

NSW EPA

An estimate of dumping  
at charitable recyclers in NSW

## **Summary Report**

Updated August 2019

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## 1 Introduction

Charitable recyclers report that dumping of waste around donation drop-off points – charity bins and shops – is a significant issue. Not only does the practice create a poor impression of the charitable recycler and its operations, but it adds to the work of staff who are usually volunteers, can put them at risk of injury, and adds unnecessarily to the cost of processing, and disposal of unusable items. The National Association of Charitable Recycling Organisations (NACRO) has also campaigned extensively and successfully in NSW to have waste from charitable recyclers exempted from the waste levy. Some, although not all, have applied for and received exemptions. In addition, some local councils exempt charitable recyclers from paying landfill fees for waste disposal. The extent and cost to the community of these exemptions is unknown.

Whilst anecdotally dumping around donation drop-off points is reported to be significant, there was limited data available to demonstrate the scale of the issue both in terms of quantities and costs. There was a need to better understand this and enable action on this issue to be prioritised.

This project quantified the issue of dumping around charitable recyclers shops and bins, in terms of quantities of materials dumped and costs. The approaches that NSW local councils take to manage charitable recycling in their area was also investigated.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Participating organisations

With the support of NACRO, the assistance of charitable organisations was sought to obtain information on the quantities of materials typically donated and dumped around op-shops and clothing recycling bins, and the costs of handling and disposal, for a sample of facilities. This information was then extrapolated to the whole of NSW.

The charitable organisations that participated were:

- Anglicare
- Australian Relief Organisation
- Lifeline
- Mission Australia
- Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- The Smith Family
- St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies)

Together these organisations accounted for 507 of the 659, or 77%, of the op-shops in NSW.

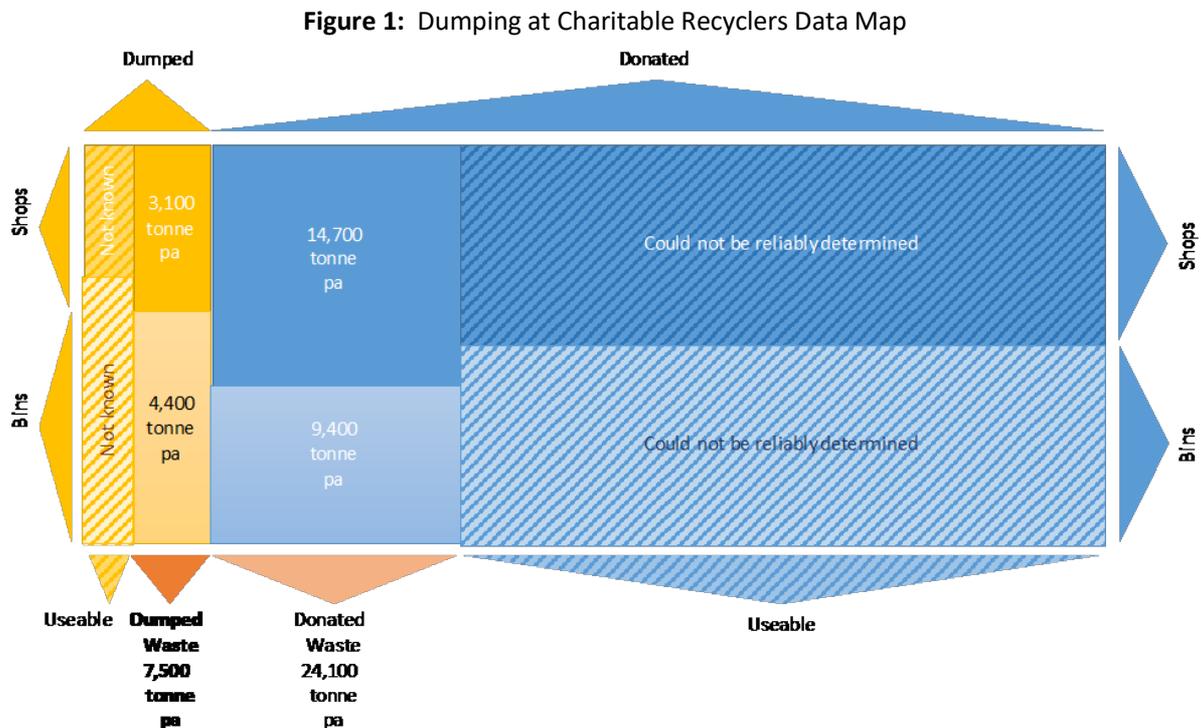
Commercial clothing recycling bin operators were not part of this research, only charitable organisations.

## 2.2 Data collection

The following information was sought from each organisation:

- For a sample of op-shops and bins across a range of locations, regions, and sizes of facilities, the number and location of the shops and bins, and information on the annual quantities of materials donated and dumped at the shop or the bin location, and the costs of handling and disposal of the waste materials was sought. Sample sizes ranged between 1 to 60 shops, and nil to several hundred bins for each organisation. Larger organisations provided information in both metropolitan and regional areas. Site visits or meetings were conducted with each organisation to outline the request, understand how the organisation operated, and answer any questions. A data collection template was provided, based on the data map in **Figure 1**.
- Whether there was an exemption from the waste levy (if this is applicable), and if the local council provided a concession for the cost of disposal, and the value of the concession.

All the organisations provided sufficient information for dumping quantities and cost to be estimated.



### Data Map Definitions:

- Donated – means either delivered to the shop or placed inside a bin
- Dumped – means placed outside the shop or the bin
- Useable – means material that can be used by the organisation – could be donated or dumped
- Waste – means material that is discarded by the organisation – could be donated or dumped
- Waste RIDCR – means material dumped outside shops and bins that is waste.

## 3 Key findings

### 3.1 Dumping quantities and costs

At the time of the review there were **659** Op Shops in NSW: 230 in metropolitan Sydney, and 429 in regional and remote NSW. These were estimated to have **2,383** clothing recycling bins, or on average 3.6 bins per shop. Two thirds of these bins were in metropolitan Sydney. The number of bins varied from some organisations that do not use bins, such as Salvo Stores, to the Smith Family who have over 40 bins for every store. Several organisations such as Salvo Stores and Lifeline Direct have moved away from using clothing recycling bins because of the problem of dumping around them. Those organisations that did use bins reported being diligent in ensuring any dumped material is cleared quickly so further dumping is discouraged.

Most organisations that provided data had obtained an exemption from the waste levy where this was applicable, and some benefited from concessions to tipping fees (eg. in Wollongong and Newcastle). Some organisations used volunteers to transport waste to the landfill and others had commercial waste collection arrangements that also varied within an organisation depending on the store location (eg. metropolitan verses small country town). This resulted in differences in the costs of waste disposal incurred by different organisations.

The results are summarised in **Figure 1**. Dumping around shops was estimated to be 3,100 tonnes per year, and around bins 4,400 tonnes per year, and total dumping **7,500** tonnes per year. The total cost of disposing of dumped material was estimated to be **\$1.67 million** per year, or **\$2,540** per shop per year.

A greater amount of material was **donated but unusable** by the recipient organisation – an estimated **24,100** tonnes per year, or 3.2 times the amount dumped. The cost of disposing of donated but unusable material was estimated to be **\$5.63 million** per year, or \$8,540 per shop per year. The results

Dumping around shops averaged 4.7 tonnes per shop per year, and dumping around bins averaged 1.8 tonnes per bin per year. Material donated but unusable, whether collected via bins or via shops, averaged 37 tonnes per shop per year.

The majority (77%) of the total cost of waste disposal for all charity organisations was spent on disposing of unusable donations. Disposing of dumped material was approximately 23% of the total cost of waste disposal.

Using an adult population for NSW of 5.68 million<sup>1</sup>, the estimated 7,500 tonnes of waste dumped around op-shops and bins per year equated to **1.3** kilograms of waste dumped per adult. This was half the amount estimated by research undertaken in Queensland by Uniting Care<sup>2</sup>, which found **2.6** kilograms of waste per adult was dumped around op-shops and bins each year.

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Department of Planning, Population and household projections, 2016, persons 18 years and older

<sup>2</sup> Uniting Care Community, Does Your Donation Count Or Cost? Understanding Donating and Dumping Behaviours And Their Impacts For Queensland Charities, March 2016

### 3.2 Councils' approaches to clothing recycling bins

101 of NSW's 128 councils had no information on either policy or fees on their website. Six councils – all in metropolitan Sydney – do not permit clothing recycling bins on council land: Campbelltown, Canterbury Bankstown, Cumberland, Georges River, Randwick, and Sydney.

Ryde Council does not allow bins on council land other than 30 bins operated by The Smith Family that are part of a council sponsored recycling program. The council website provides a map showing their locations, and clear information on what to donate and what not to donate.

Councils that did have a policy that provided for the placement of clothing recycling bins on council land generally only permitted them in council car parks. Most kept a register of bins, charged an annual fee for use of the land, and an application fee. The 2017-18 annual fee per bin ranged from \$76.50 in Narromine Shire Council to \$648.50 in Inner West Council. Most councils also listed an impounding fee for bins placed without approval.

Only three councils – Moree Plains, Richmond Valley, and Wollongong – indicated in their policy documents or Fees and Charges that charitable recyclers could access lower tipping fees at the council waste facility. However, Vinnies reported that none of their stores in the Forbes-Wilcannia region were charged for dumping of rubbish at their local tip, as waste was usually transported in a ute or trailer by volunteers, and the quantities were small enough to be considered domestic.