Q What impact does Recycle Mate aim to achieve in the recycling sector?

A At its core, Recycle Mate is a mobile phone app and supporting education campaign which aims to help educate and empower Australian communities to recycle the right way. It targets:

- Helping people make the right choices in recycling
- Reducing contamination in kerbside systems
- Increasing the recovery of recyclable and reusable products

Recycle Mate recognises how many recycling opportunities there are and supports the best local solutions. This will help to facilitate new innovations in recycling and contribute to increasing Australia's circular economy, which all helps to create more jobs in the recycling sector and reduce waste costs.

Recycle Mate provides a shared platform for all local councils, recycling stakeholders and members of the community to all contribute to the information and recycling intelligence shared with the community.

Link to other programs

Q How is Recycle Mate different to other recycling apps? Do you envisage Recycle Mate as being a substitute for existing council bespoke apps or other recycling apps?

The Recycle Mate app is a free resource available to every recycler and every community member or visitor across Australia. The associated data hub provides a collaborative platform for all recycling stakeholders to contribute to the compilation of national recycling data. This data will help guide harmonisation efforts that benefit the system, as well as recognise and embrace the diversity in the system that supports local solutions and the facilitation of new innovations. Recycle Mate provides localised information that compliments and supports existing council programs.

A The DNA of Recycle Mate is to embrace the variations in recycling systems and to ask the community what they want to know, in addition to telling them what we think they need to know. The focus is on detail at the local level to avoid blanket statements or generic rules that contribute to confusion in the community.

Recycle Mate offers a more comprehensive search functionality to other recycling apps in addition to the artificial intelligence, which is key to re-engaging the community to seek up to date information about recycling.

Q Does the app only include council run disposal locations or are there opportunities to cross promote other programs - like Return & Earn for soft drink bottles or REDcycle for soft plastics - to improve community awareness of these programs?

A The app currently includes hundreds of non-council run disposal locations, including the state-based container deposition schemes, major product stewardship programs and charitable organisations. The list of disposal options is continually expanding with ongoing community and industry feedback.

Q How will Recycle Mate align and collaborate with the Australasian Recycling Label (ARL) - are there any plans to include the ARL in the app?

A Recycle Mate aligns closely with the ARL in most instances because the ARL is based on a high level of kerbside acceptance for packaging to be deemed recyclable. If, however, a local recycling initiative doesn't align with the ARL, Recycle Mate will include information that is factually correct for a given program or geography. ACOR works closely with APCO to support positive packaging recovery.

Q Do you use the nearest location for alternative disposal locations from the Planet Ark website Recycling Near you?

A No. Recycle Mate is a program implemented by ACOR with funding support from the Australian Government. It has a comprehensive search functionality and has geolocated thousands of recycling options to a live map that can provide immediate guided directions to a chosen location, with an image of the location to help find it, a phone number, and the hours the facility is open.

What is even more helpful and significant is that Recycle Mate will advise a user if a facility is closed, even temporarily such as due to COVID lockdowns or similar.

Kerbside bin system data

Q The app identifies disposal by the bin type and the bin lid colour - what about different coloured bin bodies? Our council has a blue bin body with a yellow lid for recycling.

A The initial review of primary kerbside bin systems across Australia found the bin lid colour typically provided enough detail to differentiate the bins for a given council to provide accurate information to the community. If however any council requires the bin body colour to also be identified, for instance if there were two yellow-lidded bins for different materials, this can be accommodated. Just contact us via help@recyclemate.com.au and we will create a new bin system for your council.

Q Will the app cater for your council if you have two different bin lid colours for a waste bin? We are currently swapping from green to red lids for general waste but doing this gradually over the next couple of years.

A Yes. Multiple-bin systems can be assigned to a council. There are currently 57 different systems listed to choose from, and you can contact Recycle Mate if you need another system to be added. In a location with more than one system, an app user will be asked to choose which bins they have the first time they use the app in that location. Bin system data can be programmed to a granular level, right down to a specific address.

Q If individuals need to nominate their bin system, do they need to log in and create an account to do so?

A No. A user is presented with the relevant bin options to choose from, or if their bin system is not displayed, they will be able to contact Recycle Mate directly to update the system. This does not require the user to have an account.

Locational disposal data

Q Being in Albury on the border of NSW and VIC would the app show alternative disposal options nearby in both states, or only in the council area you are in?

A The nearest disposal locations will be presented based on the user geolocation, not necessary the council area or state they are in. The kerbside information is specific to the user's local council.

Q What happens when recycling rules are different in different states? Like in Western Australia we can't accept aerosols in recycling bins. Is that customised for each state?

A Recycle Mate is customised right down the specific bin systems and items accepted at the local council level, rather than the state level. If there are rules across a state, that will make it easier to verify the information for all relevant council areas in that state.

Q If an item is appropriate for disposal in a certain bin, does it have the ability to tell you which bin?

A Yes

Q When an item is not appropriate for disposal in a kerbside bin, would you look into a redirect for the item? For example, redirect a tyre to 'Tyre Stewardship Australia' to search for an accredited collector or recycler?

A Recycle Mate already takes that one step further. If there are no kerbside options available for a particular item, like a tyre, Recycle Mate will inform the user there is no kerbside disposal and then immediately direct them to the nearest locations the item can be reused, recycled or disposed. Thousands of alternative disposal locations are programmed so there is no need to direct users to other websites to find information. The list of alternative disposal locations is growing all the time through community and industry feedback.

Q How do you populate the drop off locations? For example, we have recycling hubs at libraries and community centres - how would we get these on the map? Will councils be able to add other local disposal options, e.g. our local Officeworks?

A Yes. The data portal has been designed exactly for this purpose. The data portal is populated with information for kerbside bin system/s, council operated facilities, privately run facilities and other recycling programs like return-to-store programs and charities. All portal users will be encouraged to notify Recycle Mate if any disposal locations are missing or if some are no longer available.

Q Will you cover hard waste collection items as well, or just kerbside bins?

A Items identified as suitable for hard waste collection are identified and a message is provided. There has been interest from some councils to tailor this more specifically to their local system, so the option for this add-on is currently being further explored. Any councils interested in having this feature included in the app can contact us via help@recyclemate.com.au

Q Will 'mail-in options' be included for people to post items?

A Inclusion of mail-in options is marked for further development. Mail in options were not included in the current scope or work and further research and programming will be required to include these options, particularly if they are brand specific.

Focus on reuse

Q Will the app be promoting reduce and reuse, like diverting items to a charity before recycling and disposal?

A Yes. Recycle Mate aims to always provide the best disposal option so if any item is identified as something suitable for reuse or donation, the nearest applicable drop-off locations will be provided. Messages are also provided stating that only good quality items should be taken to charities, to avoid dumping unwanted goods.

Item detection

- Q Most item examples shown in the presentation tended to be packaging, however most contamination is not packaging - it is textiles, shoes, electronics etc. Will these be included in the app in the future?
- A Non-packaging items are included in the app now. In fact, packaging is only a small percentage of the items covered. There are currently over 4,000 items included in the app across a broad range of categories inclusive of clothes and other textiles, electronic products, hazardous materials, organics, homewares and more. This list is continually growing as we receive more feedback from the community about what they want to know.
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- Q If I photograph a multi-material item, e.g. foam tray with a plastic lid or a meat tray which is cardboard with a plastic film, will it just suggest the red bin for the product rather than separating the recyclable part from the non-recycled part?
- A The app is designed to identify items at the point of disposal, so after a multi-material item has been dismantled. It would therefore identify the cardboard tray and plastic film as two separate items. In some instances, supporting messages are included if necessary to improve disposal - for example when lids should be removed or not removed from certain containers.
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- Q Can the AI detect the conditions for disposing of an item? For example, food scraps on a plastic plate for a council - can you add an action "separate food waste from plate and recycle in FOGO bin"?
- A Yes. We can train the app to recognise a range of different item conditions. It requires collecting an adequate number of photos to be able to differentiate 'food scraps' from 'food scraps on a plate'. New items will continually be trained with more feedback from councils, recyclers and the community. The current solution is to include a message to remind people to only dispose of food scraps in the FOGO bin, i.e. no plates, utensils, food satchels or other unwanted items.
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- Q Is there any capacity to know where to dispose of packaging by scanning the barcode of the product?
- A Barcode scanning is not within the current scope of the Australian Government grant, but this new functionality is currently being explored with the intent to include it at a later time. This will be a valuable add-on, particularly for items that are hard to differentiate via artificial intelligence and word search functionality. For example, distinguishing between a PET container or a PLA container that look exactly the same.

App release

- Q When will photo search (artificial intelligence - AI) be available on the app?
- A The AI will be live again when the national roll out commences in September. We are currently crowd-sourcing images of rubbish and recyclables and anyone can get involved by accessing the Recycle Soldier function available in the Recycle Mate app. Recycle Soldier can be used by anyone anywhere in Australia and is the best way everyone can support the app development right now.
- Q Is the app publicly available to download so we can share with our team and stakeholders? How long do you think it will be before this is freely available to the market?
- A Recycle Mate is already publicly available on the App Store and Google Play but is currently the initial NSW proof of concept.
- The new version, with all the new functionality, will go live in September at which time it will be available to all local council areas across Australia. Different locations will be switched on as we finalise data checks with the relevant local stakeholders.

Q When is the anticipated launch date? Do you have an estimate of when the app will be available in different states?

A ACOR, in conjunction with the Australian Government, will be announcing the national rollout of Recycle Mate in September 2021. An official announcement will be made at which time the app will be available to go live in different local council areas across Australia.

Q Do councils have to accept or endorse the app for it to be launched in a given area?

A No. Recycle Mate does not require any organisation to endorse it. The program is delivering a collaborative platform to provide the Australian community with more detailed and accurate recycling information relevant to a given area and different recycling programs. We are encouraging all councils, recyclers and other interested parties to get involved to help provide the community with the best information possible. This does not require endorsement, just collaboration.

Q Does the app have the same level of information on recycling directions in other states and jurisdictions as currently shown in the Sydney area?

A Yes - and more.

App charges

Q How much does the app cost for Councils, including back-end maintenance, automated poster designs etc?

A There is no cost to councils for the app coverage of kerbside bins system and other council run disposal locations. Access to the data portal and the automated posters are also free of charge.

Q What is included in the free base model?

A Coverage of kerbside bins systems, council run facilities, access to the data hub and educational posters are all included in the base model which is free. There is the potential for future plug-ins and push notifications that may be offered at a cost.

Q Will there be the opportunity for councils to add their kerbside collection dates to the app?

A There has been early interest from some councils to include additional localised information like bin collection calendars, issue reporting and push notifications to promote local system changes. Any councils interested in having this feature included in the app can contact us via help@recyclemate.com.au

Q Don't push notifications require mobile numbers from subscribers? I thought that legally you need to opt-in.

A The app currently doesn't require users to subscribe or provide any personal data. Any future changes will always be undertaken with due regard to the appropriate legal and privacy requirements.

Program updates

Q How will the data be maintained over the coming years? If recycling collection points go out of business or stop accepting items how will this be picked up by the app so the information remains current?

A Recycle Mate data is comprehensive and will be maintained on an ongoing basis via a number of means including stakeholder access to the Recycle Mate National Data Portal, which is a platform for national collaboration and data sharing. Regular automated scripting and ongoing community feedback are also important aspects of keeping the data current. Formal checks will occur annually at a minimum.

Q How regularly will content accuracy be updated and will that be the responsibility of councils etc. or you?

A The Recycle Mate team has the overarching responsibility for maintaining content accuracy however the culture of Recycle Mate is to encourage the broader Australian recycling industry and community to continually feed information back to the program. No one knows their local area like the locals. The more collaboration we have with our locals, the better the information will be for the community.

Q How will you ensure the data being provided by the community is correct?

A Any crowd-sourced information provided by the community will always be verified before going live in the app.

App promotion

Q How will the app be promoted to the community? Will there be a national advertising campaign, or will it be the responsibility of councils to promote to their community? Do you have any flyers or comms for us to share with the community about this app?

A With the generous support from the Australian Government, ACOR will be leading the promotion of Recycle Mate to councils, recyclers and the community. Supplementary to our promotional activities, our goal is to deliver information and resources to councils and recyclers so they can promote Recycle Mate to their local communities and customers in a format that best supports their local recycling efforts. Councils, recyclers and charities are closest to their communities and know how best to reach them. Recycle Mate will engage to deliver resources that best support their initiatives.

Data hub

Q Will the Recycle Mate Data Hub be open in September or prior?

A The data hub is currently open and undergoing final checks with councils that expressed an early interest. All councils and recyclers will be sent an invitation during August 2021 with the goal to have as many councils as possible go live when the national roll-out commences in September.

Q How do we let you know that we are the representative for our council to receive the link to our hub/portal to input the info?

A Contact: help@recyclemate.com.au at any time.

Q How much coordination will you have with MRFs? One MRF responsible for updating their kerbside information would save a number of councils having to do it.

A There is full coordination of data checking with MRFs and organics recyclers via the Recycle Mate Data Hub to cross-check information. We are looking for everyone to contribute to the quality of the data to improve the accuracy and detail of information made available to the community. Recycle Mate is all about continual improvement - the more collective knowledge we gather, the better informed all Australians will be.

Q As a Waste Education Officer, I coordinate the waste collection across seven councils. Do you think it would be a council-based data upload and cleansing, or group effort?

A Multiple councils can be assigned to the same person in the data portal for you to access the information collectively. If joint management means information is the same across a number of councils, only one data set needs to be checked and the Recycle Mate team can update the information for the other relevant councils. The updated information will then be reloaded in the data portal for your records.

Opportunity for schools

- Q Do you have a promo video for schools as this is such a great learning tool for app development, AI and recycling?
- A There has been a great deal of interest in developing resources for schools and engaging students in the broader Recycle Mate program. Whilst this development isn't within the current Recycle Mate scope of work, some concept development work has been undertaken to engage schools and we look forward to future collaborations.
- Q Is there an opportunity to get schools involved with Recycle Soldier?
- A Some initial work was undertaken to get a few schools involved with Recycle Soldier, however COVID-19 restrictions put this work on hold. It will be explored further as the national roll-out commences.

Opportunity for private organisations and public places

- Q Are there plans to make the app available to private organisations/facilities such as shopping centres, office buildings, etc?
- A Yes. There has already been some interest in making the app available for businesses and other non-household entities, such as sporting venues, corporate buildings and public places. Whilst this development isn't within the current Recycle Mate grant scope of work, the comprehensive data management system will allow for this expansion in a new scope of work.

Any organisations interested in this expansion of scope in the app can contact us via help@recyclemate.com.au

Funding

- Q Going forward, how will Recycle Mate be funded? How long is the app funded by the Federal government? Will councils be expected to chip in when that funding is exhausted?
- A The Australian Government grant will fund Recycle Mate through to December 2022. A funding model will be implemented to support the program beyond that. The intent is that Recycle Mate is maintained as a free resource for all Australians and visitors, so should not be reliant on localised funding support.

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