Flinders University

Sustainability Buzz

Welcome to our second edition of the *Sustainability Buzz* newsletter!

We've been buzzing with activity over the past few months, with plenty of exciting projects and new initiatives taking shape. In this edition, hear from PhD student Georgina Tilly-Scholes about her research, discover tips for cycling to campus, learn how to manage climate anxiety, and get a look behind the scenes of e-waste recycling.

Projects and initiatives update

Sustainability Week

This year marked an exciting milestone as we hosted our first Sustainability Week from 2 - 4 September at Bedford Park campus. The week was all about coming together to learn and to take action for a more sustainable future.

From creating seed bombs, turning food scraps into healthy and nutritious meals, to giving pre-loved items a second life at the Community Swap Market – Sustainability Week included something for everyone. It was great to see so many students and staff getting involved, asking questions, and discovering new ways to live more sustainably.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part, volunteered, or helped bring Sustainability Week to life. Your enthusiasm made the week truly special. We can't wait to do it all again next year!

DIY milk bottle planters

Cooking with food scraps demonstration

Community garden working bee

DIY seed bombs

Community swap market

Green wall display

DIY beeswax wraps

Waste audit

Flinders generates approximately 1292.7 tonnes of waste annually from our main waste streams which is equivalent to the weight of 860 cars! Yet we don't always know how much of it ends up in the right bin.

As part of our 2030 Sustainability Strategy commitment to reducing waste by 30% and improving recycling, we've been working with KESAB to carry out a waste audit across the Tonsley, City and Bedford Park campuses.

The audit involved physically sorting and analysing samples of 10c deposit recycling, organics, and general waste from different spaces such as student kitchens, outdoor areas, study zones, offices and corridors to evaluate the types, volumes and sources of waste generated.

The results will provide great insights into how well our waste systems are performing and where improvements can be made. For example, the data will help identify contamination hotspots, show patterns in waste disposal, highlight opportunities for better signage, and guide future education campaigns to make recycling clearer and easier for everyone.

Waste Audit Fun Fact

A lot of paper towels end up in the red general waste bin. Did you know they can be placed in the green organics bin instead?

Stay tuned for the results!

Unwanted furniture rehoming

On campus, we have some usable furniture in storage that is no longer needed. Rather than sending it to landfill, we're partnering with GreenChair to rehome these items to non-profits, charities, and community groups.

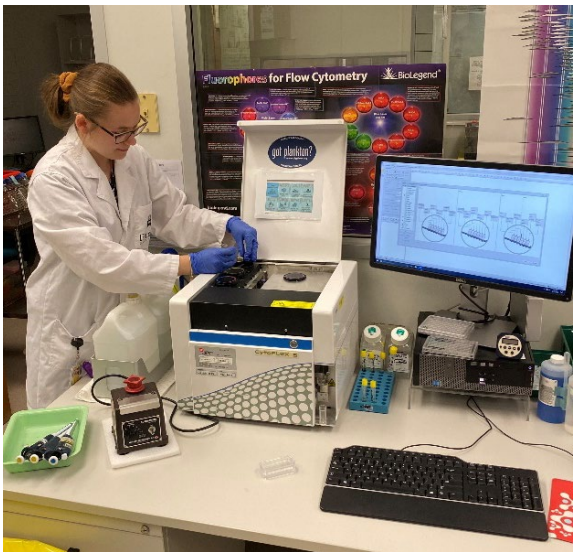
Recently, we were able to rehome 150 old plastic chairs to Pilgrim Uniting Church. The church serves 70–100 homeless people a two-course meal every Sunday evening.

We're excited to continue this program, helping to reduce waste and make a meaningful impact in our community.

Student Spotlight – Georgina Tilly Scholes

Can you tell us about your research and what it focuses on?

My research focuses on detecting microplastics, plastic particles smaller than 5 mm, by measuring their natural autofluorescence, or "glow", when exposed to a laser. This autofluorescence comes from the chemical additives that make plastics durable, UV-resistant, and long-lasting, but these same additives can leach out into the environment as plastics break down. For detection I use a technique called flow cytometry, which is traditionally used in medical research and can analyse thousands of particles per second. Using this approach, I'm investigating if microplastics can be identified based on their autofluorescence. In particular, I'm exploring how UV exposure and natural materials such as clay and algae influence autofluorescence, which will help to develop and apply this technique in real environmental samples.



What inspired or motivated you to explore this particular topic?

During my environmental science degree, I learned a lot about contaminants that affect water quality and environmental health, including microplastics. Understanding that these particles are among the most concerning and widespread pollutants of the 21st century sparked my passion for finding better ways to locate and understand them in the environment. Developing an autofluorescence-based method to study microplastics through flow cytometry has been a challenge and opportunity, as method development often involves constant tweaking, setbacks, and fresh starts. While this process can be frustrating at times, it's also incredibly rewarding and continues to drive my curiosity and problem-solving as a researcher.

In what ways have you contributed to or participated in sustainability initiatives on campus?

I have been involved with Flinders University Sustainability and Environmental Collective (FUSEC) since 2019, serving as secretary, vice president, and later president. In these roles, I represented FUSEC and students through the Sustainability Advisory Group and Sustainable Universities Network (SUN), while also contributing to native revegetation, community garden upkeep, and campus clean-up projects. I also worked with the *Embedding Sustainability into Curriculum* group to help integrate sustainability principles into teaching and learning across the university.

Which Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) resonates most with you, and why?

SDG 4: Quality Education resonates most with me as change, big or small, begins with knowledge and awareness. Through my involvement in FUSEC, I've seen how quality education can empower people to act on environmental issues. I'm passionate about making science more accessible and helping others understand how research, such as detecting microplastics, can drive real-world sustainability solutions

What are some easy ways that we can help reduce microplastic pollution?

1. **Remove single-use plastics from your lifestyle**
   Reusable bottles, containers, and shopping bags significantly cut down on the breakdown of disposable plastics into microplastics.

2. **Choose natural fabrics over synthetic**
   Synthetic clothing such as polyester and nylon sheds microfibres when washed, so opting for cotton, hemp, or wool helps reduce these fibres entering waterways.

3. **Support better waste management**
   Properly sorting recyclables, avoiding littering, and joining local clean-up initiatives all help stop larger plastics from fragmenting into microplastics.

4. **Avoid plastic-containing cosmetics**
   Check labels and avoid products with ingredients like polyethylene (PE) or polypropylene (PP), which indicate the presence of microbeads that can wash directly into the environment.




Thinking of cycling to campus? Here's what you need to know!

Cycling is not only good for your heart, lungs and mental health, it is the most sustainable form of transport (other than walking, of course)! In the 2024 Flinders student and staff commuter survey, over 200 students said they were considering cycling to campus - but we know there are practical considerations.

Are there end-of-trip facilities for cyclists?
Yes! The Bedford Park campus has several options. For those who prefer to lock up at the bottom of the hill, Adelaide Metro provides a secure bike cage at the Flinders train station. Give them a call to arrange free access using an Adelaide Metro card. For those keen to ride up the hill, you'll find a secure locker with e-bike charging, repair facilities and bike pump below the sports centre, with free access to showers inside. Other racks and showers are dotted around campus - find facilities that are closest to you.

Heading to the City campus? Adelaide City Council's U-Park offers secure bike storage for a fee.

Is it safe to leave my bike?
While locked bike storage cages on campus can only be accessed by student or staff card, for extra peace of mind bike insurance starts at around $10/month and will cover the cost of your bike in the case of a theft. Many insurers also share tips on how to lock your bike securely.

Are there safe cycling routes?
For safe routes that avoid busy roads, check out the cycle instead journey planner. Cycling on South Road or Sturt Road can be minimised or avoided.

Are there any financial incentives to cycle?
Several local councils offer financial incentives! Adelaide, Holdfast Bay and Onkaparinga all have e-bike rebate programs worth checking out.

Final thoughts
Cycling to campus can be a convenient, healthy, and affordable option - especially with the right facilities and planning. Whether you're commuting from nearby suburbs or just exploring alternatives to driving, it's worth considering how cycling could fit into your routine.

Written by Elizabeth Galanis, PhD student

How do you dispose these items? Coffee cups and lids…

If you're in metro Adelaide, do you know which bin coffee cups and lids should go in at campus and at home? The easiest way is to look for the **Certified Compostable "seedling" logo** or **PLA 7**. These symbols indicate that the packaging is made from plant-based materials such as cornstarch, sugarcane, or wood pulp, or from bioplastics. These materials are designed to fully break down into nutrient rich compost in about 15 weeks at Jeffries commercial composting facility, returning to the earth without leaving behind a harmful residue.

If there's no logo, have a look at the material. Cups and lids made from plant fibres and do not have a waxy coating. That means they can go in the organics bin. Let's recycle to help conserve resources. To learn more about recycling on campus, visit our resource recovery webpage.

JOIN! Flinders University Sustainability and Environment Club (FUSEC)

Want to connect with like-minded students who are passionate about sustainability and taking climate action on campus and in the community?

FUSEC has recently been re-affiliated and is looking for new members to join the club! With plenty of exciting projects and initiatives planned for 2026, now's the perfect time to get involved and make a real difference.

Instagram: flinders_sustainability
Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/flindersenvironment/
Email: infofusec@gmail.com

Behind the scenes of e-waste recycling

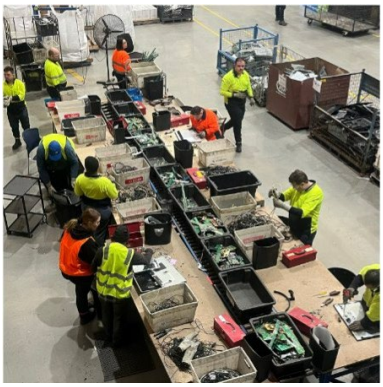
Do you know where e-waste goes?

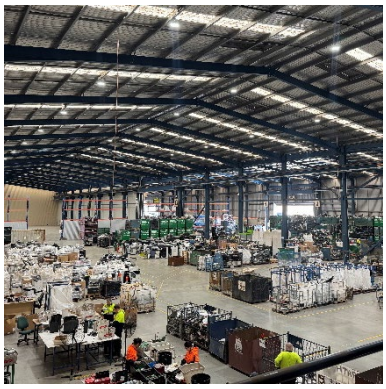
Recently, the Information and Digital Services (IDS) team who manage e-waste at Flinders visited the Electronic Recycling Australia (ERA) facility in Wingfield to take a behind-the-scenes look.

At ERA, e-waste is handled through a two-tiered approach: reuse and recycling. Any items that can still be used are tested, refurbished, and sold through ERA's online store. Doing this first allows these items to be used for longer, which helps save energy and resources, avoid waste, and reduces overall environmental impact.

For items that can't be reused, ERA's team dismantles and sorts materials into categories such as metals, plastics, and printed circuit boards. The facility also uses a specialised cable granulator to separate cables into ferrous metals, non-ferrous metals, and non-metals. Valuable materials recovered through this process are then sent to certified processors off-site to be transformed into new products.

We are proud to collaborate with local businesses who are making a real impact in accelerating the circular economy and are providing meaningful employment opportunities for people living with a disability.





Did you know

Electronic Recycling Australia diverts 3.6 million kg of e-waste from landfill annually!

If you would like to recycle your old home electronic goods, there are several **Unplug N' Drop points** in South Australia which can be found here.

On campus, you can also drop off your batteries for recycling at three main locations:

- **Sturt Library** - Level 3 (next to the vending machine)
- **Central Library** Level 1 (next to the photocopiers)
- **Tonsley Library** (outside the entrance).

Climate anxiety

Feeling worried or overwhelmed by the impacts of climate change is becoming increasingly common and it has a name - **climate anxiety**. Learn more about what this is and strategies to manage climate anxiety by checking out the infographic and blog by staff member Dr Gareth Furber.

Have a fun and relaxing summer break! We'll be back with more sustainability updates in the first quarter of 2026.