



Former Nespresso boss warns coffee pods are killing environment

Lateline By Zoe Ferguson and Margot O'Neill

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Your coffee pods could be contributing to a global environmental disaster, with billions of the sleek aluminium and plastic capsules ending up in landfill in America, Europe and Australia each year.

When George Clooney became the face of Nespresso's coffee pods in 2006, it spelt the beginning of a worldwide love affair with the product that allowed people to brew espresso at home with the touch of a button.

The global market for fresh ground coffee pods went from \$7 billion in 2010 to \$17 billion in 2015. Last year, Australians spent \$215 million on coffee pods.

Former Nespresso chief executive Jean-Paul Gaillard says it is time for consumers to think about the price of convenience.

"It will be a disaster and it's time to move on that. People shouldn't sacrifice the environment for convenience," he said.

Mr Gaillard says he has even written to Clooney informing him of the environmental impact of the pods.

"Mr George Clooney didn't answer. I guess he didn't dare to answer. Or he just didn't care, I do not know," he said.

"What is clear is that someone who is meant to be pro-environment and everything [is] promoting something which is polluting."

Pods take up to 500 years to breakdown

Made from a combination of plastics and aluminium with organic matter inside, the coffee pods are not biodegradable.

It takes 150 to 500 years for aluminium and plastic capsules to breakdown in landfill.

"That's just nonsense. [It] shouldn't take place," Mr Gaillard said.

Coffee companies like Nespresso are now teaming up with recycling company TerraCycle to recycle their pods.

"We're able to set up international platforms where you can send us the capsules, we pay you for shipping, we even give you a donation to your favourite school or charity for every capsule you send in and then we shred them," TerraCycle CEO Tom Szaky said.

"We separate the organics and compost those and then we take the metals, melt those into new metal products and the plastics into new plastic products."

'Winning the war' on coffee pods

Nespresso has not released figures on how many pods are being recycled worldwide, but Mr Gaillard is not convinced recycling is the answer to the pod problem.

"I discovered that recycling doesn't really work. Except if you are very close to a smelting factory which is never the case," he said.

MAP: Australia



Key points

- Coffee pods take between 150 and 500 years to breakdown in landfill
 - Australians spent \$215 million on coffee pods in 2015
 - Former Nespresso CEO now creating sustainable coffee pods
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"Aluminium capsules have to be shredded, the coffee has to be taken away with water, the varnish to be burnt and aluminium has to be re-smelted again. You need a lot of transportation and energy."

Mr Gaillard now heads the Ethical Coffee Company which makes fully bio-sourced and biodegradable coffee pods that break down within eight months.

"This capsule doesn't contain one single molecule of petrochemical origin element. It is very difficult, a bit more expensive," he said.

"It was a tough challenge and I'll say we are slowly winning the war at this stage.

"This is the future. The planet is not ours. It will be for our kids."

Mr Szaky believes the onus of environmentally-friendly products lies with both manufacturers and consumers.

"The good news is the power is entirely with consumers to buy the right goods, because what we buy more of, those things will be on the shelf," he said.

"Consumers need to take action in consuming the right goods, and voicing where they don't like what they see, and that's how we're going to wake up in a world where the concept of garbage doesn't exist."

Topics: environment, environmental-impact, recycling-and-waste-management, food-and-cooking, australia

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PHOTO: Billions of coffee pods end up in landfill each year. (ABC Sunshine Coast: Harriet Tatham)