

Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 – 2021-2027

New South Wales is transitioning to a circular economy over the next 20 years. This means we will end up with less waste, less emissions, less harm to our environment and more jobs.

The NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 – 2021-2027 outlines the actions we will take over the next six years, the first phase of the strategy. This document answers some frequently asked questions about the strategy.

What is the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041?

The NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 – 2021-2027 aims to reduce waste and change how the NSW economy produces, consumes and recycles products and materials. It sets out a vision for transitioning to a circular economy over the next 20 years and gives the actions we will take over the next six years to deliver on our long-term objectives.

The strategy includes actions across three focus areas:

- meeting our future infrastructure and service needs
- reducing carbon emissions through better waste and materials management
- building on our work to protect the environment and human health from waste pollution.

Why did the NSW Government develop the strategy?

Under the NSW *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001*, the NSW Government regularly updates the state's waste strategy continually improve NSW's policies and targets for waste reduction and resource recovery. We're taking the opportunity in our latest review to set bold targets backed by reasonable actions to improve environmental and economic outcomes for NSW.

The new strategy replaces the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2014–2021.

What challenges will the strategy address?

Over the next 20 years, NSW waste volumes are forecast to grow from 21 million tonnes to nearly 37 million tonnes. Without action now, and without sustained action over the next two decades, we will have more waste than we can safely manage. Our environment and community will be at risk.

We are running out of space to deal with residual waste and recycling is facing challenges. Since 2018, demand for recycled materials has steadily contracted with the closure of export markets. This has resulted in an oversupply of recycled materials and a decline in their value, particularly for poorly sorted or hard-to-recycle paper and plastic. This has led to increased recycling costs for households and businesses.

Since the release of the previous waste strategy in 2014, we have grown our understanding of how the lifecycle of products and materials affects climate change. Emissions from organic waste decomposing in landfill make up more than 2% of total net annual emissions in NSW. It is estimated nearly half of global emissions arise from use and management of materials and products.

We have also seen how plastic is increasingly threatening our natural environment. Hundreds of millions of plastic items are littered each year, polluting our neighbourhoods, bushland and beaches and harming our wildlife.

These emerging challenges have informed our new strategic directions, ensuring we have the right actions in place to meet our current challenges and future needs.

How was the strategy developed?

The department produced the *Cleaning Up Our Act: The Future for Waste and Resource Recovery in NSW* issues paper to inform development of the strategy. The issues paper incorporated over 100 submissions received in response to a request for feedback in August 2019 and was placed on public exhibition in March 2020. We also held several webinars and online forums, attended by well over 300 people.

We received more than 250 responses to the issues paper. In reviewing the responses, we recognised the need for clear direction and actions on waste and resource recovery modernisation in the strategy. Another key theme was the need for reform, including support for investment in circular economy technology, removing organics from residual waste streams and the development of a statewide waste and resource recovery infrastructure plan. This feedback has guided the development of the strategy.

What is the circular economy and why is it important?

A circular economy is all about valuing our resources by getting as much use out of products and materials as possible and reducing the amount of waste we generate.

A circular economy approach changes the way we produce, assemble, sell and use products to minimise waste and to reduce our environmental impact. The circular economy can also be great for business. It can help business maximise the use of valuable resources and can contribute to innovation, growth and job creation.

How does the strategy relate to the NSW Circular Economy Policy Statement?

The NSW Circular Economy Policy Statement: *Too Good To Waste* was released in 2019 and sets the ambition and approach for creating a circular economy in NSW and provides principles to guide resource use and management. The strategy represents a major step in implementing the principles outlined in the Circular Economy Policy Statement.

How does the strategy relate to the NSW Net Zero Plan?

In 2020, we released the NSW Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020–2030, which is the foundation for NSW's action on climate change and our goal to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Under the strategy, we will implement actions to achieve the target of net zero emissions from organic waste to landfill by 2030. Actions include the separate collection of food and garden organic waste from all NSW households by 2030, and from targeted businesses including large supermarkets and hospitality businesses.

Globally, the use and management of materials are estimated to contribute nearly half of all emissions. Actions we take under the strategy to improve the efficiency of material use will contribute to our overarching net zero target.

Is the NSW Plastics Action Plan part of the strategy?

The NSW Plastics Action Plan forms a key part of the strategy focusing on the management of plastic from production and consumption to disposal and recycling. The Plastics Action Plan sets out clear actions that not only deal with downstream activities like recycling and litter prevention, but also focus attention on the points of production and supply, stopping plastic waste before it becomes a problem.

What will happen with the Waste Less, Recycle More program?

Through Waste Less, Recycle More, the government has invested over \$802 million in funding for business recycling, organics collections, market development, managing problem wastes, new waste infrastructure, local councils and programs to tackle illegal dumping and litter. It is the largest waste and recycling funding program in Australia.

The Waste Less, Recycle More program has demonstrated significant value to the NSW community in preventing waste, managing illegally disposed of waste and increasing recovery of materials to create new products. Many of these programs will continue over the next six years, with adjustments to funding levels as we build on the successes of these past programs and re-evaluate future waste priorities for NSW.

What are the new opportunities under the strategy?

The NSW Government will invest \$356 million over 5 years, with funding commencing from July 2022. The government is providing a further \$85 million over the 2021–22 financial year to continue key waste and resource recovery activities and support councils to deliver waste services, tackle illegal dumping and develop regional waste strategies.

New funding commitments under the strategy include:

- a **\$37 million** Carbon Recycling and Abatement Fund to support innovative circular economy approaches that manage waste and materials more efficiently and reduce emissions
- a **\$16 million** investment in a new joint procurement facilitation service to make it easier for local government to collectively procure waste services
- **\$24 million** to catalyse investment in strategic waste and circular economy infrastructure
- **\$65 million** to support the rollout of new organics collection services and a further **\$4 million** for food donation infrastructure and equipment
- **\$13 million** to support research into new technologies and uses for recycled material and to provide opportunities to pilot them in government projects through the new Circular Innovation Fund
- **\$15.6 million** in funding for local government collaboration through regional organisations of councils, council groups, joint organisations and voluntary regional waste groups
- more than **\$10 million** for local councils to continue litter reduction and illegal dumping prevention activities
- continued funding of **\$6 million** for the Landfill Consolidation and Environmental Improvements Grants Program to support regional councils, and **\$7.5 million** to support the installation of landfill gas capture infrastructure
- **\$66 million** for continued support of community recycling centres and household chemical clean out events
- **\$16 million** to continue work in combating illegal dumping and **\$5 million** for continuation of the NSW Asbestos Coordination Committee

- **\$5 million** in ongoing support for the planning and delivery of waste management projects working in partnership with Aboriginal communities across NSW
- **\$15 million** to continue the Bin Trim program, which assists small and medium businesses to reduce and recycle waste
- **\$38 million** for litter prevention programs to protect our environment and waterways.

How and when will government report the progress of the strategy?

The targets under the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041: Stage 1 – 2021-2027 and the NSW Plastics Action Plan are to:

- reduce total waste generated in Australia by 10% per person by 2030
- achieve an 80% average recovery rate from all waste streams by 2030
- significantly increase the use of recycled content by governments and industry
- phase out problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2025
- halve the amount of organic waste sent to landfill by 2030
- reduce litter by 60% by 2030 and plastic litter by 30% by 2025
- triple the plastics recycling rate by 2030.

We will also establish new indicators to help us track our progress on infrastructure investment and the cost of waste services and develop a new measure of the emissions performance of our waste and materials management.

Progress against the targets will be reported annually.

What are the next steps?

The NSW Government is committed to working closely with local government, industry and the community to progress the highest priority actions. We will be undertaking two phases of consultation on key actions.

Consultation phase 1 (2021–22) will cover:

- diverting organics from landfill
- local government joint procurement support
- strategic infrastructure planning
- a review of the resource recovery framework.

Consultation phase 2 (2022 onwards) will cover:

- waste levy review framework
- biogas generation and capture
- hazardous waste management.

Where can I find more information?

You can find further information about the strategy and the Plastics Action Plan on the department's website.