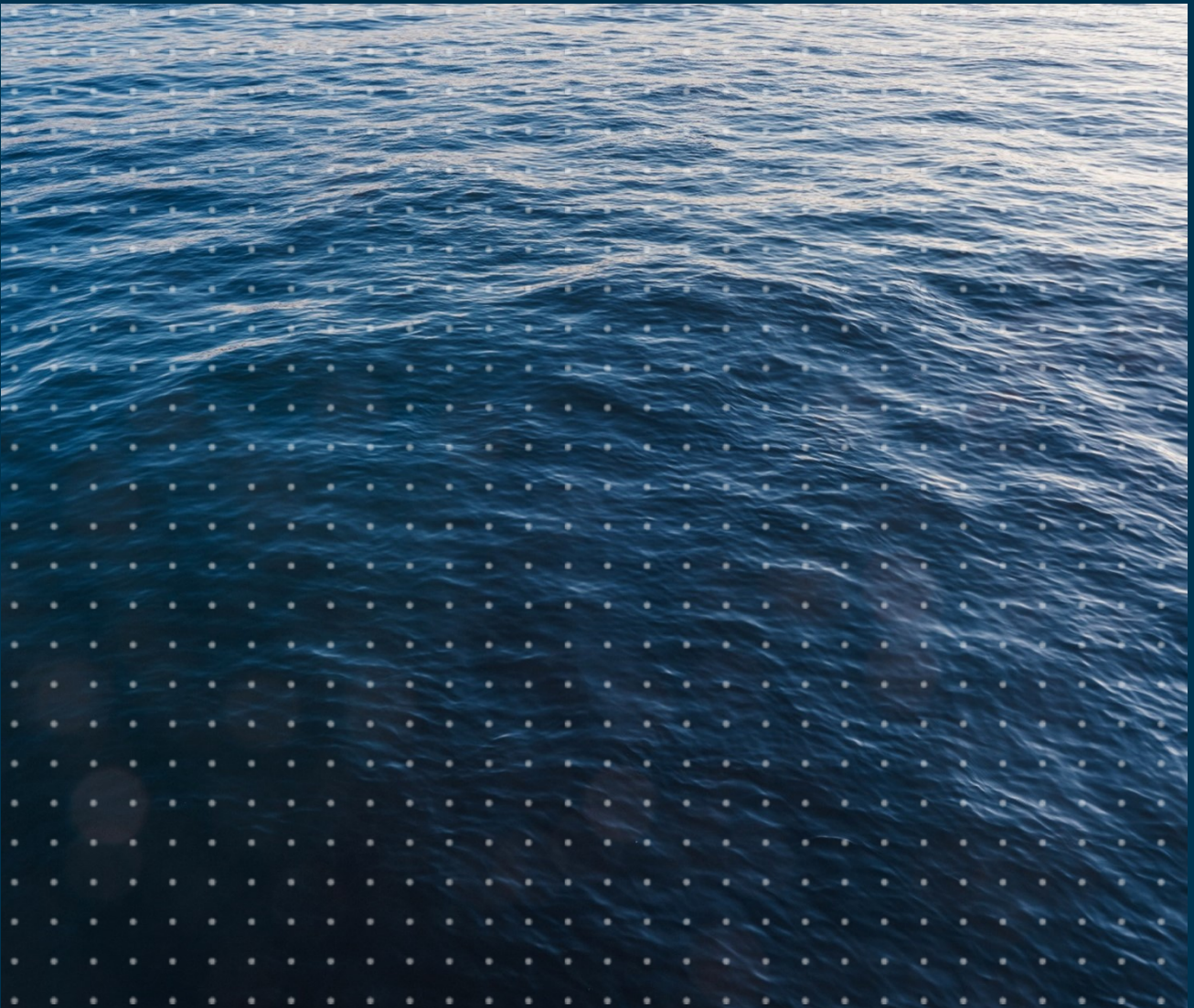




Environment Protection Authority

Taking a regional response to the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy

Guidance document



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Through the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy, the State Government has committed \$15.6 million over five years to fund Regional Organisations of Councils, Joint Organisations and voluntary regional waste groups to coordinate a regional approach to implement the strategy.

This guidance assists regional waste groups to plan and prepare their regional responses to the *NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041*.

1. Introduction

Under *Waste Less, Recycle More*, the EPA-funded Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs), Joint Organisations (JOs) and voluntary regional waste groups prepared regional waste strategies and submitted annual action plans as a condition of funding.^{1,2} The strategies guided the work of regional groups and their member councils and demonstrated a regional commitment towards achieving waste management and the State's waste diversion targets.

In July 2021 the NSW Government released its *Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041 Stage 1 2021–2027: A guide to future infrastructure needs* (WASM), and the *NSW Plastics Action Plan*.³ Together, these set out the actions, policies and targets the NSW Government will take to tackle waste reduction and plastic pollution.

The EPA is working with the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) to implement the WASM strategy and report on the targets at a state level. Regional waste groups are a key delivery partner for the WASM Strategy.

Through the WASM Strategy, the NSW Government has committed \$15.6 million over five years to fund ROCs, JOs and voluntary regional waste groups to assist local governments in their critical role of managing waste and recycling within their communities. This funding will continue to support the work of regional waste coordinators to identify regional priorities and work with member councils to implement projects identified under their strategies.

This guidance assists regional waste groups to develop a regional WASM strategy that reflects local councils' priorities and services. It was developed after consultation with regional waste coordinators over two workshops held on 3 and 4 November 2021.

2. Why a new regional approach?

The policy landscape in NSW has changed. The WASM strategy is very different to Waste Less, Recycle More. It represents a 20-year vision for how we will build on our work to protect the environment and human health from waste pollution. It goes further to focus on meeting emerging circular economy and infrastructure needs and to address how communities and businesses can reduce carbon emissions through better management of waste and recovered materials. It is more than a refreshed suite of support programs – proposing new policy, legislative and regulatory instruments to drive the delivery of these new expanded priorities. This includes action on source-separated organics collection, policy to incentivise landfill gas capture and biogas production, and establishing a policy to increase industry uptake of recovered and low carbon emitting resources. The new priorities for the WASM strategy are complex and require careful sequencing and integrated design. The EPA has prepared a Waste Delivery Plan (WDP) that sets out its plan for how it will work with councils, industry and communities to design and deliver on WASM priorities.⁴

The past few years have seen significant societal changes because of COVID-19 combined with major international events such as China's National Sword Policy. Unforeseeable events and conditions means the approach to regional planning must be adaptive.

¹ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/waste-less-recycle-more>

² <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/waste/local-council-operations>

³ <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/environment-energy-and-science/waste-and-sustainable-materials-strategy>

⁴ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/strategic-direction-for-waste-in-nsw>

For these reasons, a different approach to regional waste planning and management is needed – one that moves away from detailed and prescriptive plans to a strategic approach that can be easily updated as circumstances change.

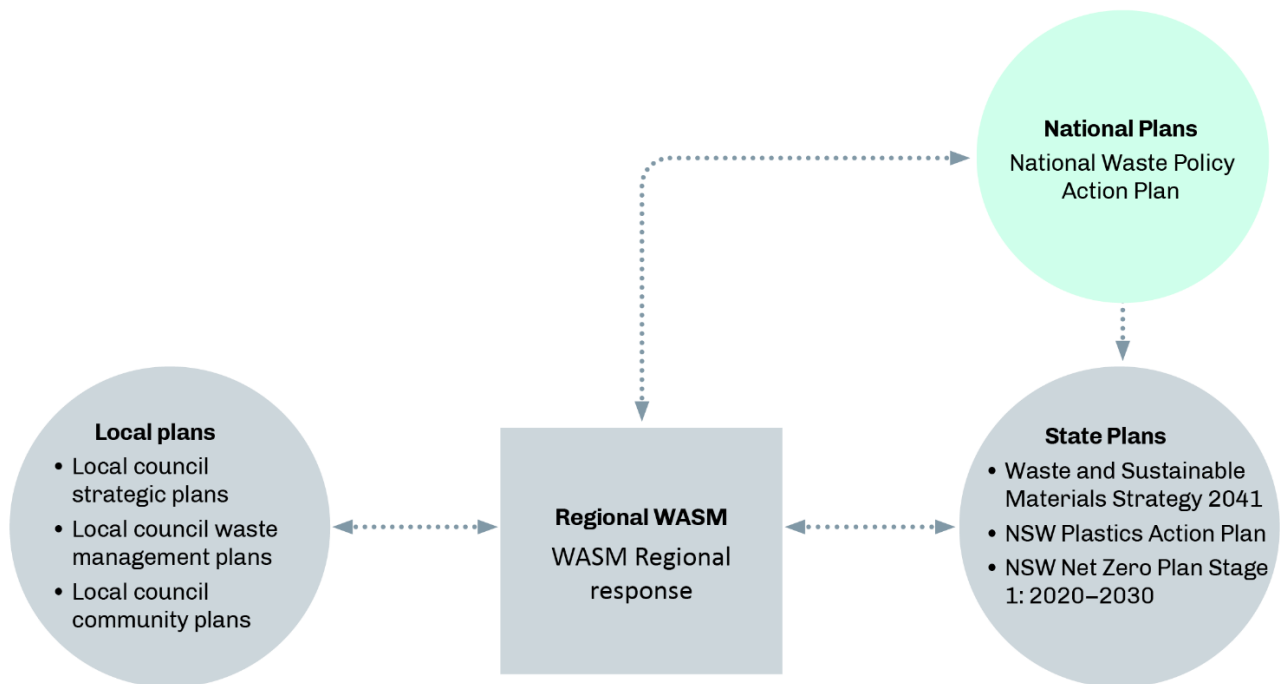
The development of a regional response to the WASM strategy in 2021–22 (referred to hereafter as ‘the document’) is a key deliverable under the Regional Support and Coordination Program. The document can be supplemented with an action plan that can be submitted until the end of December 2022.

3. The opportunity

The WASM strategy gives regional waste groups an opportunity to implement relevant parts of the strategy at a regional level, and to:

- identify and articulate regional priorities
- set regional targets and outcomes
- guide the allocation of resources
- send market signals by identifying infrastructure needs where possible within regions
- assist councils to identify priorities and gain council buy-in for regional initiatives
- provide evidence and support for EPA funding applications (e.g. funding applications may ask if the project is aligned with the regional approach and is identified in the action plan) and
- communicate and engage the community, councils and other stakeholders about a region’s aspirations and priorities for waste management, recycling and transitioning to a circular economy.

Figure 1: Strategic placement of the regional response to the WASM strategy with other plans and strategies



4. Key principles for developing the document

There are seven guiding principles to frame the regional response.

Principle 1: Relatable

A publication that local councils, members of the community and other stakeholders and partners can use and read with ease.

Principle 2: Evidence-based

A publication that contains the best available data (including data from the Local Government Waste and Resource Recovery Data Report) as well as findings from evaluation and research, to support priorities and project selection.⁵ Headline figures and data should be in the final document. Detailed analysis can be made available in a technical supporting document and its publication is optional.

Principle 3: Responsive

Regional waste groups are well placed to understand the needs and expectations of their member councils and communities. The EPA supports regional waste groups to decide how best to express and present information in the document.

As more detail is released about the implementation of the WASM strategy, action plans can accompany the document.

Principle 4: Aligned

The document should adopt a 20-year horizon with a 5-year focus, with a minimum 1-year or up to 5-year action plan to align with the WASM funding.

Regional waste groups are encouraged to incorporate any strategic objectives that their member councils might have, such as addressing Climate Change Emergency Declarations or Net Zero Policies.

The document must align with the WASM priority areas to ensure a level of consistency across the regions and support the development of a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework that the EPA will develop. The WASM priority areas include:

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

Principle 5: Adaptive and resilient

Adaptive – the document can be easily adapted to respond to unforeseen policy changes or external factors, such as the China National Sword Policy. A quick review of the document should be made annually to ensure the document still aligns with any unforeseen major policy or regulatory changes.

⁵ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/warr-strategy/policy-makers/surveys>

Environmental resilience – the document should consider the impact of natural disaster events. This may include a focus on resilience in infrastructure needs, such as through emergency waste management planning.

Principle 6: Efficiencies

The document needs to identify efficiencies across the region to optimise opportunities, resources and funding. Selected projects supported by councils should drive a regional impact. Efficiencies may be gained by working across neighbouring regions, such as identifying opportunities under the Joint Procurement Program.

Principle 7: Circularity

The EPA acknowledges that many councils and regional waste groups have limited resources. Councils and regional waste groups do not have the powers or scope to deliver circular economy outcomes that are impacted by activities and infrastructure outside their boundaries.

The document should be approached with a circular economy lens, moving away from the linear approach of 'take, make, dispose'. It should consider what actions or programs can be undertaken within the region that contribute to a circular economy. For example, an agreed action may be that member councils will buy products made from recycled content, helping to drive end markets. Or they could buy from suppliers who take part in product stewardship schemes, such as B-cycle and DrumMUSTER.^{6,7}

5. Guidance on minimum requirements

5.1 WASM program areas

The WASM strategy includes funding for new programs and funding to continue initiatives that were part of *Waste Less, Recycle More*. Detailed information about timing for grant and program funding will be provided as the WASM Strategy begins from mid-2022.

WASM program areas and funding overview

New initiatives

- Carbon recycling and abatement fund **\$37 million**
- Facilitating joint council procurement of waste services **\$16 million**
- Landfill gas capture infrastructure **\$7.5 million**
- Local government waste and resource recovery **\$25.6 million**
 - funding for local government **\$10 million**
 - continuation of Regional Coordination and Strategy Program **\$15.6 million**
- Diverting organics from landfill **\$69 million**
- Avoiding plastic waste **\$13 million**
 - Circular Materials Fund **\$10 million**
 - Plastic Research Partnership **\$2 million**

⁶ B-cycle is a stewardship initiative that provides robust accreditation for everyone in the battery value chain, including battery brands, retailers, drop-off points and the whole recycling network.

⁷ DrumMUSTER provides Australian agricultural and veterinary chemical users with a recycling pathway for eligible empty agvet chemical containers.

- education program for single-use plastic phase outs **\$1 million**
- support for improved plastic nurdle management at manufacturing facilities
- Strategic infrastructure investment fund **\$24 million**
- Circular innovation fund to support research into new technologies and uses for recycled content and opportunities to pilot them in government projects **\$13 million**.

Building on our success

- Preventing illegal dumping **\$16 million**
- Litter prevention **\$38 million**
- Household problem wastes **\$66 million**
- Aboriginal communities waste management **\$5 million**
- Landfill consolidation and environmental improvements program **\$6 million**
- NSW Asbestos Coordination Committee **\$5 million**
- Business recycling **\$15 million**.

Councils and Regional Coordinators are encouraged to seek funding or co-contributions opportunities outside of WASM that can be leveraged to deliver WASM priorities and circular economy initiatives. Examples might include funding from other council work areas, such as water and park management or environmental services teams working on climate change and emissions reduction projects.

There may be other initiatives and projects that regional waste groups or councils support that can be linked to achieving WASM priorities. These can be included in the document and action plan.

Examples may include:

- support for the Aboriginal Communities Waste Management Program
- managing asbestos-contaminated materials
- managing plastic waste and pollution
- local government procurement actions to support a circular economy
- climate change and low carbon economies
- disaster resilience and waste management planning
- strategic planning or future waste infrastructure needs.

5.2 Alignment with WASM priorities and themes

The development of the document will be an iterative process. Regional waste groups can begin discussions with their member councils on key priorities, aspirations, themes and outcomes.

Figure 2 provides an example of how the document can be structured around the WASM priorities and themes. Regional waste groups need to show how their regional response fits in with the three WASM priority areas:

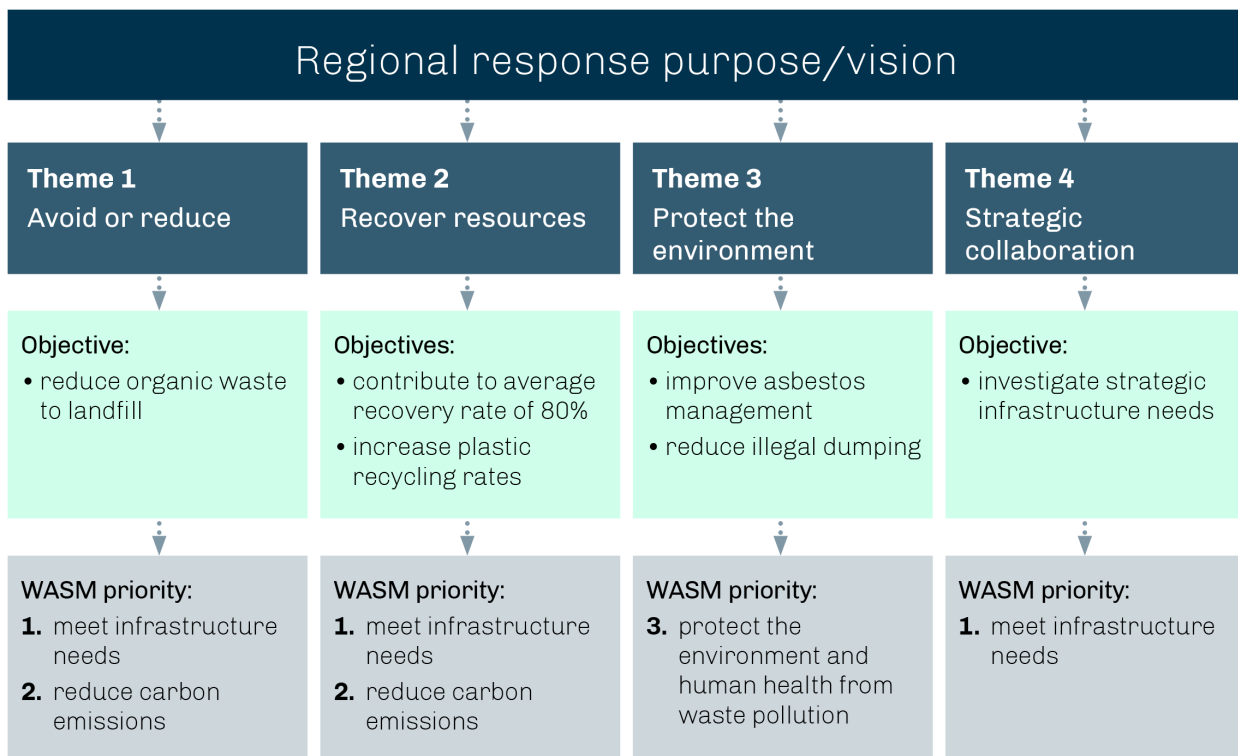
1. meeting our future infrastructure and service needs
2. reducing carbon emissions through better waste and materials management
3. building on our work to protect the environment and human health from waste pollution.

The following themes should be used to structure the document:

- avoid or reduce
- recover resources
- protect the environment
- strategic collaboration.

Other themes can be added, as needed. Using the same themes provides consistency and makes it easier to report, monitor and evaluate.

Figure 2 – Alignment with WASM priorities and themes



Please follow the outline below for the basic structure of the document for regional waste groups. The information in each section can be developed in a way that best responds to the needs of a particular region. The amount of time spent developing the document and level of detail required will be different for each regional waste group. Some groups may have new councils that need to be engaged with for the first time, while other groups will not have any changes. Some groups may have had significant population changes which may impact current and forecasted waste generation rates.

6.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The EPA's Acknowledgement of Country can be used and/or adapted by regional waste groups.



Please use: *This program is funded and supported by the NSW EPA through the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041.*

6.3 Introduction and background/policy context

- Statement of purpose
- Alignment with the WASM priority areas, National Waste Policy, National Packaging Targets, State Regional Plans, Council Waste Strategies etc
- Guiding principles such as circular economy, sustainable development goals, Net zero emissions, the waste hierarchy.

6.4 Where are we today?

- Overview of achievements and performance against the previous regional waste strategy and delivery of Waste Less, Recycle More programs
- Short summary of the region's waste and resource recovery profile/baseline, population and demographic information (headline figures only)
- Brief outline of range of current services and key infrastructure within the region, including existing landfills with details about gas capture or flaring systems
- Summary of any significant local government or regional initiatives, such as community education and behaviour change campaigns
- Summary of the current and forecast waste generation up to 2027 and 2041 for the region
- Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) position for each council in the region, including any current or planned services based on number of households and/or business and contract expiry dates where relevant
- Outline regional challenges (e.g. infrastructure needs and services).

6.5 Where do we want to get to?

- Provide a short narrative that sets the strategic outlook, themes, strategic objectives and targets for the region. Refer to the three WASM priority areas and themes to support the vision as outlined in Figure 3.
- Plans to consolidate and/or improve landfills
- Summary of any planned infrastructure or new services and/or a discussion on what these may be in the future.

6.6 Strategic objectives

- Use the themes agreed by member councils to set clear strategic objectives under each WASM priority area. For example, under the theme Avoid and Reduce Waste, an objective might be to 'divert food organic material from residual bins'. This would align with priority area 2: Reducing carbon emissions through better waste and materials management.

6.7 How are we going to get there?

- Provide a short statement explaining how you will deliver the strategy through the development of an action plan (which can come later).
- Add a short description of what the action plan is and its purpose – that is, outline detailed actions, responsibilities to deliver actions, timelines, KPIs and progress against KPIs. State how often the action plan will be updated (e.g. this could be annually to align with submitting an annual action plan to the EPA) to adjust for changes to projects or timelines for delivery.

7. Process for developing the document

The process of obtaining endorsement from member councils is at the discretion of each regional waste group. The method of consultation and engagement with member councils and the broader community is a decision for each regional waste group. The EPA will need to see documented evidence, such as a letter or approval/endorsement from council, that member councils are supportive of the document prepared by regional waste groups.

8. Timetable for delivery and next steps

8.1 Final document

Some groups may choose to submit a final draft, while securing council endorsement, before submitting the final document.

Please advise the EPA if you will be submitting a final draft or a final endorsed document.

8.2 Final document submission

Please refer to the EPA website for the submission date.

8.3 Action plan

The action plan can be prepared after the regional response document is developed and after further information is available on the WASM program timelines and the new monitoring and evaluation framework is ready.

8.4 Action plan submission

Please refer to the EPA website for the submission date. The first action plan can be set for any length of time that suits the region's needs (e.g. it can be 1, 2 or up to 5 years. We will ask for the action plan to be submitted annually, so it can be updated.

9. Tips to get started

Adopting an iterative process is recommended. Regional waste groups can start talking to their member councils about what their priorities and focus areas should be under the WASM strategy. When a detailed program funding allocation timetable is made available (in mid-2022) discussions with councils can continue to identify objectives, projects and funding and will help to finalise the document and prepare the action plan.

The EPA's *Regional waste avoidance and resource recovery strategy guidance* is a useful reference on how to write and prepare a regional waste strategy.⁸ This guidance document contains a template action plan you could follow.

When considering a long-term horizon, look to other council strategies and plans that take a longer-term view that may link to WASM priorities or help with cross-sector projects, such as:

- local council community strategic plans
- local council economic plans
- local council waste management strategies
- local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPS) and other strategic planning documents
- If located in Sydney, visit the Greater Sydney Commission and find the District Plan that covers your regional waste group
- If located in a regional area, visit NSW DPE and find the Regional Plan that covers your regional waste group.

10. Illegal Dumping Strategy

The EPA will prepare a new Illegal Dumping Strategy, which is expected to be completed in the second half of 2022. Regional waste groups will be kept informed on the strategy's development and how they can incorporate this into their regional responses, without delaying delivery of the final document.

11. Litter Prevention Strategy

In your regional response to WASM, the document should reference the WASM litter targets, the region's intention to support the targets and any high-level litter prevention priorities. You can note in the document that a separate regional litter prevention strategy will be developed before June 2023. The EPA's litter prevention team will provide further information on the development of regional litter strategies.

12. Preparing Action plans

- When preparing Action plans, set SMART actions and targets (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) for each objective. This can include a discussion of barriers, risks and opportunities. Set KPIs for measuring performance against targets.

⁸ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/publications/warrlocal/140074-regional-warr-strategy>

- Targets can reflect local needs but should also consider WASM strategy targets. When setting targets, consider the baseline position – this will help identify what is achievable and determine the rate of change needed to achieve a final target.

13. Let's keep talking and collaborating

Over the coming months, we encourage regional coordinators to talk to each other and with the EPA about the development of their regional response to the WASM strategy. Given some of the complexities outlined in this guidance – and the fact that WASM programs are still under development – we understand questions and issues will arise. The quarterly regional coordination meetings will be an opportunity to discuss progress, problem solve and collaborate on the development of your regional response.