"We have seen a lasting improvement of a 15% increase in our landfill diversion and reduction of our waste levy payments each month."

Gavin Hughes
Coordinator Waste Services
Kempsey Shire Council

The rural residents of Kempsey Shire have embraced a new weekly food and garden organics collection and their dedication has contributed to a 15% drop in waste going to landfill in just 12 months.

Kempsey Shire Council has expanded its existing kerbside food organics and garden organics (FOGO) collection service to 3,012 rural and semi-rural households thanks to a $187,500 grant from the NSW Environment Protection Authority’s Waste Less, Recycle More Organics Infrastructure Fund.

Each household was given a 240 litre green bin, along with a kitchen caddy, a roll of compostable bin liners, educational material and a waste hotline number.

In an example of ‘walking the talk’, the bins were made from up to 40% recycled material and the kitchen caddies were made from up to 100% recycled material.

At the same time council changed the frequency of red bin collections from weekly to fortnightly across the entire local government area (LGA) (13,000
The new service is very easy-to-use and it encourages all households to dispose of waste in a more sustainable manner, which is ultimately reducing the amount we put to landfill.”

Marnie Jeffery resident, Turners Flat

Council changed the red bin collection from weekly to fortnightly across the entire LGA.

Sort and save

Kempsey Shire Council delivered a community education program branded Sort & Save to support the roll out. Educational activities included local newspaper and radio advertising, distribution of printed material, a social media campaign and detailed information on council’s website. The council also ran community outreach activities at events, shopping centres and rural locations.

While there was some negative feedback at first, the community response was largely positive due to council’s effective education campaign. The campaign began months before the service change and took into account experiences from neighbouring councils.

The introduction of the new system in 2017 was much more successful than an earlier trial. In the 2014 trial council provided kitchen caddies and compostable liners to residents in town with an existing fortnightly garden organics collection service. In 2017 the new weekly green bin service was introduced for all food and garden waste to divert FOGO material from landfill and convert it into compost.

The changes to the red bin collection meant residents needed to conserve bin space. The bin change and persuasive education campaign encouraged households to re-evaluate their daily practices and change their waste management behaviour.

Measure of success

The roll out of the new FOGO service to rural and semi-rural areas and the simultaneous change of bin collection frequencies across the whole LGA increased Kemspey Shire’s diversion rates by 15%.

A waste audit in October 2017 in areas covered by the new collection service found that:

- the average household put 15.4 kilograms or 129 litres of FOGO into their kerbside bins each week
59% of food waste was being recovered in the organics bin
78% of loose food waste was recovered in the organics bin
99% of garden organics was recovered in the organics bin
contamination in organics bins was low at 1.5% by weight and 1.1% by volume.

In addition Kempsey Shire Council’s new service has:
- reduced the cost of the waste levy on the local community
- extended the life of the local landfill
- diverted valuable resources from landfill to recycling or composting
- reduced landfill air and water pollution as a result of less food and organics matter going to waste, including reducing methane which is one of the major greenhouse gases
- improved efficiencies and reduced costs for the community.

Figure 1: Changes to Kempsey Shire’s kerbside bin collection service

Looking to the future

Kempsey Shire Council plans to continue its community education campaign highlighting the right way to dispose of food waste. Council also plans to work on reducing commercial food waste and recovering more food (mostly containerised) from residual waste bins.