



NSW Litter Prevention Partnership Plan 2024–30





Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Environment Protection Authority acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, honours the ancestors and the Elders both past and present and extends that respect to all Aboriginal people.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples' spiritual and cultural connection and inherent right to protect the land, waters, skies and natural resources of NSW. This connection goes deep and has since the Dreaming.

We also acknowledge our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who are an integral part of our diverse workforce and recognise the knowledge embedded forever in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship of Country and culture.

This document outlines the NSW Litter Prevention Partnership Plan 2024–30 (the Partnership Plan or plan). It lays out the foundation and principles for deciding which areas within litter prevention we will target with strategic partnerships and how we will implement the plan.

Why we need a Litter Prevention Partnership Plan

The *NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041* (WaSM) sets targets of reducing plastic litter by 30% by 2025 and overall litter by 60% by 2030. Strategic partnerships are expected to contribute 7.2% to achieving these targets.

Changing our thinking: To reach these ambitious targets we need to change how we think about and approach the litter problem, focusing on measurable outcomes.

Empowering new stakeholder groups: Strategic partnerships will empower industry, community organisations and other stakeholders to take ownership of litter. Working with new partners will give our projects greater reach, allow more resources to be deployed, and develop new insights and expertise.

Circular economy principles: Litter programs have traditionally focused on dispersal and removal. Strategic partnerships will let us tackle litter

at its source. We will pilot innovative approaches to litter reduction, using circular economy and waste reduction principles.

Leveraging existing initiatives: Strategic partnerships will use evidence from existing initiatives to determine which actions will have most impact.

“Strategic partnerships aim to achieve litter reduction of 7.2% in NSW on 2018–19 baseline”

How we define strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships are distinct from other program partnerships. Strategic partnerships will focus on identifying new, high-impact actions.

Other program partnerships, such as education and awareness campaigns,

are part of the existing integrated approach to litter prevention.

Grant programs have fixed timelines and can lead to limited, short-term efforts. But strategic partnerships will work beyond those limits.

Projects will be evidence-based

Strategic partnerships will use evidence to prioritise the largest litter problem areas. They will focus on key littered items identified in the EPA's Litter Data Framework. Each strategic partnership will be based on a measured litter baseline, letting us track progress over time. This will ensure we invest the EPA's and partners' resources in ways that will achieve our targets.

Target items have been identified for pilot projects ('Horizon 1' of the program). But focus areas can change if data suggests they should.

By using and sharing data, we will make our decision-making transparent.

Collaboration will be ‘win-win’

Our strategic partnerships will be highly collaborative, and designed to benefit all stakeholders. We believe that ‘win-win’ partnerships will work best to prevent litter.

Plastic bans have been in effect since 1 November 2022 under the NSW Plastics Action Plan. This Partnership Plan will ensure action is taken on litter items that fall outside the legislated bans.

What the EPA contributes

The EPA brings to the program its expertise, data and strategic vision. Funding will come through the NSW Litter Prevention Strategy 2022–30, which commits \$38 million to litter prevention.

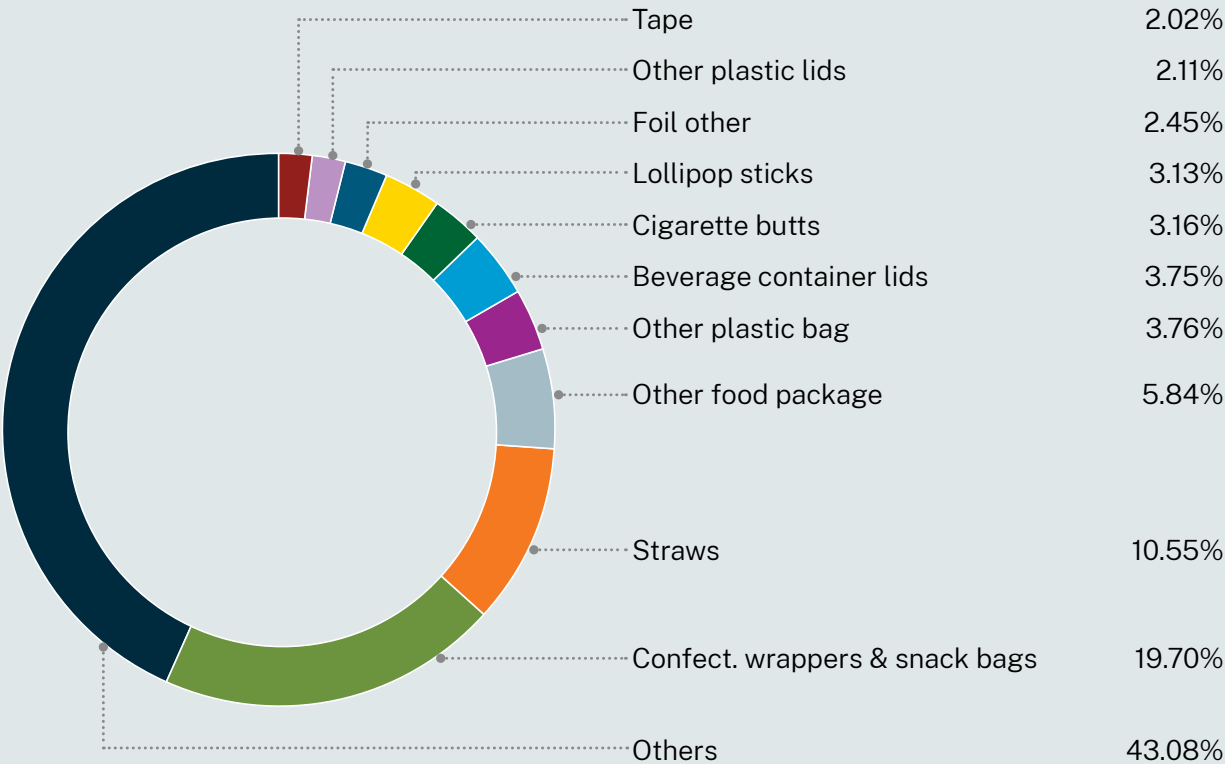


Figure 1 Litter categories composition analysis.
Source: Key Littered Items Study



How we build strategic partnerships

Overview

Identifying focus areas and designing strategic partnerships is a multi-stage process. The key steps are shown below.

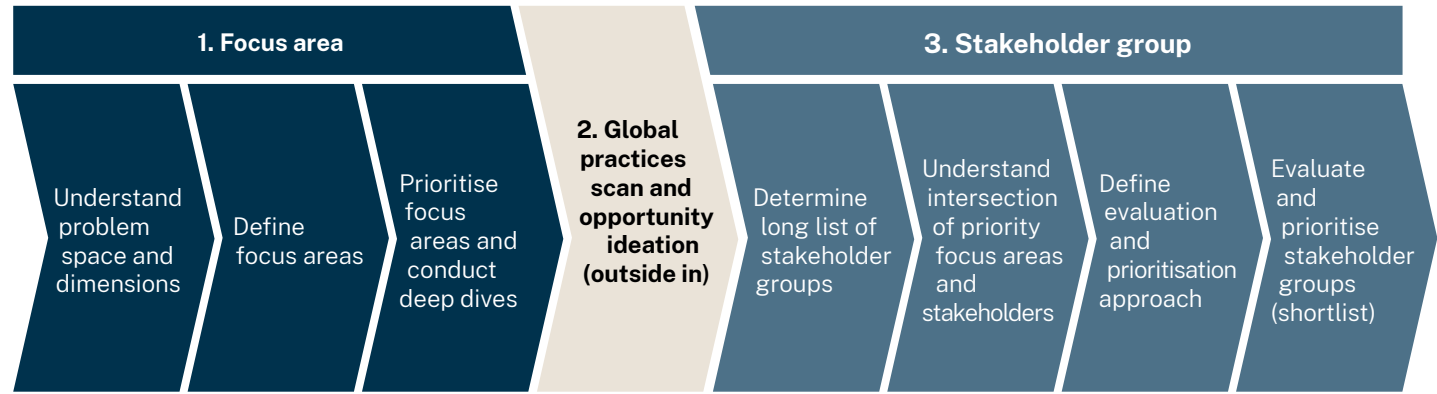


Figure 2: Steps in establishing a strategic partnership

Understanding the litter problem

Many factors drive littering behaviour.

We can analyse littering in different ways. We currently look at these ‘angles’:

- what (types of litter items)
- who (characteristics of litterers)
- why/how (reasons for littering and behaviours around it)
- where (regions and hotspots)
- other leakage (e.g. bin overflow).

But we can analyse these angles further, into ‘problem dimensions’. (See diagram.) We can then use the dimensions to define focus areas for action.

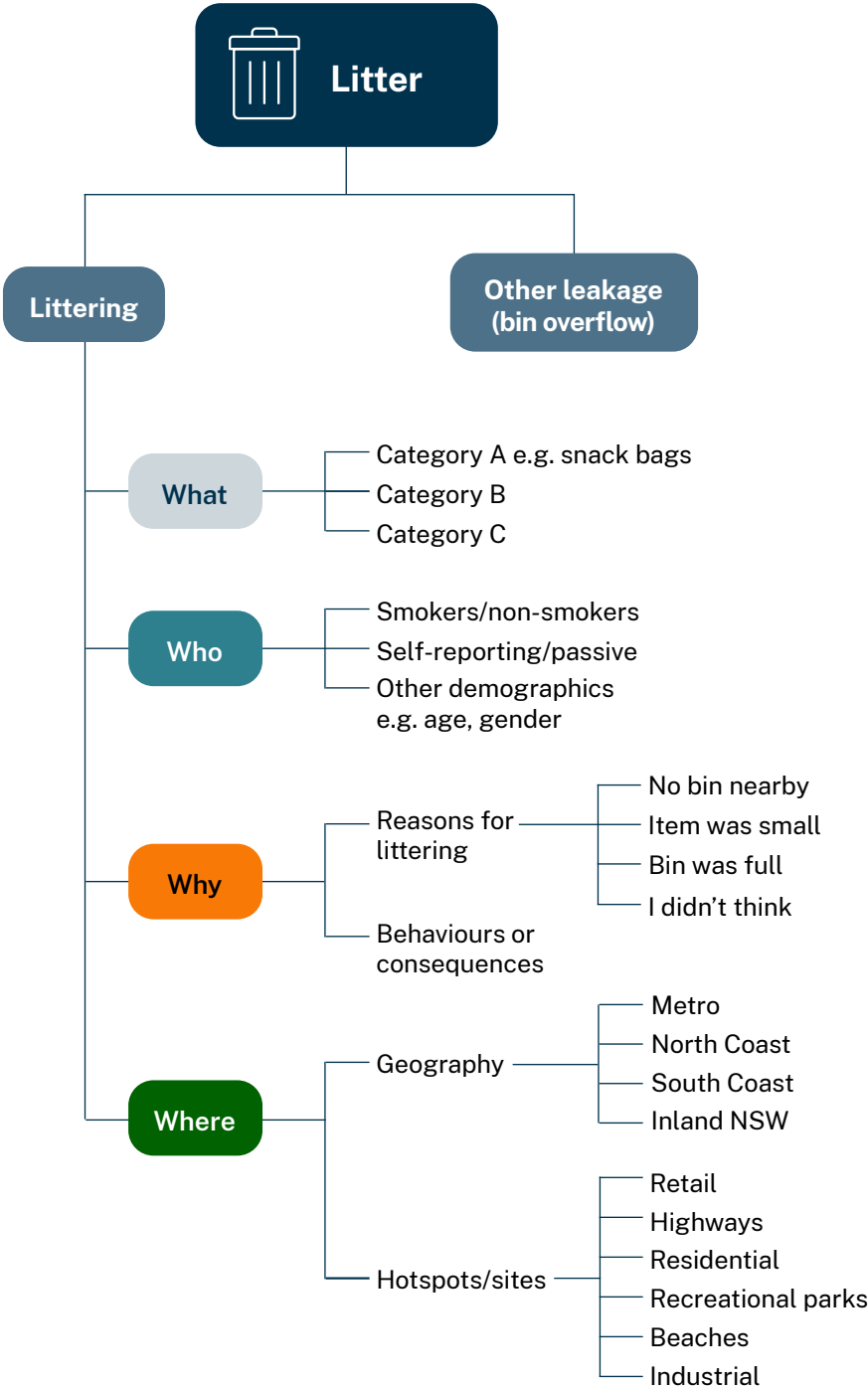


Figure 3: The litter problem space

Strategic partnerships will target focus areas that deliver high-impact solutions. To identify these focus areas we first consider the size of each problem dimension (shown in the diagram on page 6). This includes assessing the available litter data.

For each focus area, we then conduct a ‘deep dive’ analysis to understand the nature, scope and dimensions of the problem. We apply four criteria to evaluate each area:

- **Measurability:** do we have baseline data, and would we be able to measure future litter reduction?
- **Size of the problem:** how severe is the litter problem associated with this focus area? We will take into account any existing initiatives that already address a focus area.
- **Impact on reduction:** is a strategic partnership likely to reduce litter by at least 2%?
- **Strategic fit:** is the focus area best suited to a strategic partnership, or does it fit elsewhere in the overarching litter prevention strategy?

Key to this approach is that we start with focus areas, not stakeholders. After we identify focus areas and prioritise them, we evaluate which stakeholder group has most influence on each focus area, and therefore the most potential to affect it.

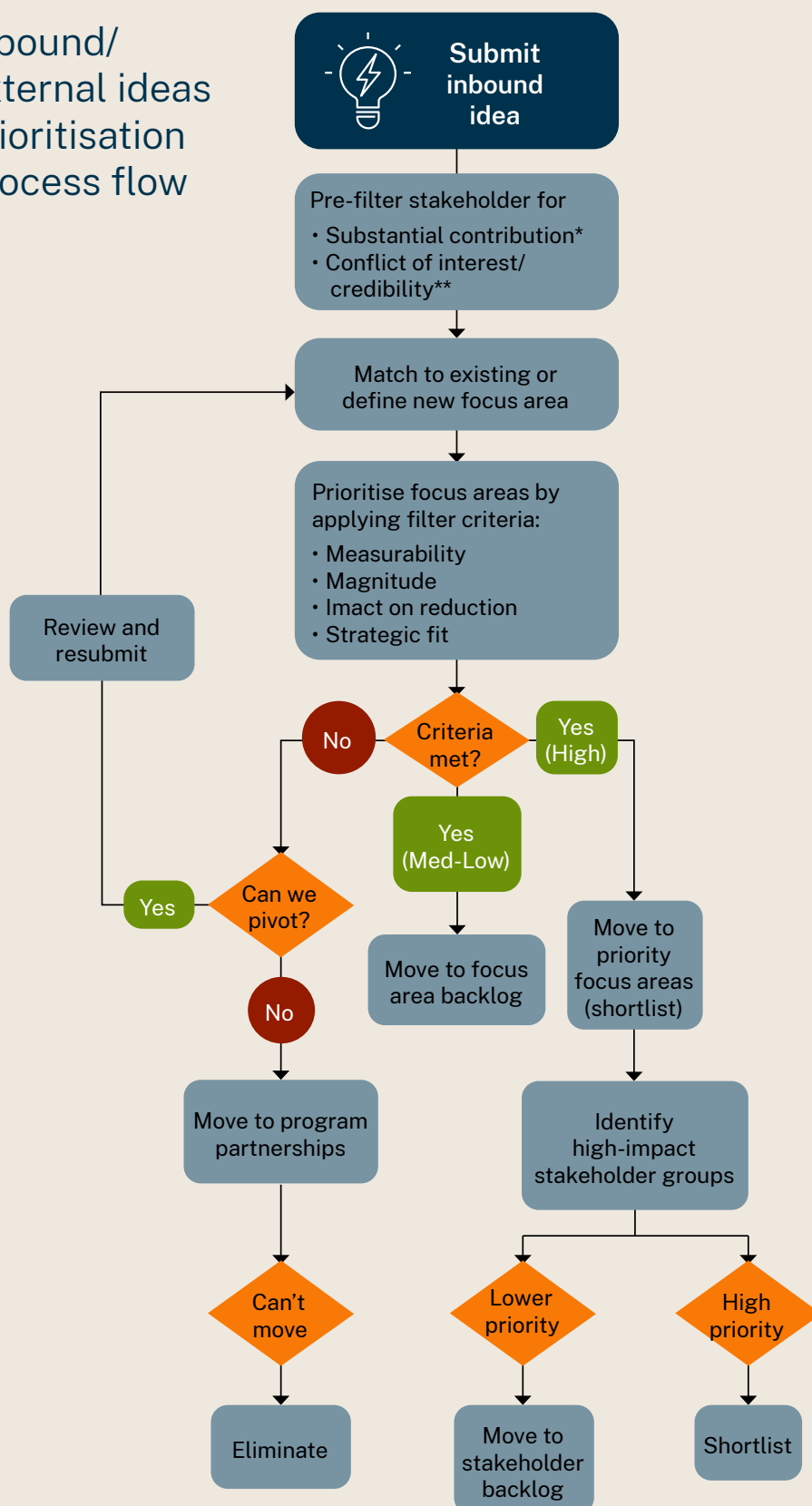


Partnership ideas are welcome

The EPA welcomes ideas from stakeholders, both about new problem angles and focus areas and for strategic partnerships. We will assess external ideas using the criteria on page 6. Our assessment will outline:

- whether the idea meets all criteria
- if not, if it can be modified and resubmitted for consideration
- whether there is sufficient scope for a program partnership instead (i.e. if the idea would be appropriate for the grants program).

Inbound/ external ideas prioritisation process flow



*Stakeholder group provides substantial contribution, e.g. network, reach, capability, influence, resources

**There are no conflict of interests or credibility concerns

Priority focus areas

Using the process on page 6, we have identified two focus areas highly suitable for strategic partnerships – ‘snack bags, confectionery wrappers and lollipop sticks’ and ‘beverage containers and lids’. Both focus areas have a measurable baseline, contribute significantly to the overall litter problem, and are appropriate for addressing through strategic partnerships, given existing initiatives and strategy. These two focus areas currently account for 35.5% of NSW litter.

Snack bags and confectionery wrappers

Snack bags, confectionery wrappers and lollipop sticks are the category of littered items most likely to end up in waterways. They currently make up 22% of all littered items. The EPA's Litter Prevention Program is already addressing some of these items. However, our analysis shows that with no further action, the overall category percentage will drop only by 6.2%, to 15.3%. There is scope to do more.

The items in this category are readily available to consumers. They are usually made of a mix of materials such as plastics, polyethylene and aluminium, and easily fragment into smaller pieces. Wrappers and similar packaging can take over 50 years to even start decomposing. During decomposition, they release toxic gases into the atmosphere. In the ocean, these wrappers are hazardous for marine animals that swallow them.

Beverage containers and lids

Bottles and bottle tops – ‘beverage containers and lids’ – are the category of littered items third-most likely to end up in waterways. They currently make up 14% of all littered items (containers 7.2% and lids/bottle tops 6.8%). Our analysis shows that existing planned initiatives would reduce the impact only to 7.9% – still substantial. Again, there is scope to do more.

Items in this category are readily available to consumers. They are mostly made of plastic, aluminium and glass. Most can be recycled or repurposed in the circular economy but consumers still litter them. Over time, one plastic bottle can break up into 10,000 pieces of microplastic. Glass bottles can stay in the environment for a million years.



Beverage containers and lids make up **14%** of littered items in NSW



Takeaway containers and plastic bottles can take from **10 to 450** years to break down

Potential future focus areas and dynamic review

Some focus areas are not yet measurable – that is, we cannot clearly determine the size of the problem. For these, we need to do more research and analysis. We will then be able assess these areas' suitability for strategic partnerships. Below is a summary of the existing information and hypotheses we have for certain groups of focus areas, and proposed next steps.

We will continually review focus areas in the light of new insights and ideas. Focus areas are not fixed or constrained by any given angle, and new ones may emerge.

Site locations

We have insights from a 2020 National Litter Index (NLI) report about which sites within the sampling area were most heavily littered. (Industrial sites took top spot, followed by retail sites.) However, we are yet to confirm (through the more recent AusLM data) how representative that finding is of NSW across all regions.

Smokers

Smokers are a focus area within the 'who' angle of the litter problem because we know that frequent smokers litter more than non-smokers. However, we need to quantify how much of each kind of item they litter, to assess if this area would be suitable for strategic partnerships. There is an existing cigarette-butt initiative under the Litter Prevention Strategy but this program focuses just on cigarette butts rather than on all the items smokers litter.

Self-reporting litterers

Don't be a tosser! research shows that self-reporting litterers are a very varied demographic. They tend to have mixed beliefs, are generally headstrong, and do not respond well to awareness campaigns about the harms of littering. More research is under way to understand who or what most influences them, which may present opportunities for strategic partnerships.

Reasons for littering: 'No rubbish bin close by', 'item was small' or 'bin was full'

Don't be a tosser! research also shows the three major reasons given by those who admit that they litter. 'Bin was full' is a justification that skews towards males (30% of males, 15% of females). The other two reasons do not differ significantly by demographic.

To explore these focus areas, we need to ascertain how much littering is associated with each reason. For littering reasons that relate to bins, we will continue with existing infrastructure measures such as targeted grants; however, there may also be potential future strategic partnerships for this focus area. In relation to the 'item was small' reason, some of this rationale may be addressed as we launch pilot projects for snack bags and confectionery wrappers, and for beverage containers and lids.

Geography

This focus area relates to dispersal and littering behaviour. Our analysis shows litter rates are highest in metro areas (Sydney). We need to assess further how this focus area is covered by existing programs. For the moment it will remain on hold, and be reviewed for potential future strategic partnerships.

Behaviours and consequences of littering

This focus area is currently targeted by *Don't be a tosser!* and enforcement initiatives. To progress with it in relation to strategic partnerships, we need to better understand the size of the problem in terms of the items littered. Research is under way.

Alignment with NSW actions on plastics

Many littered items listed in this plan have also been identified as items of concern in the action paper, *NSW Plastics: The Way Forward*. Some actions proposed in that paper may need a program to support them. For example, the paper proposes that brand owners of highly littered items use litter data to set targets. This Partnership Plan provides a framework within which the EPA could work with brand owners to set targets and develop ways to meet them.

How we will implement the Partnership Plan

Defining and prioritising stakeholders

For the priority focus areas, we will assess groups of stakeholders that could help significantly reduce litter, to determine how much impact each group could have. We will consider:

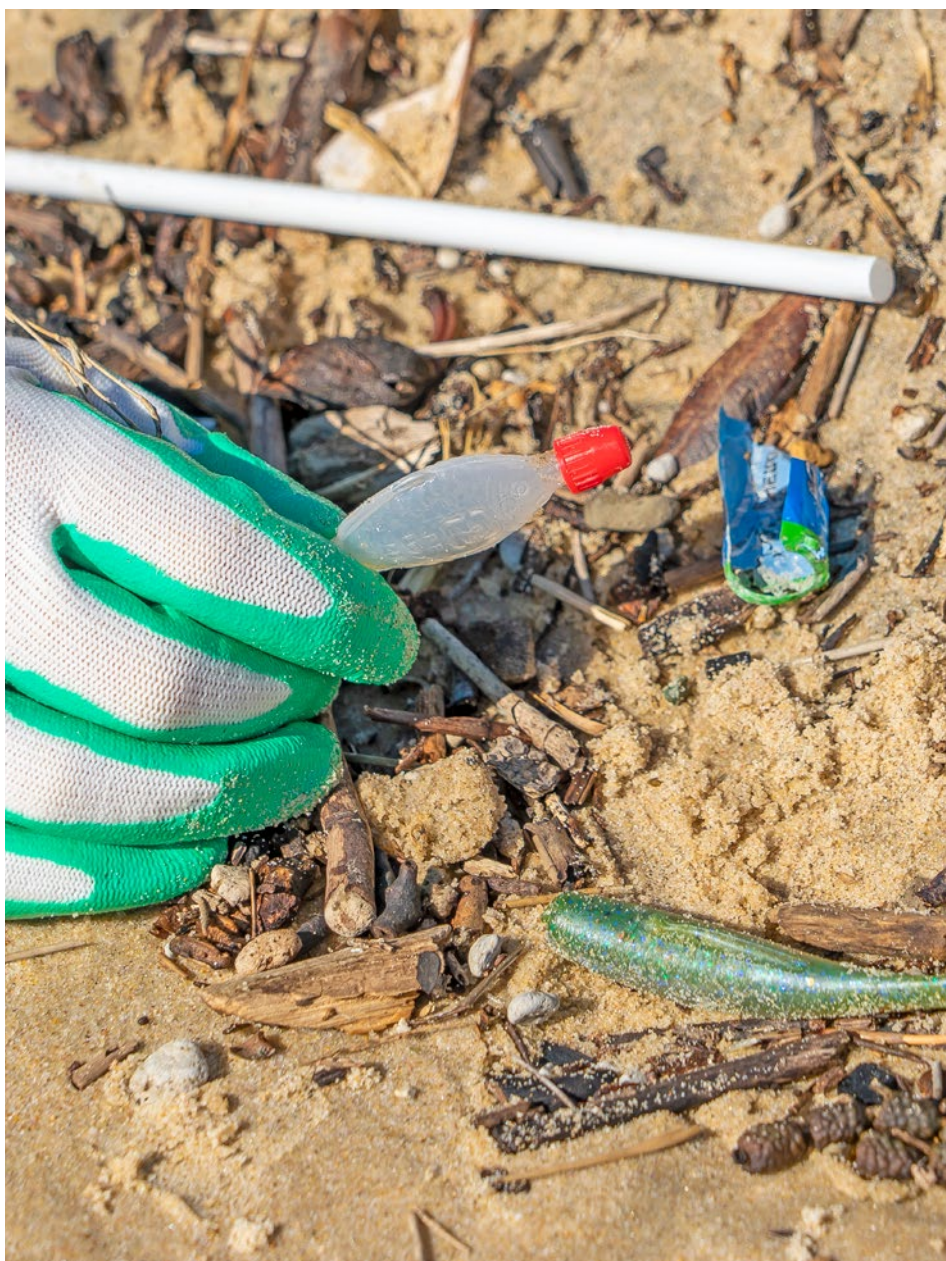
- **influence:** stakeholders' influence over the generation of littered items, and ability to influence litter disposal or prevention activities
- **reach:** stakeholders' interaction with litterers, and with other key stakeholders in the litter life cycle
- **distinguishing features** of litterers: whether stakeholders have a focus on a particularly important segment of litterers, such as youth, smokers, or other distinct demographics.

After finding the high-impact groups, we will consider specific stakeholders within each group. We will look at their perceived capabilities, resources, networks and alignment of interests, to identify those with whom we can engage and co-design a strategic partnership.

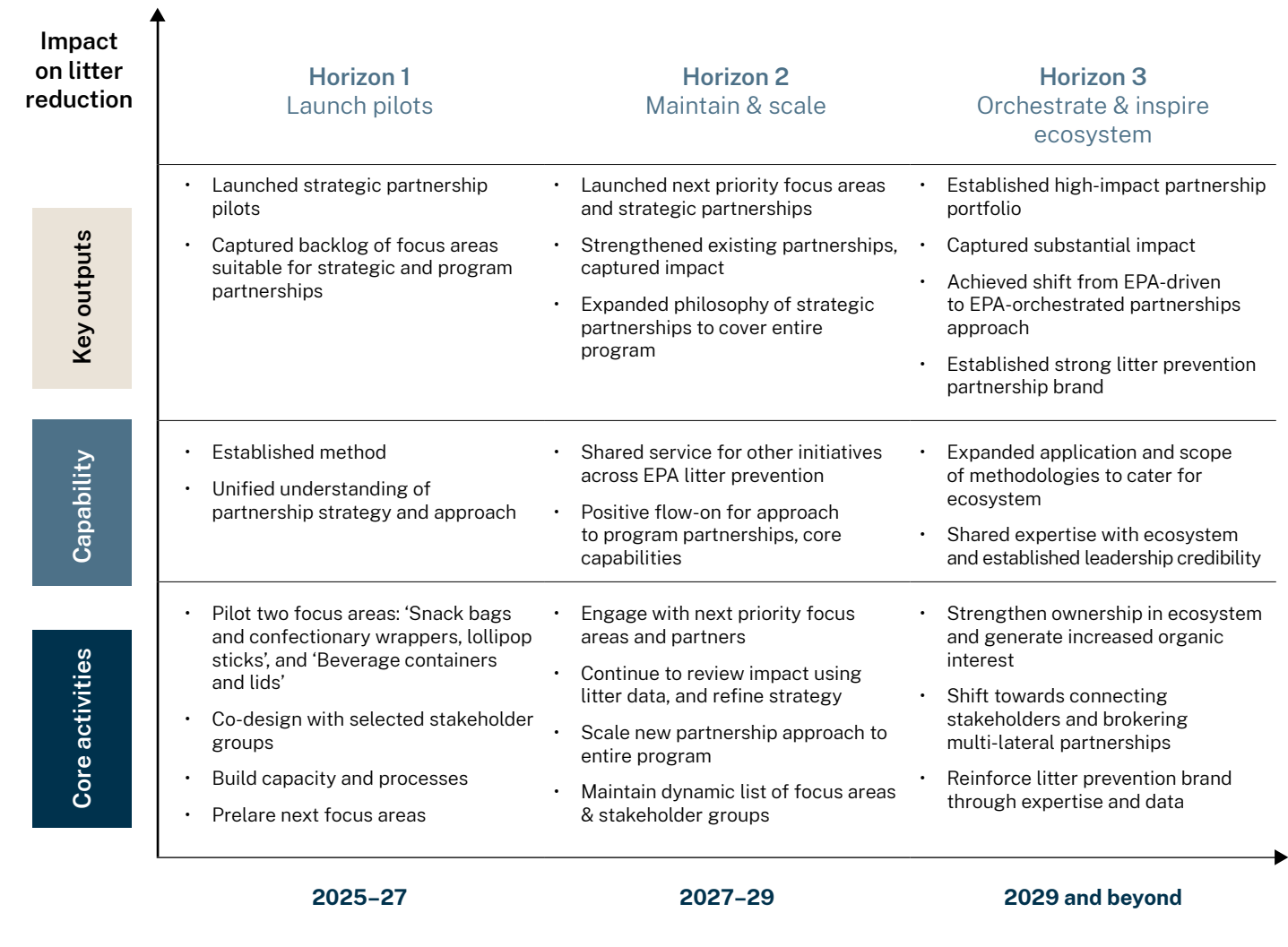
After we engage and begin co-designing, we will continuously review the engagement to ensure we are on track to achieve high impact.

There are checkpoints within the co-design process: for example, we will regularly review progress in reducing litter. We will also look at emerging, alternative options that may be more effective in reducing litter.

This Partnership Plan will continue to evolve, to identify and tackle new priority litter challenges in collaboration with key partners.



Looking forward: strategic partnerships roadmap



We will roll out strategic partnerships in stages. In the first stage, Horizon 1, we will launch the pilot strategic partnerships. In the second, Horizon 2, we will maintain those and add other focus areas. In the third stage, Horizon 3 — expected to be from 2026 onward — we will orchestrate and maintain lasting change in the litter prevention 'ecosystem'.

Guiding principles for implementation

Ten principles will guide us as we explore partnerships, engage with partners and co-design projects. These principles distinguish strategic partnerships from program partnerships or other, more transactional, stakeholder engagements.

Guiding principles for strategic partnerships



Mindset shift

Move beyond transactional landscape to focus on higher value Strategic Partnerships



Mutual benefit

Ensure mutual benefits for both partners through co-design with the EPA



Maximum reach

Optimise for largest sphere of influence across geographies, segments, industries



Strengthening our brand

Leverage EPA value proposition and brand to increase visibility and partnership adoption



Problem-led

Start with the problem and what we want to solve for, before focusing on potential stakeholder groups



Data and evidence-based

Make decisions and assess progress based on data and hard evidence towards litter reduction



Iterative process

Seek regular feedback, test, and re-evaluate partnerships across all dimensions to ensure alignment



Repeatable structure

Use standardised approach to design unique partnerships



Tailored to partners

Tailor core approach to each partners' needs, their expertise, resources and specific problem context



Uplift in capability

Seek mutual capability improvement throughout every partnership and refine partnership approach over time

Opportunities to become a strategic partner of the NSW EPA

This plan outlines a structured process to identify strategic partnerships across targeted areas of focus, with the aim of achieving a 7.2% litter reduction in NSW. To support this work, the EPA is committed to investing resources, expertise and capability and using a data-led approach to litter reduction. We are looking for partners that are equally committed to driving litter reduction and can provide a substantial contribution in the form of networking, reach, capability, or other resources that help achieve the NSW targets.

The program will be flexible and projects will be co-designed with partners to achieve mutual benefit and innovative, high-impact litter solutions. Litter reduction initiatives will be based on evidence and subject to ongoing monitoring. Partners will be able to demonstrate tangible and measurable results for their environmental and sustainability agenda.

To discuss opportunities for litter prevention partnerships, contact us via litter.prevention@epa.nsw.gov.au.



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Front cover: Litter on a beach
Credit: NSW EPA

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