

IT'S TIME TO MAKE WASTE HISTORY

WORDS EMILY GRAY | IMAGES ALEX SPODYNEIKO



"We have the solution to make waste history." So states Vincent Callister. The founder of event waste management company Waste Wizards is on a mission: to provide coffee drinkers with an easy and sustainable alternative to single-use coffee cups.

Needing to diversify Waste Wizards during the Covid-19 pandemic, Vincent introduced Make Waste History to the Bay of Plenty. It's a subset of the reusable packaging management system, Again Again – a nationwide platform that enables consumers to borrow reusable takeaway products from cafés.

Whilst New Zealand is the first country in the world to ban single-use produce bags, when it comes to disposable coffee cups, The Packaging Forum estimated in 2019 we used 295 million annually. Vincent believes it's now closer to a million a day. And those cups, which can't be recycled, end up languishing in landfill. It's a big price for the environment to pay, to satisfy our daily caffeine fix. Like burnt coffee, it's enough to leave a bitter taste in your mouth.

Admittedly some cups are compostable, but here's the catch. The majority can't be composted at home.

"Single use cups are an example of greenwashing because of what they are, single use and a waste of resources," says Vincent. "Technically some are compostable, but they have to be composted in controlled environments due to their PLA – polylactic acid lining [there are no facilities in the Bay of Plenty that accept compostable packaging]. And the truth is, they don't add any nutrients to the compost. We're just making dead dirt."

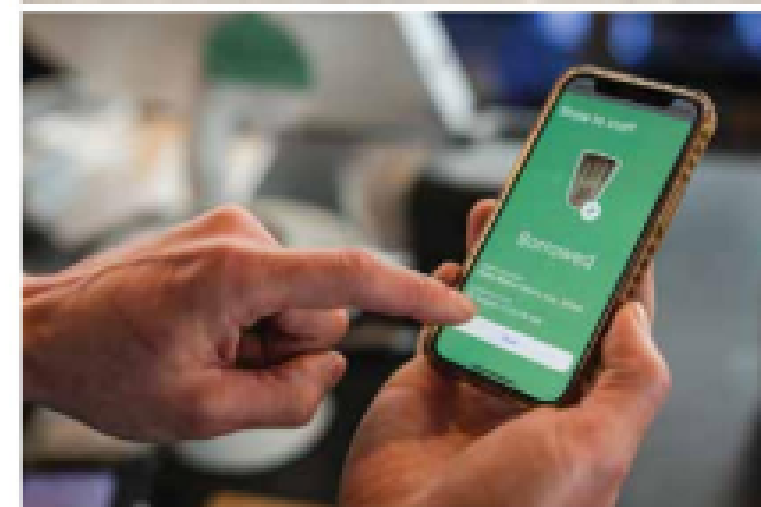
That's why initiatives, like Make Waste History that champion a circular economy, are so important. "We want to prevent waste, not divert it," explains Vincent.

How it works is simple: as a customer, you download the Again Again app and find a café that is part of the Make Waste History network. Next time you want a coffee, you choose one of the reusable stainless steel cups and scan it out via the app. You then have eight days to return the cup (it doesn't even need to be washed) to any café that is part of Make Waste History's network, if not you incur a \$3 fee.

Tauranga City Council's Resource Wise® Community Fund, The Packaging Forum, and the (Taupō) Great Lakes District Council have, via their community funding grants, funded the project to get the network started with enough cups for 15 cafés. Currently this is 30 cups per café but can increase and extend to bowls too.

Now it's time to get cafés on board. Vincent particularly wants to grow the network in the Bay of Plenty and Taupō but hopes that eventually you'll be able to pick up a Make Waste History cup in the Mount, take it on your road trip and drop it off at another partaking café across the country. For those cafés that do sign up they are provided with staff training and receive promotion through marketing campaigns across social media, the news and radio as well as a spot on Again Again's map on the app.

Since April 2023, eight cafés have joined Make Waste History and another twelve are keen to join. "We want more locally owned cafés to join, so our communities can prosper when the imminent wave of behaviour change regarding single-use products sweeps our streets. We're hoping these innovators will incentivise everyone to try reusable takeaway cups," says Vincent.



The Cory Corner in Taupō was an early adopter of the scheme and owner, Camilla Baker, is a staunch supporter. "We have an environmental responsibility as a café. They're good quality coffee cups and we take pride in the fact that we're on the right track to help the environment."

It's a sentiment that Connie Richards, owner of Tauranga's Elizabeth Café and Larder, echoes. Despite recycling and eliminating as much plastic as possible, Connie hopes more people will start to opt for reusable takeaway cups and encourages other cafés to join Make Waste History. "At least you feel like you're doing something that is in the right direction [to help reduce waste]," Connie says.

As for customer uptake, Camilla says, "It's slowly growing, and as more people start to walk around with the Make Waste History cups, we hope more will want to join."

Initial feedback has shown that whilst some customers are eagerly making the swap, others are initially hesitant about downloading the app. But as Connie has found "it's about changing habits. Once you take customers through the process, and they see how easy it is, they think it's brilliant. They feel good about being part of the change, and love seeing how many cups they have saved from the landfill."

So café owners and coffee drinkers, are you ready to make the swap? As Camilla says, "Let's work on this together so we can stop waste."

www.makewastehistory.org