NATURAL TURF ALLIANCE

Where Does Synthetic Turf Go When It Wears Out? Recycling in Australia

Synthetic turf recycling is available in Australia, but “recyclable” does not mean every field is fully recycled, every component becomes new turf, or disposal is guaranteed years from now. Councils should demand evidence of what is accepted, recovered and actually reused, especially the plastic carpet.

Why This Matters

A worn synthetic field is a mixed waste stream, potentially including sand, rubber or organic infill, fibres, backing and a shockpad. A recycling headline can conceal very different outcomes for these materials.

Recovering useful materials is preferable to unnecessary disposal. Yet a truck leaving an oval for a recycling facility is only the start of the evidence trail. Communities need to know what happened after delivery, what remains as waste and who paid.

The presence of an Australian facility is a real improvement. It does not make a new synthetic field environmentally harmless, erase pollution during use or remove the recurring cost of replacement. Recycling is an end-of-life measure, not a complete sustainability case.

The honest question is not simply “Can it be recycled?” It is “How much of this particular field will become usable material, where will it go, and how will that be verified?”

1. The Evidence: The Australian Position

RE4ORM advertises an operating dedicated synthetic turf recycling facility at Barnawartha North, Victoria. It describes separation of sand, rubber and plastics, with uses including infill, underlay, bollards and construction products. These are the operator’s published descriptions, not an independent audit of every field. [1]

A Victorian Government project case study reports reuse of more than 80 tonnes of sand from Cromer Park in a Ballarat hockey field, and 33 tonnes of rubber in a Wagga Wagga running track. This supports material recovery; it does not establish that all carpet plastic became new turf. [2]

It is no longer accurate to say that Australia has no synthetic turf recycling pathway. It is equally unjustified to assume complete recycling from the existence of that pathway.

1. The Evidence (continued)

RE4ORM's FAQ says up to 95% of materials can be reused. This is an operator claim about potential reuse, not proof that 95% of each field's plastic is recycled. Its process page describes plastic outputs such as bollards and edging, while describing shockpad reuse pathways as being tested at scale. Ask for component-specific results. [1, 3]

Sutherland Shire Council's November 2025 construction bulletin records removal and recycling work at Kareela Oval. RE4ORM reports 799 tonnes recovered and 22 truck movements for that project. These reports demonstrate a real project; they do not replace a published breakdown of each material's final destination. [4, 5]

2. Understanding the Issue

Recovering sand is not recycling plastic

Ask how the reported percentage is calculated. A total by weight can be dominated by heavy infill, so a high overall recovery figure does not reveal the result for the lighter carpet. Require separate figures for sand, rubber, fibres, backing, shockpad and residual waste.

Collection, storage and processing are different

Delivery to a recycler confirms receipt. It does not, by itself, confirm that the material has been processed or sold into a useful application. Request weighbridge records, processing outcomes and evidence of the downstream destination.

Reuse in another product is not turf-to-turf recycling

Sand reused as infill and plastics used in bollards can be worthwhile outcomes. But they should be described accurately. They do not establish a closed loop in which old carpet becomes equivalent new turf carpet. Ask what the claimed loop actually includes.

Do not allow "collected for recycling", "materials recovered" and "fully recycled into new turf" to be used interchangeably.

3. Impacts and Implications

“100% recyclable”: require proof for every component

Ask whether the claim applies to the complete installed system or only a new, clean sample. Require written confirmation of acceptance for the worn carpet, backing, adhesive, infill and shockpad where removed. Identify contaminants or material combinations that could change the outcome.

A broad percentage claim is inadequate without its calculation, exclusions and component-level evidence.

“Guaranteed recycling”: test the future obligation

A facility operating today does not prove availability, pricing or acceptance when a field wears out. Require an enforceable arrangement, clear responsibility and a funded fallback if the provider closes, changes its criteria or cannot accept the material.

“Cost-comparable to landfill”: obtain a site quote

RE4ORM makes this comparison in its FAQ. Treat it as an operator claim to test through current quotations. Price uplift, preparation, transport, processing, rejected material and reporting. State the landfill alternative and assumptions used rather than repeating a general cost promise. [3]

“Carbon savings”: inspect the comparison

Require the underlying method, boundaries and assumptions. Check whether removal, haulage and processing are included. A benefit relative to landfill is not evidence that installing and repeatedly replacing synthetic turf is better than maintaining a natural field.

“Circular” does not mean the waste problem disappears

Ask what happens to products made from recovered plastic at their own end of life. Material recovery can reduce demand for new resources, but does not automatically remove eventual disposal or environmental risks.

Recycling cannot retrieve fibres or infill already dispersed into the surrounding environment. It does not answer the full impacts of the field during use.

4. Best Practice Approach

Before approval, obtain a field-specific recycling assessment and a complete end-of-life budget. Name the accepting facility, state the material conditions and require a separate destination for any rejected fraction. Do not assume an overseas example proves an Australian route.

At replacement, track the material from the oval to processing and onward use. Require a mass balance: tonnes received, material recovered by component, residual waste, storage still awaiting processing and verified downstream applications. Make the results public.

The ACCC's environmental claims guidance requires recycling claims to explain relevant facilities and conditions. NTA recommends applying that scrutiny to procurement and public communications: a recycling claim should describe the actual arrangement and its limits. [6]

5. Recommendations

1. Acknowledge real Australian progress. Recognise verified recovery without converting it into a blanket sustainability endorsement.

2. Ask specifically about carpet plastic. Report fibres and backing separately from heavy sand and rubber infill.

3. Demand destination evidence. A collection receipt or recycling intention is not proof of completed recycling.

4. Fund the full obligation. Include transport, processing, exclusions and fallback disposal in lifecycle budgets.

5. Compare with avoiding the waste. Assess best-practice natural turf, which avoids recurring synthetic carpet purchases and their end-of-life burden.

Key Takeaways

Australia has a real specialist pathway

Its existence does not guarantee full recovery for every field.

Percentages need a breakdown

Overall material recovery is not the same as plastic carpet recycling.

Follow the material to its final use

Verify the outcome rather than accepting a recycling label.

"Recycling should be demonstrated by what happens to the material, not by what is promised in the brochure."

References

1. RE4ORM. The RE4ORM Process. Operator website, observed 13 October 2026. Industry/commercial source; claims are attributed in the text.

https://re4ormrecycling.com.au/the-re4orm-process/

2. Victorian Government, CEBIC. Funded project - Australia's First Synthetic Turf Recycling Hub. Project case study reporting Cromer Park sand and rubber reuse. Government project reporting, not a full independent material audit.

https://www.cebic.vic.gov.au/grants-funding-and-investment/funded-projects/australias-first-synthetic-turf-recycling-hub

3. RE4ORM. FAQs. Operator website, observed 13 October 2026. Industry/commercial source for "up to 95%" reuse and comparative pricing claims.

https://re4ormrecycling.com.au/faqs/

4. Sutherland Shire Council. Construction Councillor Bulletin, 21 November 2025. Kareela Oval removal and recycling works.

https://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/110306/2025-11-21-Construction-Councillor-Bulletin-.pdf

5. RE4ORM. Kareela Oval. Operator project report, observed 13 October 2026. Industry/commercial source.

https://re4ormrecycling.com.au/project/kareela-oval/

6. ACCC. Making environmental claims: A guide for business. December 2023. Printed p. 22: recyclability and qualifications.

https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/greenwashing-guidelines.pdf

NTA Document Library: https://naturalturfalliance.org/document-library/

Prepared October 2026. This review identifies a documented Australian pathway; it is not an exhaustive facility inventory. No independent, field-specific mass balance was obtained for the cited projects. The due-diligence questions are NTA recommendations, not allegations of misconduct.

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This Fact Sheet has been developed with the support of Lawn Solutions Australia, the nation's largest network of turf specialists.
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Natural Turf Alliance Inc (NTA) is a Registered Association consisting of community groups committed to preserving and developing natural grass open spaces including sporting fields.
Our core focus is engaging with local councils and sporting groups in relation to best practice natural turf construction and maintenance.