

Case study: Garden organics collection in Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton



Photo: Education proved critical to the successful rollout.
(Singleton Council)

The Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton council areas cover a 51,285 square kilometre area in the Hunter Valley and have a combined population of around 156,000 people; Maitland, with more than 76,000 residents, has the largest population. The main industries in the region are wine making, coal mining and tourism.

Garden organics now, food organics later

A staged introduction of kerbside organics collections is delivering positive results for three Hunter Valley councils.

Organics funding for the Hunter Valley

In March 2017, a new fortnightly garden organics bin was introduced in the Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton council areas. In the first year after its introduction, 13,598 tonnes of garden organics were collected from households.

The councils received a \$2.4 million grant from the NSW Environment Protection Authority's Organics Collection Grants towards the introduction of green-lid bins, and community education for a garden waste collection, as the first step towards rolling out a full food organics and green organics (FOGO) service by 2024 or earlier. The timing will depend on the processing facility being constructed and licensed to receive food.

Approach: Staged introduction

The Environment and Waste Manager for Cessnock City Council, Michael Alexander, said: 'A full FOGO service is quite complex and requires significant capital and infrastructure investment. The quickest gain could be made by a staged introduction, given garden organics can be accepted and processed with smaller capital investment and with fewer issues relating to odour and leachate.'

Cessnock City Council teamed with neighbouring Maitland City Council and Singleton Council to introduce the service, having taken a similar combined approach when kerbside dry recycling was started.

Mr Alexander said they recognised that 'alone our council would probably not be viable or attractive from a contractor point of view'. So the three Hunter Valley councils formed a joint working group, with Maitland City Council running the tender process.

The councils hoped to appoint one principal contractor for the complete service, but the initial tender process was unsuccessful. According to Mr Alexander,

contractor feedback showed the organics collection (logistics) contractors were nervous about underwriting risk around processing, while potential processing contractors did not have the infrastructure nor the logistics for collection.

As a result, the councils split the project into two contracts:

- processing and marketing
- collection.

A 14-year contract for processing was awarded to ANL in December 2015. The collection contract was awarded to Solo Resource Recovery in June 2016.

The ANL contract agreement covers seven years of processing garden organics into compost, then seven years of processing both food organics and garden organics. The councils can start the FOGO service earlier if its facilities at Tea Gardens are ready.

The education campaign began four months before the service started. It included a joint letter, signed by the three mayors, distributed to all households. This was complemented with other educational material, including advertising in the media, at stalls during community events and in shopping centres.

Information packs were provided with each green-lid bin. The councils also launched the Your organics bin website (<http://www.yourorganicsbin.com.au>), which gives details and news about the service and collection dates.

After garden organics collection started, the focus of the education program changed to getting as much of the right material as possible into the bin. Tricia Donnelly, Sustainability Officer, Cessnock City Council said: 'We have also reminded the community why contamination is an issue and advertised that the collection vehicles and collection team can, and do, monitor what every bin contains and report contamination, which results in the household being sent a targeted letter.'

'The letter from the three mayors was something we hadn't tried before. It took some involved consultation to get everyone to agree on the text, but by using letterbox delivery we ensured all households (including renters who don't receive rates notices) knew what to expect.'

**Tricia Donnelly,
Sustainability Officer,
Cessnock City
Council**



Photo: Prunings can go in the garden organics bin. (Singleton Council)



Photo: Leaves can be tipped into the garden organics bin. (Singleton Council)

Residents were invited to request a second garden organics bin if the first was insufficient. At community events, the councils have started to give away free compost made from household garden organics. In Singleton, urban residents received the new bins automatically. Those living on rural properties could opt into the scheme for a small annual fee.

Results: Savings and jobs created

In the first year, 4,742 tonnes of garden organics were collected from the green-lid bins from Cessnock, 7,144 tonnes from Maitland and 1,564 tonnes from Singleton. Approximately 10 jobs were created through the education, collection and processing components of the new service. The garden organics are composted and sold to farmers, landscapers and home gardeners.

‘Residents have embraced the service from the beginning with very few problems.’

**Elfi Blackburn,
Waste Service
Coordinator,
Maitland City Council**

An audit of garbage, recycling and garden organics bins in all three council areas was completed in October 2017. The green-lid bins were recovering between 90% and 92% of all garden organics material, with a contamination rate between 0.5% and 1.7%. Across the three council areas, per week the average household red-lid bin contained 4.5–6.4 kilograms of organics (mainly food).

Ms Blackburn, Waste Services Coordinator for Maitland City Council, said the green-lid bin service was ‘very successful with no complaints’. The amount of garden organics collected was ‘right on the mark’ and closely matched the estimates. ‘We were surprised at how low the contamination rate was.’



Photo: Solo Resource Recovery delivering garden waste to ANL processing facility. (Singleton Council)

The Environment Protection Authority's Organics Collections Grants provide up to \$1.3 million to councils and business to introduce new food only or food and garden collection services. They are administered by the Environmental Trust and open for applications over several funding rounds.

Looking forward: Faster pace to FOGO processing

Mr Alexander said all three councils wanted to introduce food organics collection as soon as the processing facilities were available. The food organics processing must start by 2024 in terms of the contract, but ANL are confident the upgraded Tea Gardens facility will be ready before 2021.

The service has achieved 90% recovery of garden organics and has the potential to collect an extra 4.5–6.4 kilograms per household per week by adding food scraps. The next step is to have a similar success story when upgrading to FOGO.

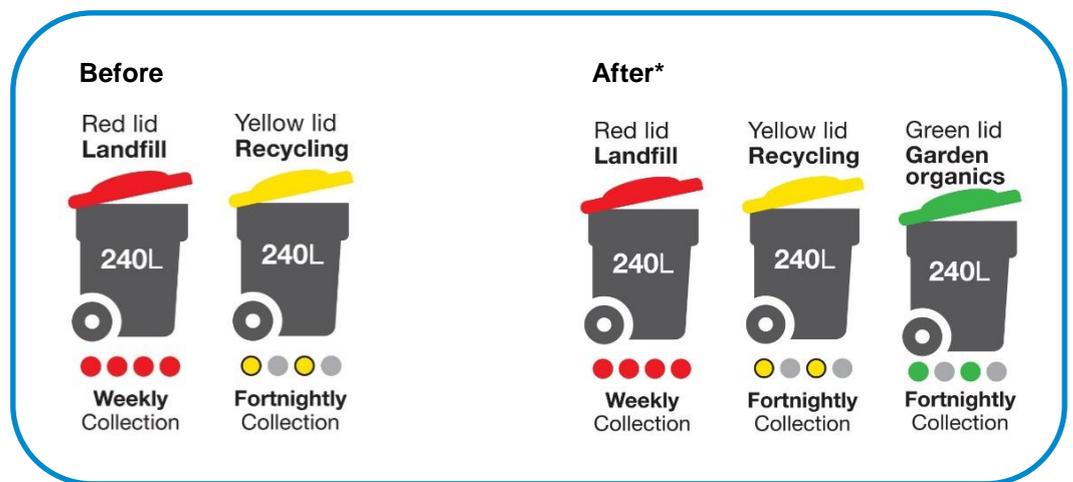


Figure: Changes to Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton City Councils' kerbside bin collection service. (*Residents can choose from a 240 litre or 360 litre yellow-lid bin. Singleton rural properties' red-lid bins are collected fortnightly and they have an opt-in option for the green-lid bins.)

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