

TACKLING FOOD WASTE TOGETHER

REDUCING FOODSERVICE FOOD WASTE IN PRECINCTS:

A TOOLKIT FOR A COUNCIL-LED PILOT

1. REDUCING FOOD WASTE

- Why target reducing food waste in food service businesses?
- Deliver on Council's objectives.

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- Selecting the precinct.
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- Identifying risks.
- Develop a communications plan.

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- Visit the precinct businesses.
- Gather general interest in the project.

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- Identify a time period for the trial.
- Make sure all the necessary equipment is in place.
- Start measuring and learning.
- Visit the precinct daily for the first week.

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- How it is going and how Council can best help?

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- What does success look like?
- How do you know?

8. CREATING A LASTING COLLECTIVE SOLUTION

- Sharing a food waste bin?
- Using the same waste collection contractor?
- Sharing on-site processing equipment?

REDUCING FOOD WASTE IN FOODSERVICE

WHY TARGET REDUCING FOOD WASTE IN FOODSERVICE BUSINESSES?

In Australia, 7.6 million tonnes of food are wasted annually, costing the economy \$36.6 billion each year. The hospitality sector is responsible for 1.2 million tonnes of this waste, 67% of which is edible; the equivalent of throwing away 4.6 million meals each day, whilst 3.4 million households are experiencing food insecurity. Reducing food waste has environmental, social, and economic benefits.

NSW has a statewide mandate for Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) recycling, to reduce food waste and stop food waste going to landfill. Foodservices businesses will need to source separate, starting with the largest waste generators from 1st July 2026. For more information click [here](#).

BENEFITS FOR COUNCILS

Waste targets

- Reduce total waste generated.
- Address shortage of landfill capacity.
- Improve recovery rates from waste streams.
- Divert food organic waste to meet target to halve organic waste to landfill by 2030.
- Commit to broader emissions target to be net zero by 2050.

Support local businesses and economic growth

- Reducing food waste saves foodservice businesses money.
- Consumers increasingly want to support sustainable businesses.

Community

- Businesses operators may be local community members.
- Building sustainable cities/circular economies.
- Addressing community complaints about commercial bins/waste.

BENEFITS FOR FOODSERVICE BUSINESSES

Economic benefits

- Identifying amount and source of food waste can lead to reductions and subsequent savings on ingredient costs, overheads, labour and waste disposal.
- Consumer preference for sustainable businesses leading to increased sales / illustrating marketing strategy.

Collective solutions

- Reduce costs for services such as organic waste collection.
- Access to service that otherwise might not be available to a single business.
- Building networks and knowledge sharing.
- Creation of hubs that attract sustainability conscious consumers and employees.

Environmental benefits

- Reducing waste to landfill.
- Reducing emissions associated with wasted food; also reducing the carbon footprint.

DELIVER ON COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Addressing food waste can advance many Council objectives through providing environmental, economic and social benefits:

- Raising business and community awareness of food waste.
- Reduced total waste generated per person.
- Increase recovery rate from waste streams.
- Reduced organic waste into landfill/ extending landfill capacity.
- Reduced carbon emissions; working towards net zero.
- Supporting transition to a circular economy.
- Economic benefits for foodservice businesses.
- Attracting consumers to areas noted for their sustainable actions.
- Supporting community members – business owners may also live in the LGA.
- Strengthen community networks.
- Increased volume of food donated to rescue.
- Delivering on town planning schemes for livable commercial strips.

Four key motivators for initiating a precinct food waste reduction project/trial:

1. Source separating organic waste.
2. Reducing food waste in food service businesses.
3. Identifying collective solutions to food waste management.
4. Supporting local businesses.



BRINGING COUNCIL ALONG

GETTING THE RIGHT COUNCIL FUNCTIONS INVOLVED

Think broadly across Council to ensure the right functions are involved to get maximum impact from the project. A key question in applying the project objectives is *how does council want to be involved with their local businesses?* Relevant Council functions to engage may include:

- Circular economy
- Communications & marketing
- Community Relations
- Community support
- Cleansing teams
- Economic/business development
- Environmental Health Officers
- Sustainability
- Town Planning

RUNNING THE COUNCIL WORKSHOP

- Workshop objectives
 - Get 'buy in' across Council.
 - Assign roles and responsibilities for the trial.
- Welcome and introduction of attendees/ sections and potential roles in the project.
- Brief Project Description
- What does project success for the proposed trial look like?
 - Ensuring everyone is on the same page - Understanding the context.
 - What's being done on food waste / organics waste reduction in your LGA?
 - What's driving current activities? (Who/ what section).
 - What's happened before? (what to do or not do from that attempt).
 - Precinct selection / confirmation.
- Are there any pitfalls to look out for?
- Next Steps, Comms and Reporting (including how this group will be kept informed).



TAKING A PRECINCT APPROACH

WHY TAKE A PRECINCT APPROACH?

Let's think of a 'precinct' as a geographical concentration of foodservice businesses (cafes, bakeries, restaurants, quick service restaurants and/or takeaways) within a Local Government Area (LGA) where there is a sufficient volume of food waste generated and opportunity, through physical proximity, to support collective solutions.

The majority of these businesses are SMEs. In Australia, 91% restaurants and cafes employ fewer than 20 employees. Individual businesses may not have the space, infrastructure or financial capacity to successfully source separate and/or manage their waste. By bringing businesses together, a group solution may be discovered which would not be feasible for an individual business and for which local councils may be able to facilitate solutions.

SELECTING THE PRECINCT(S)

Start by **understanding locations and dynamics of foodservice businesses**. This may be facilitated through Council's business development or business liaison officer.

Precinct Selection Criteria could include:

- Number of businesses (keep in mind attrition rate, business/staff turnover).
- Type of businesses (foodservice vs mixed retail, independent vs franchise/chain).
- Not part of other council initiatives (too confusing and time consuming for businesses).
- Replicable (similar to other areas with the LGA).
- Champion or long term/established business.
- Close proximity to one another and potential willingness to work together.
- Sufficient food waste.
- Community connection.
- Existing business collective.

Identify and rank several possible precincts as business recruitment can be challenging.

KNOW YOUR PRECINCT(S)

Gather desk top data to understand background information about your precinct:
What food service businesses are located in the precinct?

- What do they serve?
- What are their hours of business?
- Who is their main clientele?
- Is there a natural 'champion/ leader'?

Understand the current waste profile

- Number of bins by type?
- What is the collection frequency?
- Which waste service contractors?



IDENTIFY ANY RISKS

POSSIBLE RISKS

POSSIBLE RISKS	PROPOSED RISK TREATMENT
High turnover of business	Involve businesses with a strong community connection or well-established businesses
High turnover of staff	Help owners/managers implement strong and ongoing communication / education of how and why the business is diverting food waste during employee onboarding process
Organic waste collections services are not available in their area	Use collective demand from precinct to attract new services; possibly at a more competitive rate. Council to provide a list of service providers
Community concerns about organic bins	Sharing waste contractors can make more frequent pick ups more cost effective
Community concerns about increased traffic from additional waste vehicles	Sharing waste contractors can make reduce overall vehicle numbers into precinct
Getting accurate organic waste volumes/ weights to inform waste contractors for a baseline	Use other indirect sources such as waste contractors and/or estimate based on number of bins and pickup schedule
Getting qualitative data from businesses (may be unwilling to provide as think they will be judged)	Any surveys need to be concise and accessible
Food waste contamination	Ensure new staff are informed of requirements and limitations, and bins not accessible to public
Keeping momentum after the precinct trial finishes	In NSW there is a legal requirement for FOGO recycling
Challenges in working with busy foodservice businesses	See End Food Waste Australia's dedicated hospitality webpage.

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Delivering the message about food waste reduction issues and initiatives is challenging in such a diverse and fragmented sector. Advice given by authorities can sometimes be viewed with scepticism that those delivering the advice do not understand how real businesses operate. Possible **ways to communicate with multiple businesses** effectively include:

- Dedicate time to visit businesses and speak with owners / managers / staff face-to-face. Building rapport and trust early, and providing a person behind the project can dramatically influence the willingness of the business and success of the project.
- Chambers of Commerce or Trade Associations can be useful mechanisms to communicate with businesses since they often already have existing networks to leverage.
- Local associations e.g. the Wine and Tourism Association in wine regions.
- Waste contractors have access to businesses and can provide data about volumes and contamination rates.
- Food Health and Safety Inspectors are already regularly visiting businesses and have established relationships.

Any communications to foodservice business's needs to be concise, practical and written in appropriate language. Many small business already operate in alignment with the principles of circular economy but would seldom use terms like circular economy or circularity. Any education/training materials provided need to be in appropriate formats, such as apps, social media posts or short (2-3 min) videos. However, the role of face-to-face interactions cannot be overemphasized. Foodservice businesses are fast-paced environments with multiple demands for attention, managers, and staff simply do not have the time to read, digest and take on board new behaviours.

A plan also needs to be developed for internal Council communications, to keep teams across Council informed and also identify opportunities to amplify food waste messaging.

ENGAGING THE PRECINCT BUSINESSES

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Engaging food service businesses is extremely challenging. Using established networks and existing relationships can get projects off the ground more quickly and with greater likelihood of success for your trial.

Key messaging and motivation to get business participation:

- No cost to participate.
- It's not complicated to get involved; [Council will help by providing necessary equipment such as bins, AS4736 certified compostable bin liners, signage for the trial].
- Be seen as a leader (influencing other business owners nearby and build customer loyalty for using more sustainable business practices).
- Building a sense of collaboration and collective problem solving.
- Social normalisation = the sense of doing the right thing or that everyone is doing this.
- NSW FOGO mandates will make it compulsory to divert food waste from landfill.
- Raising awareness of the consequences of not acting on food waste.
- Financial incentives and economic reasons are crucial, especially in today's challenging economic climate.
- Provide evidence as to how reducing food waste to landfill can save the business money (less waste = more profit).
- Provide a clear and convincing business case for the perceived time and effort required to separate and reduce food waste. Use case studies of businesses already separating organics (realistically you only need to remove the napkin and the rest of the plate waste is organic).

VISIT THE PRECINCT BUSINESSES

Visit foodservice businesses in the precinct, starting with the likely 'Champion.' It is useful to have two council officers make the initial call, utilising someone known to the business to introduce the precinct project officer. Have a flyer explaining the trial project ready in case the manager needs to refer to an absentee owner. Provide direct contact information of the project officer to the business.

GATHER GENERAL INTEREST IN THE PROJECT

- Follow up at least 3 times with foodservice business in the precinct. [If there is a clear champion, take them with you to recruit other businesses in their precinct].
- Explain how Council will practically support the trial with equipment, advice and assistance with waste contractors.
- Start to understand what businesses are doing now about separating their food waste, current collection volumes and frequencies, and waste management challenges for these food service businesses.
- Encourage businesses to start thinking about their current waste output (how many red bins do they go through each week, what is the cost of this, what percentage of that waste is food/coffee).

Experience shows having a local champion is key to getting other foodservice businesses on board.



GETTING STARTED

IDENTIFY AND SHARE A PROJECT TIMELINE FOR THE TRIAL

Liaise with precinct businesses to identify an 'average' time of year to commence the trial. For example, try and avoid major busy public holidays seasons such as Christmas, January and Easter. Agree on a time frame of at least two months for the initial trial. Talk with the businesses about how you would judge success at the end of the trial.

ENSURE ALL THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT IS IN PLACE

Council's role is to ensure everything is in place for the trial to make it as easy as possible for precinct businesses to source separate their food waste.

Work with kitchen staff to identify locations for the extra bin(s), provide appropriate liners and have a flyer for over the food waste bin with pictures as to what goes into which bin. [Pictures and stickers are preferred as language may be a consideration in some kitchens].

Outside, provide appropriate bins for frequent organic collections, shared where possible to reinforce the precinct concept. Check in with the waste contractor that everything is ready from their perspective and then follow up with them regularly as to implementation.

Consider external elements, such as contamination from people passing by in busy footfall areas; potentially consider bins that can be locked, or have a clasp to hold the lid shut.

START MEASURING AND LEARNING

Establishing a baseline of business food waste is important. This can occur through using Bin Trim, or simply noting down the number of full internal food waste bins for the first week. Council should provide a measurement sheet with weight (or volume), waste composition and a note on the number of covers or overall assessment of the day would assist in comparability. As the trial progresses businesses may be able to become more aware and granular regarding the composition of the waste -is it prep waste, coffee grounds or customer plate waste?

VISIT THE PRECINCT DAILY FOR THE FIRST WEEK

Successful precinct approaches are underpinned by visible and ongoing support from Council officers. Checking in daily for the first week to identify and quickly address any initial 'teething' problems, will keep the project on track and demonstrate support for the businesses in this new endeavour. Having a Council support officer who solves issues in real time will be invaluable in helping businesses follow the new procedures effectively.



KEEPING MOMENTUM

HOW'S IT GOING AND HOW CAN COUNCIL BEST HELP?

Visit precinct businesses regularly to support the trial. Having Council support throughout the trial is critical to a successful outcome. After the first week, visits can reduce to several times a week, or even once a week depending on business engagement and uptake, but are still required to ensure a small problem (bin liners etc) does not derail the entire trial. With the rapid staff turnover in food service businesses, having a steady Council presence to support businesses and quickly address any emergent issues is vital to the success of the project.

After several weeks extend the conversations to food waste avoidance. What have businesses noticed that is being wasted most? Why do they think that is the case? Are there any easy solutions that Council could assist with like finding community gardens able to use coffee grounds? Provide links to EFWA's Hospitality Guidelines and follow up next visit.

Implement the communication plan with articles and social media highlighting the trial and participating businesses

Near the conclusion of the trial, get businesses to remeasure their food waste using the measurement sheet to provide a before and after comparison. Celebrate success!



EVALUATE

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

At commencement of the precincts project trial Councils may want to consider how they are going to measure success for the project? How will the trial be evaluated? What data needs collecting and when?

If the goal of the project is to simply divert food waste from landfill, assessing the number of businesses separating and diverting food waste also will provide useful information.

Research from Zero Waste Scotland and from EFWA's Case Study of the Opera Bar shows that just by source-separating food businesses start to reduce their food waste by 30%. Once food waste is separated – everyone can see how much is being wasted and start to consider possibilities for reduction.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Gathering food waste data is challenging. Businesses may feel uncomfortable sharing this information and may feel shamed for being wasteful. Many businesses are unaware of how much of their waste is food. Busy foodservice operations may not have time, may not see the value or may not have suitable equipment.

Are there other sources of data such as Bin Trim, previous council surveys, or waste contractor's data? If food waste cannot be separated and weighed, visual estimations and industry accepted percentage compositions can be used to extrapolate data.

Understanding the amount of food waste generated at commencement of the trial will help provide a baseline to measure success against and is also vital when trying to understand what services will be most appropriate and cost effective.

If the goal of the project is to simply divert food waste from landfill, assessing the number of businesses separating and diverting food waste also provides useful information.

Rich data can be collected through surveys and interviews:

- Understanding what is currently working well in source separation and waste management, what is missing and what barriers need to be overcome?
- Explore what resources/support/services are available and what is needed to improve food waste reduction and management?
- Is there a desire to work collectively with other precinct-based businesses?
- How can businesses work better collectively to reduce food waste to landfill and costs?

Pre and post project surveys and comparative data can identify how attitudes and behaviours have changed over the course of time, although it is challenging to attribute causality. Post project interviews and surveys can also help understand whether behaviour change is lasting and has been embedded.

Also, keep a log of conversations, issues, and successes that have happened throughout the trial to refer back to. Try to update this regularly, as simple yet critical comments, such as 'we noticed 70% of our organics waste is coffee beans' or 'we have reduced our chip servings by 15% to reduce plate-waste and customers have not commented' may be forgotten over time.



CREATING A LASTING COLLECTIVE SOLUTION

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT

The selection of workable long term solutions is highly context and resource dependent. Nationwide, where Councils remain involved, their precinct-based solutions continue to deliver better waste management outcomes. If resources are limited, establishing a collective precinct solution that is durable will require consideration of the physical needs of the precinct, but also longer term contractual options. The process of getting businesses to identify and sign up to an ongoing solution may be even more of a challenge than potential regulatory barriers.

SHARING A FOOD WASTE BIN: CAN PRECINCT BUSINESSES SHARE A BIN?

Benefits

- Reduce number of food waste bins needed in the area.
- Reduce costs.
- Reduce number of heavy vehicles visiting the area.

Contract Considerations

- Who will own the contract?
- What happens if this business changes hand or closes?
- Will businesses be able to leave or join?

Fee Structure

- How will this be decided?
- What information is needed?
- If businesses leave or join how will this affect fees?
- How will you measure the amount of waste each business generates to fairly divide costs?
- If businesses require different frequencies of collection will this be reflected in charges?

Contamination

- If all businesses don't do a good job keeping things like plastic and cutlery out of food bins, the entire collection will be affected – how do you determine who the perpetrators are?
- Find out where the food waste is being processed, some facilities sort food waste before processing.

Responsibilities

- Can all businesses easily access the bin?
- Is the bin in a safe location for all users (especially late at night)?
- Can the public access the bin? [May need to use locks to prevent non-food waste entering the bin]
- Who will take the bin in and out for collection and bring it back in afterward?
- Who will keep the bin clean?
- If the bin is damaged who will replace it?

USING THE SAME FOOD WASTE COLLECTION CONTRACTOR

[Sharing a food waste bin might not be applicable in many settings, and there are many barriers to overcoming a successful collection. It might be simpler to think about each business having their own bin but negotiating a better rate by all using the same food waste collection contractor].

Benefits

- Reduce costs.
- Reduce number of trucks to the area.

Considerations

- How will you all negotiate fees and timing with the preferred food waste contractor?
- What happens if businesses drop out of the scheme or new ones want to join?
- What if all businesses currently use different waste contractors and don't want to use a different provider just for food waste?
- What information does the contractor need to work out details of the service and shared costs?



SHARING ON-SITE PROCESSING EQUIPMENT

Not all businesses have space for on-site processing. If one business does have space or there is a community space, could equipment be shared?

Benefits

- Streamline services – why operate multiple pieces of equipment in the same locality
- If out-puts need collecting and further processing, sharing equipment means one pick up.
- Reduce costs.

Contract Considerations

- Who owns the space?
- Who will own the equipment/lease?
- What will happen if the owner of the space changes?
- What if businesses want to leave or join?
- Are there issues with becoming a waste processing facility?

Fee Structure

- How will this be decided?
- What information is needed?
- If businesses leave or join, how will this affect fees?

Contamination

- Is there an acceptable contamination level? (e.g. 10%)
- What are the processes and procedures if contamination level exceeds acceptable limits? Will the waste need to be collected by a separate partner?
- How do you determine who the perpetrators are?

Responsibilities

- Can all businesses easily access the equipment?
- Is the equipment in a safe location for all users (especially late at night)?
- Can the public access the equipment? May need to use locks to prevent non-food waste entering the bin.
- Who will operate the equipment?
- Who will be responsible for service and maintenance?
- If the equipment is damaged who will be responsible for repair fees?





ENDING FOOD WASTE
STARTS WITH ALL OF US