

Calls to ramp up war on plastic

Alex White

Australia must ramp up its war on plastic, or the country's recycling industry could collapse and millions of tonnes of plastic will go to landfill, a new report warns.

In the wake of soft plastics collection schemes folding in 2022, the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR) is now sounding the alarm on other plastic products, warning the country's recycling system is teetering.

Currently, most of the 1.3 million tonnes of plastic packaging used in Australia is made from brand-new cheap imported plastics, with only 8 per cent of packaging made from recycled materials.

The report, *Securing Australia's Plastic Recycling Future*, found that in recent years virgin plastic is flooding the local market and manufacturers are not taking responsibility for ensuring product packaging is made sustainably.

As a result, Australia's circular recycling economy won't last unless new laws mandate minimum standards for recycled plastic content, it flagged.

In Europe, more than 200 recycling plants shutdown in June and July, because of the same issue, prompting experts to warn of an "imminent" industry collapse.

ACOR boss Suzanne Toubourou called on the government to step up and ensure brands, manufacturers and producers maximise the use of plastic recycling programs.

"Without strong markets for locally recycled plastic, Australia risks repeating Europe's experience, where falling demand and cheap imports have forced plant closures and left recycling capacity stranded," she said.

"The Australian government must now urgently introduce its planned packaging reform to ensure the future viability of the domestic plastic recycling industry and break the bottleneck in plastic waste. This can help to secure a future where plastic is remade into new products and Australians can continue to benefit from the results of their recycling efforts."

An industry collapse would also see a dramatic increase in plastic waste going to landfill, which would cause \$32bn in environmental costs by 2050.



Former senator Ron Boswell, who almost died twice after contracting ARDS, with St Andrew's ICU director Professor John Fraser. Picture: Lyndon Mechelsen

Miracle gives Ron a second chance at life

Rachel Riley

I'm sure this will save many deaths around the world

Ron Boswell
who battled ARDS

It was a routine knee surgery that turned into a nightmare for a former senator, who is now championing world-first research aimed at stopping the deadly lung condition that almost took his life.

Retired Queenslanders and former Nationals' leader in the Senate Ron Boswell has revealed he still lives with long-term loss of mobility after almost dying twice from Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome – a condition that kills one in two sufferers.

What started as routine knee replacement surgery in 2019 quickly escalated into a life-threatening battle when Mr Boswell aspirated fluid, triggering severe ARDS, which led to pneumonia, kidney and lung failure.

visiting him, until the former prime minister showed up at Mr Boswell's bedside.

Under the care of St Andrew's ICU director Professor John Fraser AO, Mr Boswell made a remarkable recovery, walking out of hospital with a new knee and a profound gratitude for the second chance at life.

The 85-year-old is now supporting groundbreaking new ARDS research at St Andrew's and The Wesley hospitals in Brisbane – funded by the Wesley Research Institute – to help save lives and improve the outcomes for survivors.

"Doing this is tremendous, because the problem is not only in Brisbane, it's worldwide," Mr Boswell said.

"I'm sure this will save many, many deaths right around the world."

Wesley Hospital Deputy Director of Intensive Care Associate Professor Jeremy Cohen heads the research team exploring a newly identified mechanism, Biofluid-Induced Lung Injury, that could explain how ARDS spreads.

It works like a drop of dye spreading through a sponge.

Once inflammatory fluid floods one part of the lung, it seeps through tiny channels, damaging healthy tissue.

A new world-first human pilot study will collect blood and lung fluid samples from a small number of ARDS patients within 48 hours of diagnosis, using minimally invasive techniques.

By analysing how this fluid affects immune cells, the study aims to validate BILI and identify new ways to contain and treat it.

Professor Fraser, who is also the Queensland Spatial Biology Centre's clinical director and involved in the study, said patients with lung conditions in ICU cost the taxpayer about \$6500 per day.

He said the research was about reducing that burden on the health system, saving and improving the lives of patients.

"Our job is to make sure that we can improve the understanding of the disease, and then through understanding the disease, optimise the treatment of the disease," Professor Fraser said.

"The end game is getting someone like Ron in and out quicker of hospitals."

The investigators expect to complete the pilot study around mid-2027, with results to be submitted to a leading medical journal.