



Reducing Waste: Implementation Strategy 2011–2015

Cover photos: (*Left*) Three bin collection system/DECCW (*Top to bottom*) Glass bottle recycling/DECCW; Aluminium recycling/DECCW; Waste avoidance and resource recovery/DECCW

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1. Introduction

The new way of managing waste starts with the idea of avoiding the creation of waste in the first place wherever possible. This approach relies on efficient production processes, product design which minimises material intensity and toxicity, and optimal packaging. Its success depends on action at all levels of government, industry and the community.

In 2009, a new National Waste Policy set the agenda for waste and resource management across Australia. Environment ministers agreed to a landmark national framework for product stewardship and announced that televisions and computers would be the first products to be covered. This type of expedited national approach to product stewardship is essential to achieving effective waste avoidance and resource recovery.

State-level action is also crucial. The NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2007 (the 'Waste Strategy') provides an essential framework for reducing waste generation and improving the efficient use of resources. The strategy sets waste avoidance and resource recovery goals and targets for 2014 in four key result areas:

- preventing and avoiding waste
- increasing the recovery and use of secondary materials across municipal, commercial and industrial (C&I) and construction and demolition (C&D) sectors
- reducing toxicity in products and materials
- reducing litter and illegal dumping.

In 2010, the NSW Government commissioned a review of the Waste Strategy to ensure that the policies and programs applied to waste management and resource recovery were optimised and sufficient to achieve the 2014 resource recovery targets. The review found that state and local government, the community and industry all accept the need for greater resource recovery and waste minimisation.

2. Progress towards the Waste Strategy targets

In 2008–09, NSW residents and industry recycled about 9.5 million tonnes of waste, nearly 60% of that generated. This is up from a recycling rate of 45% in 2002–03 when the Waste Strategy was first established. Over the same six-year period, waste disposal increased by a modest 3.5% or 0.2 million tonnes. As a result, recycling has absorbed almost all the 38% increase in materials entering the waste management system in NSW since 2002–03.

The large increases in recycling shown in Table 1 were achieved even as the population and economy grew by 6.9% and 9.5%, respectively, between 2002–03 and 2008–09.

NSW is tracking well towards its 2014 recycling targets for C&D waste, but we need to refocus our efforts to guarantee that the 2014 resource recovery targets will be achieved.

Waste sector	2000 baseline	2002-03	2004–05	2006-07	2008-09	2014 target
Municipal	26%	30%	33%	38%	44%	66%
C&I	28%	34%	38%	44%	52%	63%
C&D	65%	64%	62%	67%	73%	76%
Overall	-	45%	46%	52%	59%	n/a
Total number of tonnes recycled (millions)	-	5.3	6.0	8.0	9.5	n/a

Table 1. Progress towards recycling targets

3. Refocusing our efforts to achieve the Waste Strategy targets

To achieve the targets, NSW needs a viable and mature recycling industry. This requires enhanced resource recovery, alternative waste treatment (AWT) infrastructure and strong community engagement.

This implementation strategy represents a further stage of initiatives that focus on those specific waste types, collection systems and infrastructure needs where the potential for improvements has been identified as the greatest.

By 30 September 2011, the NSW Government will develop sub-targets for each of the 2014 waste targets to avoid waste generation and increase resource recovery of key types of material. Sub-targets for specific waste materials, such as food and garden waste, and paper and cardboard, will support industry and community efforts to avoid waste and recycle these materials.

The NSW Government's review of progress towards achieving the 2014 waste targets highlighted specific themes for governments, industry and the community to ensure the right actions are taken to meet the targets.

Five new focus areas are proposed:

- 1. Making it easier for households to separate and recover their waste
- 2. Making it easier for businesses to separate and recover their waste
- 3. Reducing or removing problem wastes to improve resource recovery and produce environmentally safe recyclable materials
- 4. Facilitating investment in waste infrastructure
- 5. Reducing litter and combating illegal dumping

By 31 December 2012, the NSW Government will review the current resource recovery targets to assess whether they should be increased as a result of the actions in this implementation Strategy.



Focus Area 1: Making it easier for households to separate and recover their waste

Barriers

Municipal waste is predominantly generated by households. In 2008–09, the NSW community recycled 44% or 1.86 million tonnes of the municipal waste generated. The municipal waste recycled in 2008–09 increased by 97% or 0.92 million tonnes on 2002–03 levels, while disposal grew by just 11% or 0.2 million tonnes.

While recycling has increased dramatically, significantly more tonnes of waste will need to be recovered to achieve the 66% municipal target by 2014. Achieving that rate by 2008–09 would have required the recovery of an additional 0.94 million tonnes of material that year. However, the actual increase needed in tonnes of material recovered by 2014 is expected to be even greater than this because of the likely continued increases in waste generation through population growth and economic activity.

Analysis of the household waste has identified that food makes up 40% of the household waste in the residual (red) bin (Figure 1) and this could potentially be added to garden waste to form a consolidated organic waste stream. An estimated 23% of the waste in the red bin is dry recyclables that could be recovered (Figure 2), consisting largely of paper (8.8%), plastic (8.7%) and glass (3.6%).

Lack of progress on source separation of household waste and recycling of domestic dry recyclables may be due to apathy, lack of knowledge, or insufficient bin capacity or emptying frequency, or a combination of all of these. The growing number of households in apartment blocks compared with those in single dwelling houses also presents very different waste management opportunities, particularly for garden and food waste, and these will require new strategies.

Waste disposal per capita and recycling rates vary greatly from council to council, possibly reflecting different socio-demographic circumstances, various approaches by local government to waste management, or a lack of information. In 2008–09, across NSW there were 55 different types of bin configurations and collection frequencies for kerbside collections provided by councils.

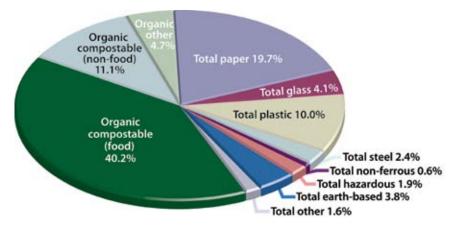


Figure 1: Composition of waste in the red residual waste bin

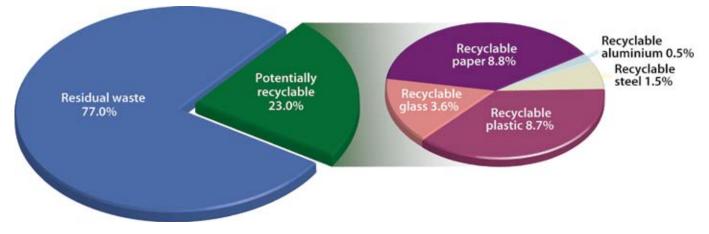


Figure 2: Potentially recoverable dry recyclables in the red residual waste bin

The effectiveness of kerbside dry recycling also varies widely between councils. For example, while communities in the Greater Sydney Region recover on average 68% of potentially recoverable dry recyclables overall, the best recovery rate is 88% while other areas in the region are achieving recovery rates in the low 40% range.

Improving the collection performance of dry recyclables would help reduce the average 32% of potentially recoverable dry recyclables that are currently lost to landfill and contribute considerably to achieving the overall recovery target of 66% for municipal waste.

More effective separation of recyclable materials by households has been identified as a way of improving downstream recycling options by reducing the level of contamination by plastic, glass and other problem materials.

Making the disposal of problem wastes which need specialist treatment more convenient for households, via accessible drop-off facilities, would help reduce contamination and improve recovery of recyclables.

There are two key obstacles to creating a consolidated organic waste stream so that the residual waste stream is essentially dry waste:

- food waste is often disposed of in plastic bags which compromise the recoverability of the resultant organic waste stream
- soiled nappies (and like products) need to be collected weekly and thus removed from residual waste if those bins are to be collected less frequently.

Strategy

To better match waste separation practices with the technology that recovers and treats waste by:

Best practice household collection

1.1 encouraging councils to adopt best practice systems for household collections through:

- (a) urban and large regional centres adopting as a minimum -
 - (i) three-bin collection systems with separate bins for dry recyclables, food/garden and residual waste, or
 - (ii) where the residual waste stream is processed at an alternative waste treatment plant, separate bin systems for dry recyclables, residual waste and, where collection is viable, garden waste, or
 - (iii) a combination of these systems to service free-standing and multi-unit housing types within a local government area

with the target for a best practice system achieving at least a 75% recovery rate of dry recyclables through kerbside collections

- (b) the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) developing best practice collection and drop-off depot guidelines for small regional centres with less than 5000 people and remote council areas in consultation with RENEW NSW, individual local councils and the Local Government and Shires Associations (LGSA) by 1 December 2011
- (c) DECCW working with local councils to ensure that bin capacities and collection frequencies are sufficient for householders to recycle (recognising that inadequate collection capacity is an impediment to maximising recycling) and that effective education is provided
- 1.2 increasing the recovery of organic material from household bins by:
 - (a) accelerating the introduction of compostable bin bags for food waste to enable streaming with garden waste collection
 - (b) supporting home composting of food and garden waste
- 1.3 establishing a steering committee of appropriate state and local government representatives and relevant experts to assist local councils and regional organisations of councils in the formulation and execution of their waste contracts

Expand local waste collection centres

- 1.4 expanding the number of local waste collection centres (drop-off points) across NSW and:
 - (a) developing, by 30 September 2011, best practice design standards and a locational strategy for a network of permanent local waste collection centres in consultation with local councils, RENEW NSW, industry and LGSA, with the aim of achieving at least one such centre for every 50,000 residents across NSW
 - (b) developing, by 30 September 2011, an operational policy outlining the role of the permanent local waste collection centres, including a proposed list of problem wastes that can be received
 - (c) developing, by 30 September 2011, and in consultation with local councils, RENEW NSW, industry and LGSA, a financial management plan for the operation of the local waste collection centres that provides for overall cost recovery while allowing residents to dispose of small quantities of problematic residential waste within their local government area free of charge

Making bags compostable and dealing with nappies

- 1.5 phasing out the use of non-compostable bags (other than reusable carry bags) in food and grocery outlets in NSW by:
 - (a) convening a working group with retailers, consumer groups, industry and local councils to determine the appropriate standards for compostable bags used within the food and grocery retail sector (including all fast food outlets) and develop an agreed implementation plan by 30 September 2011 (including assessing the appropriateness of using Australian Standard AS4736 or EN1342 for compostable bags for this purpose)
 - (b) if necessary, conducting appropriate trials of compostable bags with the food and grocery retail sector by 1 July 2012
 - (c) examining the feasibility of a prohibition of non-compostable bags in the food and grocery retail sector by 1 July 2014
 - (d) identifying, by 30 June 2014, those other sectors in which it is feasible to eliminate the use of noncompostable bags and targeting prohibition by 1 July 2016
- 1.6 supporting the objective of removing organics from household residual waste bins so they can be collected fortnightly by eliminating soiled nappies and similar care products from this waste stream at collection by:
 - (a) establishing a working group, to be convened by DECCW, of nappy manufacturers, consumer groups, the waste industry and local councils to examine the feasibility of options of achieving this objective without compromising the organic waste stream
 - (b) conducting an assessment of alternative treatment options for the disposal of used nappies
 - (c) funding trials, if appropriate

with a report to be submitted by 31 December 2011 with the aim of resolving this problem by 1 July 2014

Refocusing waste funding

- 1.7 directing the future Waste and Sustainability Improvement Payments to be used to facilitate councils moving to best practice systems, and for capital investment to establish permanent local waste collection and resource recovery centres
- 1.8 using targeted education, communication and partnerships to improve resource recovery by households, such as conducting a series of targeted media and education campaigns to help householders reduce waste generation, recycle their waste and decide 'what to put in what bin'

Focus Area 2: Making it easier for businesses to separate and recover their waste

Barriers

In 2008–09, NSW C&I businesses generated about 5.4 million tonnes of waste, with 52% or more than 2.8 million tonnes of this waste being recycled.

The amount of C&I recycling in 2008–09 increased by 107% or 1.5 million tonnes from 2002–03, while disposal dropped below the 2002–03 level by 2.1% or 55,000 tonnes.

The 2014 Waste Strategy recycling target for C&I waste is 63%. Achieving that rate by 2008–09 would have required the recovery of an additional 0.56 million tonnes of material in that year. However the actual increase needed in tonnes of material recovered by 2014 is expected to be higher because of a likely continued increase in waste generation.

Currently, the waste collection system from C&I businesses is designed around two systems: one where the materials are easily recovered because they are already separated, the other where mixed waste is sent directly to landfill for disposal. There are minimal incentives for additional source separation and recycling of waste by businesses because the costs of conventional waste collection and disposal are usually fairly small relative to the overall operating costs of C&I businesses.

About 78% of C&I waste is made up of mixed loads that are often collected from multiple businesses that produce different wastes. Collection of mixed loads of waste can contaminate the waste stream, making resource recovery difficult and expensive. For many businesses, particularly small businesses, it is not economical to separate their waste manually at source, due to space, access and labour constraints. These are financial barriers to businesses contracting for recycling services: it costs them time and money over and above a simple mixed-waste service. The legislated further increases in the waste and environment levy will help reduce these disincentives for businesses and improve the viability of resource recovery of mixed collected waste.

Significant opportunities exist to recover valuable resources from the C&I waste stream. In 2008–09, the resource recovery rate for plastics from C&I waste was only 8%; for wood 16%; for food waste 18%; and for both paper/cardboard and glass 53%.

In terms of land-use planning, there are no specific planning guidelines to ensure provision is made in new developments for waste reduction and recycling.

Strategy

To remove the unique barriers that stand in the way of small and large businesses improving recycling performance by:

Best practice business waste collection

- 2.1 encouraging large businesses to move to best practice systems of source-separated materials and/or alternative waste treatment by 31 December 2012
- 2.2 facilitating councils to provide isolated C&I businesses, such as corner or individual shops, with kerbside waste collection services similar to their residential customers, in order to increase recycling rates, including consideration of appropriate regulatory changes to be effective by 31 July 2012
- 2.3 encouraging other small to medium businesses to move to the best practice model of a two-bin system and/or alternative waste treatment
- 2.4 investigating the development of place-based or precinct solutions for small to medium C&I businesses, and potentially also for larger businesses a possible approach would be for industry groups, such as local chambers of commerce, and local councils to contract waste services on behalf of local businesses in the same way that regional organisations of councils do for councils

- 2.5 examining regulatory amendments which may be required to enable the changes in item 2.4 above to be effective, including continuing discussions with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, by 1 July 2013
- 2.6 developing and implementing planning guidelines requiring best practice waste infrastructure to increase resource recovery from new or renovated large commercial facilities, such as shopping centres and office buildings, by 31 December 2011
- 2.7 introducing statutory changes to empower local councils to require commercial and industrial premises to have satisfactory collection arrangements for their waste, including appropriate verification of such arrangements, in accordance with DECCW guidelines

Refocusing waste funding

- 2.8 using targeted education, communication and partnerships to improve waste avoidance and resource recovery by businesses, for example, by conducting a series of targeted education campaigns to promote waste reduction and recycling at work as well as at home
- 2.9 allocating some future state waste program funding by 1 March 2012 to facilitate businesses moving to best practice waste management with a priority to establish resource recovery infrastructure
- 2.10 supporting the development of new facilities to maximise recovery of materials from mixed C&I wastes.



Focus Area 3: Reducing or removing problem wastes to improve resource recovery and produce environmentally safe recyclable materials

Barriers

Some wastes present a significant management issue from an environmental, materials handling, resource or human health perspective. Such items include gas bottles, lead acid batteries, e-waste, mattresses, plastic bags, sharps, tyres, treated timber, medicinal residues, pesticides, paint residues, oils and mercury-containing lamps. These wastes may also affect the quality of recyclable products, such as compost and recovered fuels.

If not properly managed, gas bottles in a waste stream present occupational health and safety risks and noise issues at recycling facilities as discarded gas bottles need to be degassed before they are processed to prevent explosions. Although about 67% of gas bottles are being recovered, these items still require attention because of their handling requirements.

Lead acid batteries contain lead and sulfuric acid that can pose a significant risk to the environment and human health when disposed of inappropriately. In particular, lead from batteries may contaminate the compost produced by an alternative waste treatment plant. Recent analysis showed that 87% of lead acid batteries are being recovered but the special requirements for handling lead acid batteries require additional focus.

Glass fragments can have a detrimental impact on recycling equipment and compromise the quality of final products such as composts.

The growing use of household chemical collection events presents a case for a different approach to diverting household chemicals from the waste streams, along with other low toxicity materials, such as paints, gas bottles and fluorescent tubes.

In NSW, both non-degradable plastic bags and compostable plastic bags are in use. This may result in potential cross-contamination where the non-degradable bags become mixed in with compostable materials, such as garden and food waste. Contamination lowers the quality of the compost products, while compostable bags mixed in with plastics recycling can affect the integrity and saleability of the recycled plastic material.

Households and businesses often struggle to find simple and practical solutions to deal with many of these types of problem wastes. Collection events and drop-off facilities for selected waste materials vary considerably across NSW, in numbers per head of population, their accessibility, and the types of wastes they accept. The range of wastes accepted may include chemical drums, glass and plastic bottles and containers, batteries, fluorescent light globes or tubes, paint, e-waste, gas cylinders, oils and tyres. Collection events and drop-off facilities are more common in regional centres.

Strategy

To extract 'problem' wastes from waste streams so they do not impair mainstream recycling by:

Accelerating product stewardship schemes

- 3.1 continuing to drive national action to introduce product stewardship schemes that tackle the priority wastes identified in the National Waste Policy at the November 2010 meeting of environment ministers, the NSW Minister for the Environment and Climate Change proposed product stewardship schemes to tackle new priority wastes, including paints, batteries and timber, in addition to the existing priority packaging, television and computer schemes
- 3.2 ensuring that, in the absence of substantive progress nationally, NSW will implement producer responsibility arrangements and action at the state level by 1 July 2013
- 3.3 subsidising the recovery of particular problem wastes from households, in conjunction with identifiable major producers, such as the paint industry, with three-yearly reviews to ensure the subsidies are reliable and sufficient to support resource recovery, and that the economic needs remain valid

Reducing problem wastes

- 3.4 aligning future waste and sustainability infrastructure grants to subsidise the capital costs of progressively providing permanent local collection centres for problem wastes to supplement the existing mobile collection events
- 3.5 once product stewardship schemes and more local waste collection centres are in operation, implementing prohibitions on problem wastes, such as e-waste, batteries and paints, including prohibitions on the disposal to landfill of recyclables that have been aggregated or source-separated for resource recovery (paper, plastics, glass, garden waste, and cardboard) by 1 July 2015



Focus Area 4: Facilitating investment in waste infrastructure

Barriers

NSW has been at the forefront in the uptake of large-scale alternative waste treatment technologies and there are now more than 170 licensed waste recycling facilities across the state.

However, more work needs to be done to encourage capital investment in waste treatment and recycling technologies to achieve the 2014 Waste Strategy targets for municipal and C&I waste.

The waste collection and processing industry has argued that policy and regulatory certainty is required to encourage capital investment in waste infrastructure. There are also market failures where councils need to be able to aggregate to reach a 'critical mass' to better procure services and infrastructure.

Improved waste data is needed to facilitate planning, funding and procurement of new resource recovery infrastructure for NSW. Data on landfill disposal is the most reliable, because it is audited and verified through the collection of the waste and environment levy. However resource recovery is difficult to measure fully, as it depends on voluntary, self-reported data. Better resource recovery data is needed to provide industry and councils with more information for long-term investment decisions on additional resource recovery infrastructure.

A high level of collaboration between everyone involved in waste management and resource recovery is needed to obtain better data and promote maximum resource recovery. A partnership approach, with formal and regular communication, is required.

The development of markets for potentially recyclable materials is essential to activate decision-makers at the various stages of the recycling supply chain: without markets there is no viable or sustainable resource recovery.

Strategy

To increase support to expand waste and resource recovery infrastructure and systems by:

Facilitating new waste infrastructure

- 4.1 developing a resource recovery infrastructure needs assessment by 31 December 2011 to outline NSW resource recovery requirements and projections and the necessary lead times for the building of infrastructure
- 4.2 developing clearer land-use planning guidelines for waste and resource recovery facilities by 31 December 2011
- 4.3 actively promoting and assisting waste and resource recovery infrastructure operators, as is done for other major developments taking a 'case management' approach should help industry to understand and negotiate government regulations and planning processes and promote innovative infrastructure solutions
- 4.4 reviewing the existing waste funding priorities to stimulate investment in waste and resource recovery systems and infrastructure as identified in items 1.7, 2.9, 2.10, 3.4 and 4.1 above by 1 March 2012

Improving the regulatory framework

- 4.5 removing the 2013 review date for the use of compost derived from alternative waste treatment (AWT) on agricultural land
- 4.6 developing and commencing by 1 July 2011 an independent trial program over a three-year period to assess the impacts of contaminants in AWT compost
- 4.7 using the powers of the Protection of the Environment Operations (Waste) Regulation 2005 to require all waste recyclers and reprocessors to provide annual waste and recycling data to DECCW via simple on-line reporting by 31 December 2011

Engaging with stakeholders

- 4.8 establishing expert panels to provide DECCW with independent advice on complex resource recovery issues and the environmental, technical, commercial and regulatory issues relating to increased resource recovery by 1 July 2011
- 4.9 preparing a new waste-to-energy policy for stakeholder consultation by 31 December 2011, which reflects the importance of striking a balance to encourage recycling where life cycle assessment demonstrates a benefit, but allows for the thermal processing of waste for energy where a better overall environmental outcome can be achieved
- 4.10 establishing, by 30 June 2011, a regular high-level forum of government, environment groups and industry to review waste policy and program settings to optimise actions to achieve the waste strategy targets

Focus Area 5: Reducing litter and combating illegal dumping

Barriers

Litter has gone from being viewed primarily as an aesthetic problem to a broader environmental issue with wide-ranging environmental impacts, including those affecting aquatic life, degrading water quality, blocking drains, posing dangers to human health and safety, and creating fire hazards.

The 2009–10 National Litter Index indicated that litter in NSW is on the increase, even though the state's per capita littering is the nation's second-lowest compared with other states and the amount of litter generated remains below the levels of five years ago. The most littered sites in NSW are in industrial areas and shopping complexes, and along highways.

Cigarette butts make up half the litter in NSW. Other common litter includes small pieces of paper, chip and confectionery wrappers, fast-food packaging materials, bottle caps, plastic straws, glass pieces, glass alcohol bottles and soft drink bottles (both plastic and metal).

New sources of litter are becoming increasingly evident. Changing consumer patterns in relation to take-away food and increased use of unsolicited advertising materials are examples of activities that now generate litter.

Illegal dumping is the unlawful deposit of waste larger than litter onto land. It includes waste materials that have been dumped, tipped or otherwise deposited onto private or public land where no licence or approval exists to accept such waste. Illegal dumping varies from small bags of rubbish in an urban environment to larger scale illegal landfills.

According to the 2009–10 National Litter Index, the incidence of illegal dumping in NSW is decreasing. However, it may start to increase as the waste and environment levy increases, creating a disincentive for legitimate waste removal. Illegal dumping undermines legitimate waste operators, damages the environment, reduces amenity and costs state and local governments tens of millions of dollars each year to clean up. Therefore this strategy needs to be closely integrated with strategies in Focus Areas 1, 2 and 3 to reduce the perceived need to illegally dump.

The NSW Government has in place strong waste compliance and enforcement programs to deter, detect and prosecute illegal dumpers.

Strategy

To focus on reducing litter and combating illegal dumping by:

Increasing education

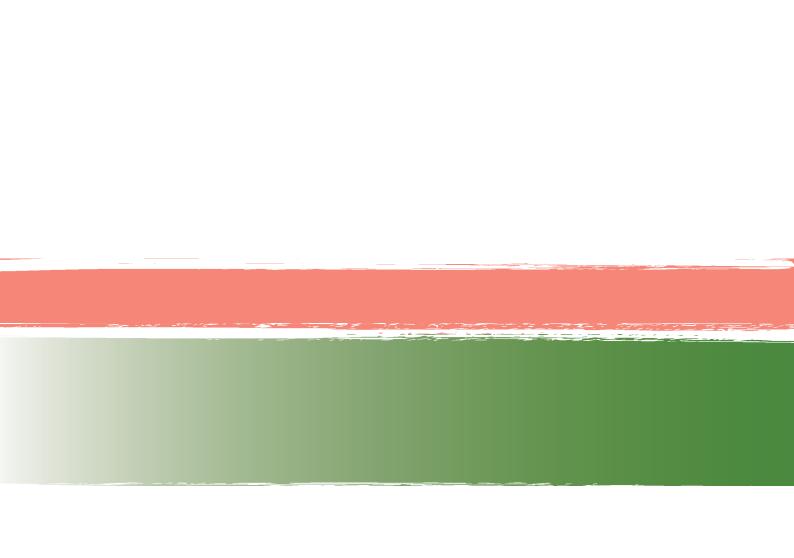
- 5.1 implementing a renewed public education campaign about littering, such as the *Don't be a tosser* campaign
- 5.2 conducting training programs and support for enforcement officers for littering and illegal dumping offences (councils, regional illegal dumping squads, Sydney Catchment Authority, NSW Police)

Aligning funding

- 5.3 implementing a series of litter reduction grants to councils, other land managers and non-government organisations to target litter hot spots, such as major roads and shopping centres
- 5.4 funding greater public place collection infrastructure and clean-up of hot spots to discourage further littering and illegal dumping

Enhanced enforcement campaigns

- 5.5 re-establishing the litter and illegal dumping reduction taskforce by 30 June 2011
- 5.6 conducting at least 15 high-profile waste compliance and enforcement campaigns targeting illegal waste activities each year
- 5.7 conducting at least four major targeted litter enforcement campaigns each year, in partnership with local councils and other land managers, such as the Roads and Traffic Authority, around major roads (such as the F3 and M4) and fast food outlets



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