



Community Waste Survey Results

October 2024

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Acronyms:

CWMC	Cessnock Waste Management Centre
DWMC	Domestic Waste Management Charge
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
FOGO	Food Organics Garden Organics
LGA	Local Government Area

1. Background

The Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy 2026-2031 provides a clear direction for the management of waste during the next five-year period and a pathway for the future.

The development of the 2026-31 Strategy included a community survey conducted during October. The survey aimed to gather information on the services Council provides around four key areas that were identified as being of most interest to our customers:

1. Bulky waste service preferences (i.e. vouchers or kerbside pickup);
2. Household waste collection post food being added to the organics bin;
3. Cessnock Waste Management Centre; and
4. Illegal dumping and littering.

This report summarises the responses received to the October 2024 community survey as well as details of previous community surveys (on waste services and Council customer services) where applicable. The survey process undertaken was optional and as such there is likely to be a degree of self-selection bias in the results as respondents may have chosen to complete the survey because they have strong views on the topic one way or the other.

2. Average Household Bin

Waste and recycling bin audits have been undertaken to assist Council in the collection of data and to determine if waste services are meeting the requirements of our community. The results allow Council to assess progress towards waste to landfill reduction targets (in line with our adopted Waste Strategy and the NSW EPA targets). The bin audits also measure the viability of the service, suggest future improvement strategies and identify for improvement.

Waste bins audits have been conducted in 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020 and 2024. The most recent bin audit in October 2024 included the waste, recycling and garden organics services. An additional audit is scheduled for late 2025 with the purpose of measuring the impact of the new FOGO service on the diversion rate from landfill.

Key points from the 2024 audit compared to the 2020 audit were:

- A combined 11.1% decrease in recycling and garden organics bin presentation.
- A 9.5% increase in waste, 7.0% increase in recyclables, and a 6.8% increase in garden organics in terms of bin volume.
- An increase of 0.33 kg/hh/wk in unrecovered recyclable material and a decrease of 0.16 kg/hh/wk in unrecovered garden organics in waste bins.
- An increase of 0.05 kg/hh/wk in recyclable contamination and a decrease of 0.28 kg/hh/wk in garden organics contamination.
- A 3.7% decrease in overall diversion from landfill rate at kerbside.

A summary of the results of the kerbside bin audit comparison can be found in Table 1.

Table1: Summary Results Kerbside Bin Audits

Indicator (Unit of Measurement)	Bin	Result	
		2020	2024
Bin Presentation Rate (ie. % households putting bins out for collection)	Waste	88.0	89.0
	Recycling	78.5	72.4
	Garden Organics	72.1	67.1
Weight of bin presented (kg/hh/wk)	Waste	13.03	14.48
	Recycling	3.51	3.21
	Garden Organics	9.40	8.71
Volume of bin used (% full)	Waste	56.0	65.5
	Recycling	64.0	71.0
	Garden Organics	59.9	66.7
Unrecovered material in waste bin (kg/hh/wk)	Recycling	1.78	2.11
	Garden Organics	1.08	0.92
Contamination rate (kg/hh/wk)	Recycling	0.41	0.46
	Garden Organics	0.37	0.09
Resource recovery rate at kerbside (% by kg)	Recycling	63.5	56.6
	Garden Organics	89.3	90.4
Diversion from landfill rate at kerbside (% by kg)	All Bins	46.8	43.1

This data has allowed the generation of an infographic (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) depicting the average household bin.



Figure 1: The Average Household Bin

Figure 2: Contents of General Waste Bin

3. Waste Survey Promotion

A multi-faceted approach to promoting the survey was undertaken and is summarised in Table 2.



Table 2: Survey Promotion Methods

Method	Details	Comments/Results
Flyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~26,000 flyers delivered by Australia Post to every household in Cessnock LGA. Saturday 19 October 2024 Mattress Drop-off Event at Mount View Basin Carpark 	Promoting the drop-in sessions and survey link.
Manned displays Staff answered questions and provided printed surveys for those without internet access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday 24 October 2024: 3pm – 5pm at Kurri Kurri Coles Thursday 31 October 2024: 10:30am – 12:30pm at Cessnock Village Shopping Centre Saturday 2 November 2024: 8am – 12pm at Huntlee Farmers Market 	
Posters	Bin cabinet displays around Cessnock, Weston, Kurri Kurri, Branxton and Huntlee.	Promoting the drop-in sessions and survey link.
Facebook posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 October 2024 promoting the drop-in sessions and survey link. 30 October 2024 reminder and promoting the drop-in sessions and survey link. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 81 comments / 49 shares. 24 comments / 1 share.
Website page	Reasons for holding the survey and link to online version to complete.	
Direct invitation	Environment and Waste Community Newsletter	Email for November 2024 sent to over 1,000 emails

4. Survey Respondents

A total of 1,390 surveys were completed. Details of suburb, household size and tenure, age and length of time in the LGA were gathered for respondents and compared to 2021 census data to assess any biases in the data.

In general survey respondents:

- Were a similar distribution for wards of residence (Figure 2).

Length of time in the LGA (Figure 3) can be used to consider the impact of changes in services noting that:

- The new Waste Management Centre opened in November 2017.
- The garden organics kerbside collection service commenced in March 2017.

Where residents have moved from may also influence their responses and behaviours. For example, those that have been in the LGA less than 12 months would view the current waste services as normal as they haven't experienced the previous system but will compare it with their previous service.

Conversely, those that have resided in the LGA longer than 10 years have experienced the greatest number of service changes and may be 'change-weary'.

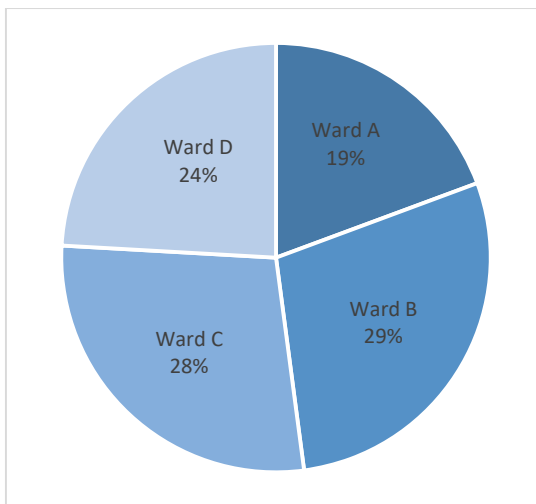


Figure 3: Survey Respondents by Ward

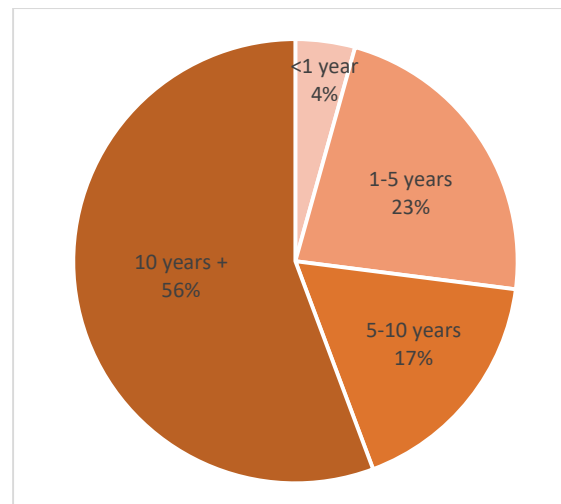


Figure 4: Survey Respondent's Time in LGA

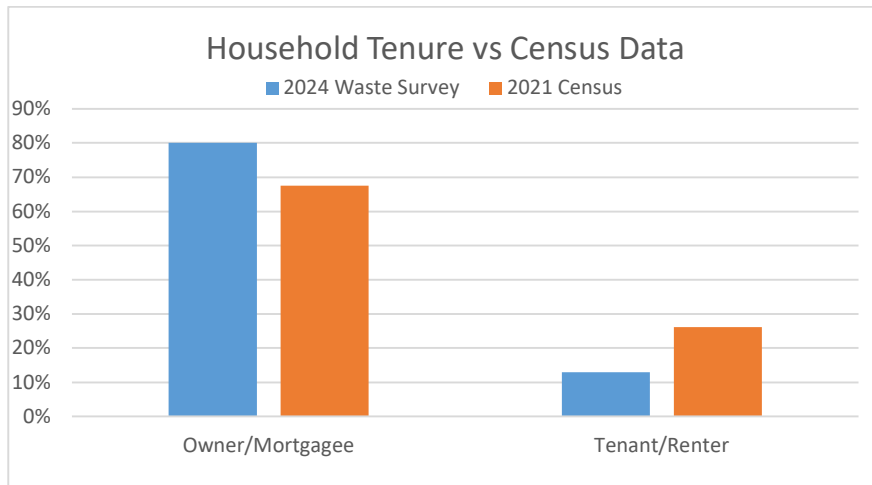


Figure 5: Survey Respondent vs LGA Household Tenure

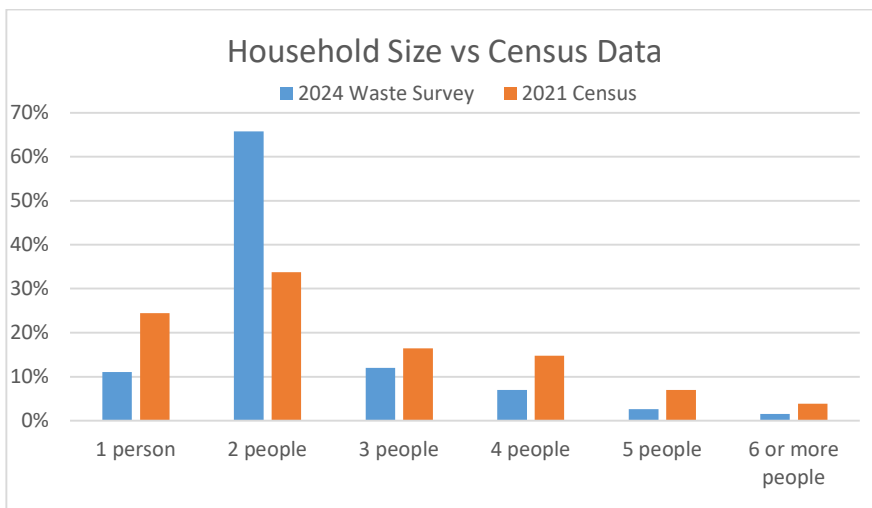


Figure 6: Survey Respondent vs LGA Household Size

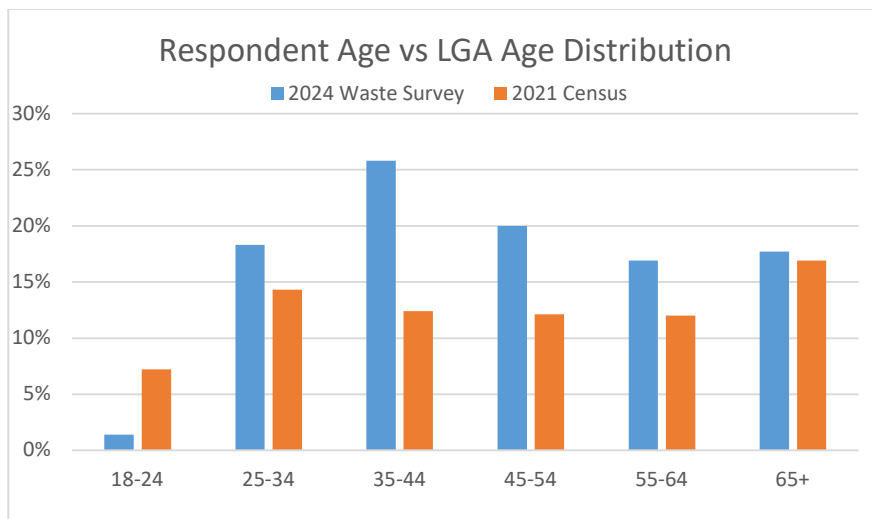


Figure 7: Survey Respondent vs LGA Age

5. NSW Waste Levy

One of the NSW Government's key priority actions is to increase recycling to limit the need for new landfills, reduce landfill disposal and turn waste into valuable resources. The Government has a range of policies in place to increase recycling and divert valuable resources from landfill back into the economy. The key economic instrument for greater waste avoidance and resource recovery is the waste levy which is increased annually (see Table 3).

The waste levy is paid on all waste received at EPA-licensed landfills in the regulated area (i.e. Cessnock Waste Management Centre). The total Waste Levy paid by Council for domestic waste in 2023-24 was \$4.5 million. It is noted that the NSW EPA is currently undertaking a review of the waste levy.

Only 32% of respondents were aware of the Waste Levy (see Figure 8).

Table 3: Annual NSW Waste Levy Rates

Financial Year	Levy Rate (per tonne)
2024-25	\$170.10
2023-24	\$163.20
2022-23	\$151.60
2021-22	\$147.10
2020-21	\$146.00
2019-20	\$143.60
2018-19	\$141.20
2017-18	\$138.20
2016-17	\$135.70
2015-16	\$133.10
2014-15	\$120.90
2013-14	\$107.80
2012-13	\$93.00
2011-12	\$78.60
2010-11	\$65.30
2009-10	\$52.40

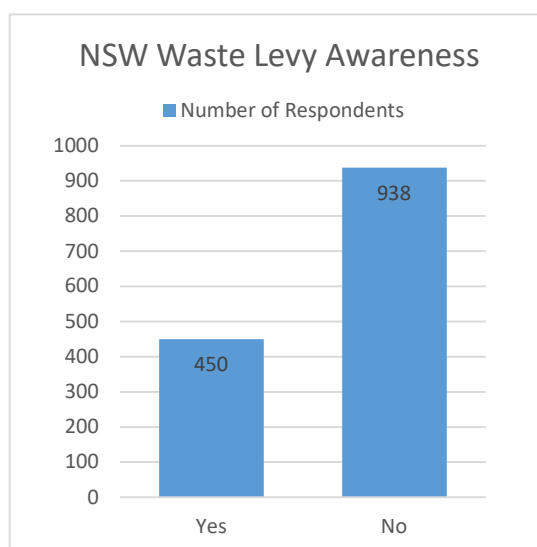


Figure 8: Survey Respondent's Awareness of NSW Waste Levy

6. Bulk Waste Services

The provision of household bulk waste services has been a topic of diversion in the community for many years. Cessnock moved away from a scheduled (suburb by suburb) bulk waste kerbside collection over 25 years ago and issued vouchers to owners as an alternative replacement. The purpose of the bulk waste vouchers is to allow residents to appropriately and cost effectively manage bulk waste. The voucher system also seeks:

- To promote a clean and healthy community.
- To reduce illegal dumping.

Currently ratepayers who are levied with the Domestic Waste Management Charge (DWMC) receive 12 vouchers per year. Each of these vouchers allow up to 250kg of waste or recyclable material to be disposed free of charge at the CWMC. The vouchers apply to domestic household waste only and cannot be used for special waste items such as asbestos, tyres or mattresses.

Whilst popular with residents, issues with the management and use of vouchers have been identified as:

- Giving a false perception that waste disposal is 'free';
- Have involved some mis-use with some vouchers being sold, traded or used for commercial waste;
- Limiting access to renters by being provided to owners; and
- Involve cost sharing which may be inequitable.

6.1 Waste Voucher Usage:

In 2023-24:

- The number of voucher transactions declined by 25%.
- The number of voucher transactions has declined by 25%.

Table 4: Historical Usage of Vouchers

FY	No. voucher transactions	Voucher usage	Ave. weight per trans (kg)	Total waste (tonnes)	Total Cost Vouchers
13/14	32,197	40%	222	7,175	\$2,014,798
14/15	31,857	39%	220	7,013	\$1,988,274
15/16	34,559	42%	225	7,763	\$2,369,739
16/17	44,667	53%	220	9,014	\$2,464,884
17/18	32,768	39%	245	7,331	\$2,041,114
18/19*	24,360	27%	249	6,054	\$1,710,551
19/20	22,682	25%	256	5,800	\$1,690,605
20/21	26,931	29%	249	6,704	\$1,987,065
21/22	23,821	25%	255	6,074	\$2,019,725
22/23	28,420	29%	233	6,623	\$2,348,367
23/24**	21,265	9%	218	4,651 28% recycling	\$1,646,588

*First year address added to vouchers to address misuse

**First year 12 vouchers (4 x waste and 8 x recycling) per property issued with weight per voucher reduced to 250kg

6.2 2024 Bulk Waste Survey:

A section of 2024 Survey regarded the voucher/bulky waste system (see Figure 9) as well as an additional digital survey (see Figure 10).

The 2024 Survey showed respondents wanted to have a choice between vouchers and booked kerbside collected as offered by other councils (1 being the most preferred and 3 being the least preferred). Furthermore, the digital survey showed 58% of the 479 respondents wanting the same choice.

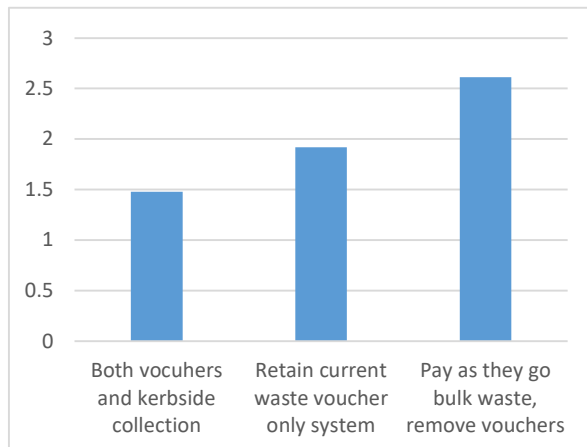


Figure 9: 2024 Waste Strategy Survey Bulk Waste



Figure 10: 2024 Digital Bulk Waste Survey

Respondents that preferred a kerbside bulky collection service sighted the following reasons:

- Convenient for those that do not have vehicles, trailers or licences to transport waste themselves.
- More useful/ accessible for the elderly and disabled (who may also be affected by the above).
- May help alleviate illegal dumping.
- Provide services to rented properties who do not regularly receive vouchers.

Common comments (quoted verbatim with no spelling or grammar corrections) received included:

“Curbside bulk waste collection is essential. Not everyone has access to a vehicle that can transport waste to the center.”

“I don’t think waste vouchers or council pick up should be should be either one or the other but rather a mix. With people giving up a voucher for a council pick up. There are many people without trailers or the ability to get to the waste management centre. This should include renters.”

6.3 2024 Survey Responses Regarding Waste App/Vouchers:

The Cessnock Waste App went live in January 2024, containing a calendar on waste collection dates, a A-Z Recycling Guide, FAQ’s and the Waste Vouchers. A section of 2024 Waste Strategy Survey regarded downloads (see Figure 11).

Of the 729 respondents that did download the application, 75.24% agreed it was easy to download and 55.98% found the notifications regarding upcoming events useful.

With 654 respondents not downloading the application (see Figure 12), the top reasons for why were:

- 32.12% didn’t know this was how they got their vouchers.
- 22.58% haven’t needed a voucher yet, but will download it when needed.
- 18.95 didn’t want to install the application.

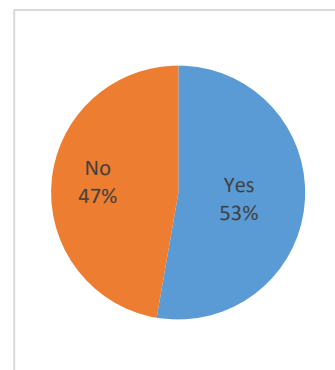


Figure 11: Households Downloaded Waste App

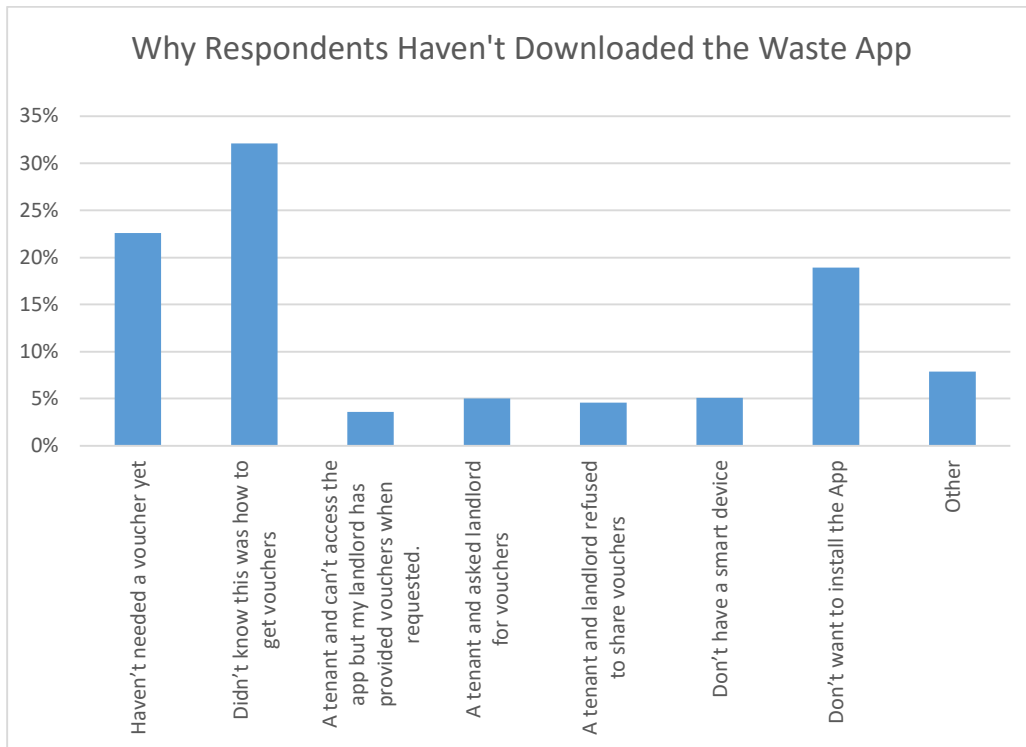


Figure 12: 2024 Waste Strategy Reasons for Not Downloading Waste App

Comments:

"I have found the waste app to be very handy when needing to check which bin goes out on which week and also for when bulky items can be disposed of

"The App is not right for everyone to use- especially elderly and people with disabilities."

6.3.1 Preferred Voucher Delivery Method

A common comment concerning vouchers is as they are sent to owners with the rates notice many renters miss out. Waste and recycling vouchers can currently only be accessed by the property owner and Council relies on landlords to make these available to tenants. To address this concern, we asked if vouchers should be issued to households directly instead of through owners only (see Figure 13).

Using the statistics from various points in the 2024 Waste Strategy Survey, bias was assessed regarding the preferred voucher delivery method with the overall responses being:

- 13% of respondents being a tenant/renter with a waste service (Figure 5).
- 13% of tenants needing to request vouchers from landlords with 4.6% of landlords refusing to share waste vouchers with their tenants (Figure 12).
- 79% thought vouchers should be issued to household directly (Figure 13).

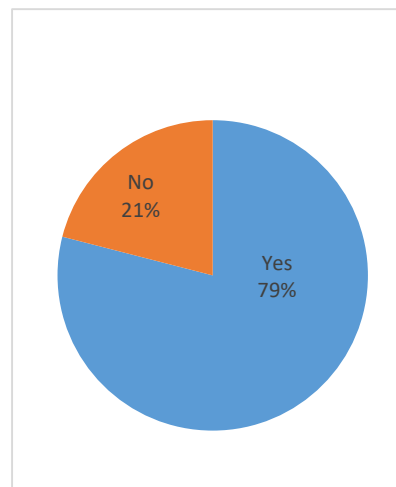


Figure 13: Should vouchers be issued to households directly

Common comments (quoted verbatim with no spelling or grammar corrections) received included:

"I'm a tenant and my landlord isn't tech savvy so can't use the app."

"It's a shocking set up for those of us whom rent and the owners and real estate don't like to communicate with us. So the vouchers being via the app, is useless for us. But we have plenty of bulk waste that needs to go to the tip. But can't afford to pay for the service."

7. FOGO

Council's current contracts for collection and processing of the garden organics (GO) bin includes accepting food organics and garden organics (FOGO). This will happen 30 June 2025, with the inclusion of food in the organics bin shifting the servicing of this bin to weekly.

With this in mind, questions regarding the distribution of caddy liners and waste bin service were asked with responses are summarised in Figures 14 and 15.

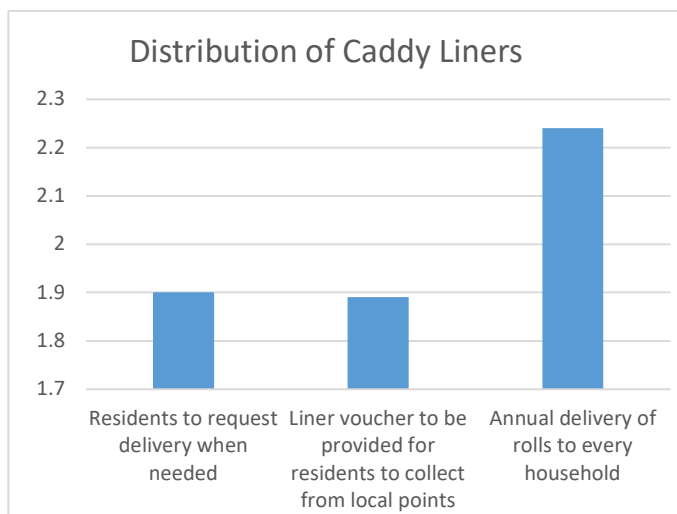


Figure 14: Distribution of Caddy Liners (1 being most preferred, 3 being least preferred)

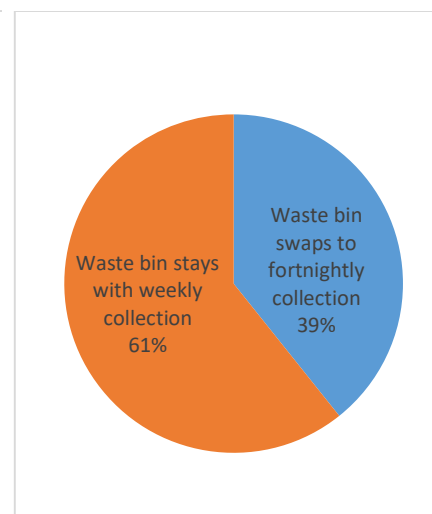


Figure 15: Preferred Waste Bin Collection Frequency

The respondents preferred the cheaper option of distribution of caddy liners with liner vouchers to be provided for residents to collect from local points, such as libraries, offices, and community facilities in their suburbs, with an estimated \$6 annual domestic waste charge increase. Respondents least favoured the annual delivery of rolls to every household, with an estimated \$15 annual domestic waste charge increase.

However, in regards to the collection frequency of red-waste bin 843 respondents preferred the more expensive option of keeping the waste bin service staying weekly, with approximately a \$60 domestic waste increase.

Common comments regarding FOGO (quoted verbatim with no spelling or grammar corrections) received included:

"I have chickens and compost 95% of my kitchen waste for my vegetable garden. I don't need the kitchen waste liners for the organics bin."

"Larger yard with a lot of green waste. A larger bin or weekly collection"

"I am extremely concerned if council reduces our red bin to fortnightly. The amount of waste we will see along the roads will increase dramatically. There is already illegal dumping throughout the Cessnock council which is seen often. Doing this will just increase this. As a family with 2 children in nappies I am extremely concerned if this is put in place. I work in LMCC in real estate (property management) and the amount of issues tenants have with fortnightly bins and bags for food scraps etc to go in green bins is terrible. Not something I would want to see in Cessnock city council with lower socioeconomic background that would be higher to illegal dump etc."

8.1 Special Needs Households

76.9% of respondents of the 2024 survey had 1-2 persons living in the same household. Waste services are provided based on the average household (census data shows that 58.1% of households in the LGA are 1-2 persons with an average household size of 2.58 persons per dwelling).

To find out more from these households a question was included in the survey asking if they had special needs requiring extra waste disposal. Those that answered yes were asked a follow up question of what special needs they had (see Figures 16 and 17).

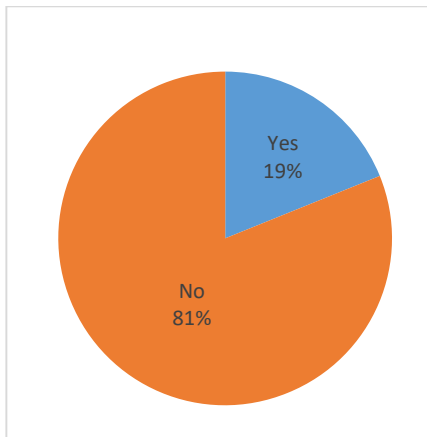


Figure 16: Do you have special needs requiring extra waste disposal?

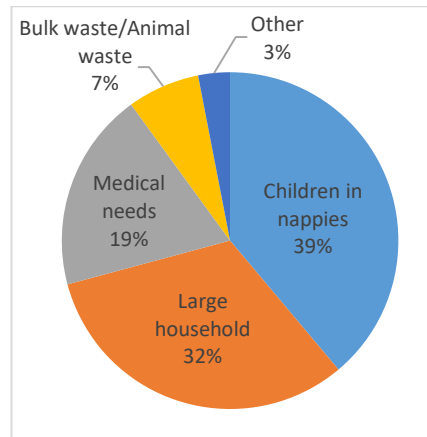


Figure 17: Special Needs

Regarding households that required extra waste disposal, 1,126 of respondents said no. However, of the respondents that said yes, majority of the special needs were children in nappies, larger households, and medical needs.

Upon further investigation it was found that 45.6% respondents had children (under 18) living in their households, while 54.4% of respondents had none.

Comments:

"I have family who has large household waste needs - 5 children with 4 in nappies. They can't afford the extra cost but need the weekly red bin collection."

"Children in nappies and using baby wipes. Weekly collection of red bin isn't even enough for us, sometimes we have to use waste vouchers just for excess weekly rubbish"

8. Cessnock Waste Management Centre Services

Questions were included in the survey about residents' experiences at Cessnock Waste Management Centre (CWMC) in the last 12 months. 1,064 respondents indicated they had visited the centre and their overwhelmingly positive responses are summarised in Figure 18:

- Over 85% were satisfied or very satisfied with their customer service and found the staff helpful and knowledgeable.
- Over 70% were satisfied or very satisfied with the site cleanliness, access to drop-off areas and ease of separating materials.

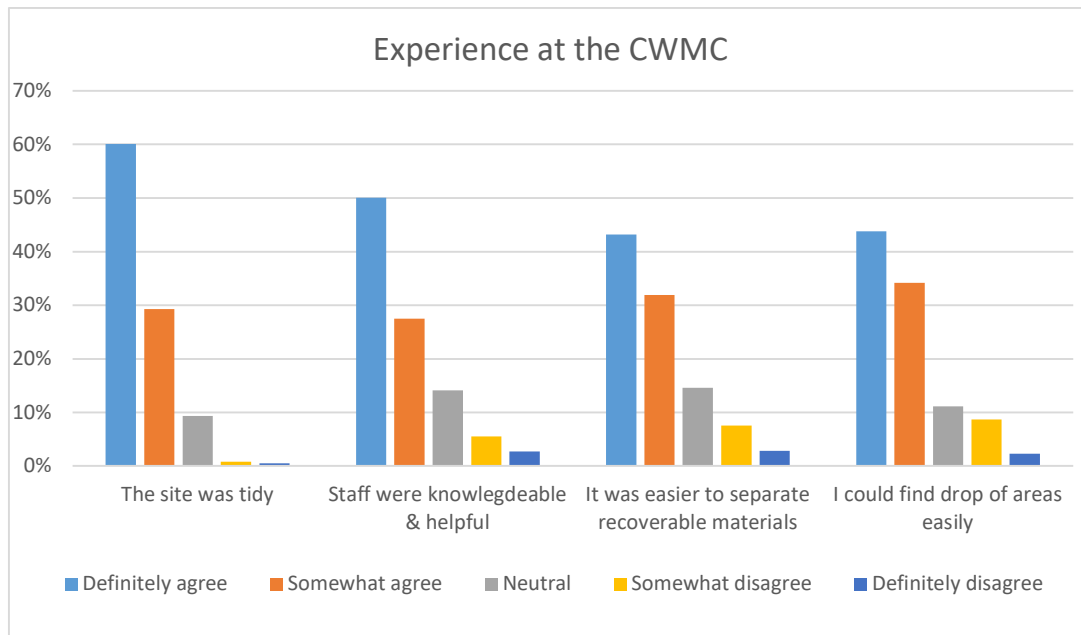


Figure 18: 2024 Waste Strategy Satisfaction with CWMC

Comments:

"We were very impressed with the state of the tip, manicured gardens and no overwhelming smells."

"More signs from office to dropping off"

"The waste management centre, and the excellent team that work up there and obviously take great pride in their work, is one of the BEST services offered by CCC."

"The staff at work in the weighbridge need customer service training"

9.1 Reuse Centre/Tip Shop

The aim of a Reuse Centre (Tip Shop as known in the community) is to reduce waste to landfill by encouraging the community to reuse materials. A Reuse Shop operated for more than 20 years at CWMC and was considered to be beneficial based on social and environmental outcomes and patronage of the site. While being recognised as a beneficial service to the community, the majority of Council's in the Hunter Region have discontinued providing this service to their communities due to the low resource recovery rates and the high cost of operation.

Despite no question in the survey regarding a reuse centre/tip shop, there were a large amount of comments stating their desire for its return. Common comments (quoted verbatim with no spelling or grammar corrections) received included:

"I miss the old recycling shop where we could purchase items that could be reused or recycled by locals"

"The recycling centre should NEVER have been removed. It prevents landfill and gives another use for goods. One man's trash 🗑️ another man's treasure 🍀"

"Bring back the Tip Shop where we can find reusable materials at a cheap price. "

"Recycling old product is good, but re-use is better. The old tip offered a re-use function through a retail front...it may have been a marginal enterprise, but people like to browse through old stuff - and occasionally buy. This reduces disposal quantities and allows some re-use of the original item. Kimbriki tip to the north of Sydney is a prime example of a well run re-use/re-cycle centre."

"I love the collections of salvaged items decorating the place. An increased focus on repurposing would be demonstrated with the introduction of a tip shop, even a men's shed style deal where men seeking purpose and connection with others, could repair and resell items for profit that could be put into other recycling programs."

9. Illegal Dumping and Litter

Illegal dumping is a major waste management and cost issue for Local Government. In the Cessnock LGA, the problem is compounded by the geography of the area and ease of access to large tracts of bushland. During 2023-24, 503 illegal dumping incidents were reported to council.

Illegal dumping and the detection of offenders is a complex task that utilises a variety of technologies and skills to detect and identify offenders. Often these activities are conducted by highly organised operators, in remote locations and under the cover of darkness. Council currently has one full-time RID Officer who investigates offences where waste has been illegally transported and disposed of outside of a licensed facility.

To gauge current community concern regarding illegal dumping and its impacts the 2024 Survey asked respondents to think about illegal dumping, and from their own personal experience, answer a series of questions (results are summarised in Figures 19 – 22).

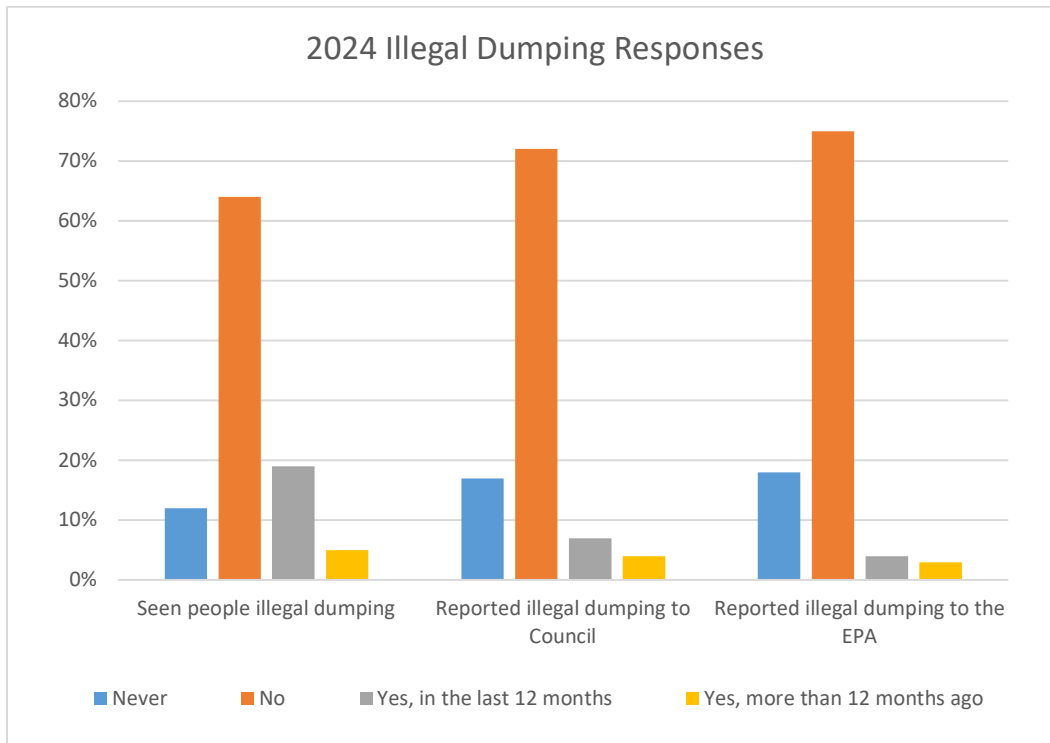


Figure 19: 2024 Survey Illegal Dumping Responses

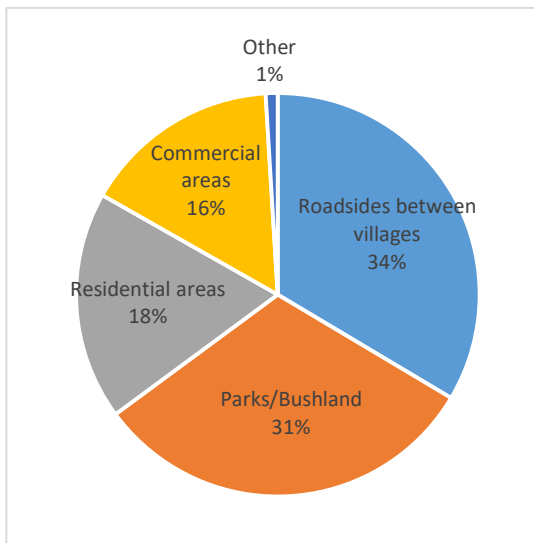


Figure 20: Where is littering an issue in the Cessnock LGA

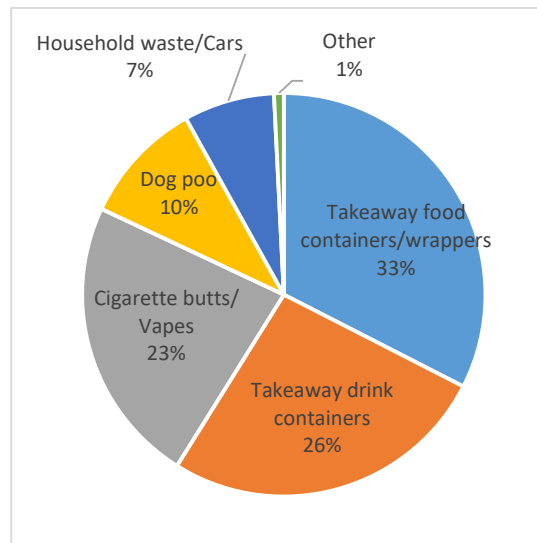


Figure 21: Type of litter notice in the Cessnock LGA

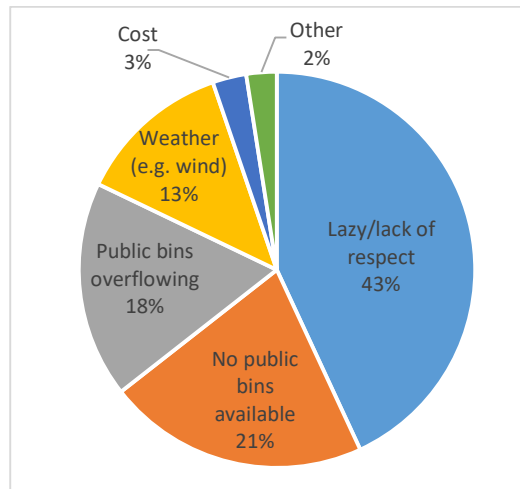


Figure 22: Why do you think there was litter visible?

This question also had an open comment option which received 340 responses that have been summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: 2024 Strategy Respondent Comments on Illegal Dumping

Issue/Cause	Comments
Cost	<p><i>"The cost of taking rubbish to the tip needs to be reduced dramatically so people will do the right thing."</i></p> <p><i>"Perhaps if Council made it cheaper/easier for residents to dispose of waste at the tip, then illegal dumping may be reduced."</i></p>
More public bins	<p><i>"There needs to be more public bins in the area. We notice people put their rubbish in ours bins when they are out for collection, but when there are no bins, the rubbish is thrown on the ground."</i></p> <p><i>"There's a need for more public waste bins. And dog poo bins."</i></p>
Identifying dumping hot spots	<p><i>"The large illegal dumping of cars, whitegoods are heavily seen in the bush areas or fire trails. There needs to be more bins available in public spaces such as the shopping centres, parks, near bus stops etc."</i></p> <p><i>"Soooo much dumping in the bush"</i></p>
Kerbside collection	<p><i>"We need kerbside pick up. A lot of people can not get to the dump to drop off rubbish (no trailer/no tow ball). Which means they never make use of the vouchers that their rates pay for."</i></p> <p><i>"A lot of the illegal dumping is large household waste and furniture, this might be reduced by kerbside collection"</i></p>
Suggestions/general comments	<p><i>"This is a real problem and a really unfortunate one. I'm afraid it's a small group of people who continue to do it and will likely not change. I don't know what the answer is but I wish there was more I could do to help! Perhaps an incentive for community-based tidy-ups?"</i></p> <p><i>"Should be fined heavily"</i></p> <p><i>"Perhaps when Council drive along to check road surfaces they report illegal dumping. If I knew who to report to I would. Please advertise boldly."</i></p>

10. Waste Minimisation and Improving Recycling

The final question in the survey concerned household behaviour towards recycling and waste minimisation (results are summarised in Figure 23).

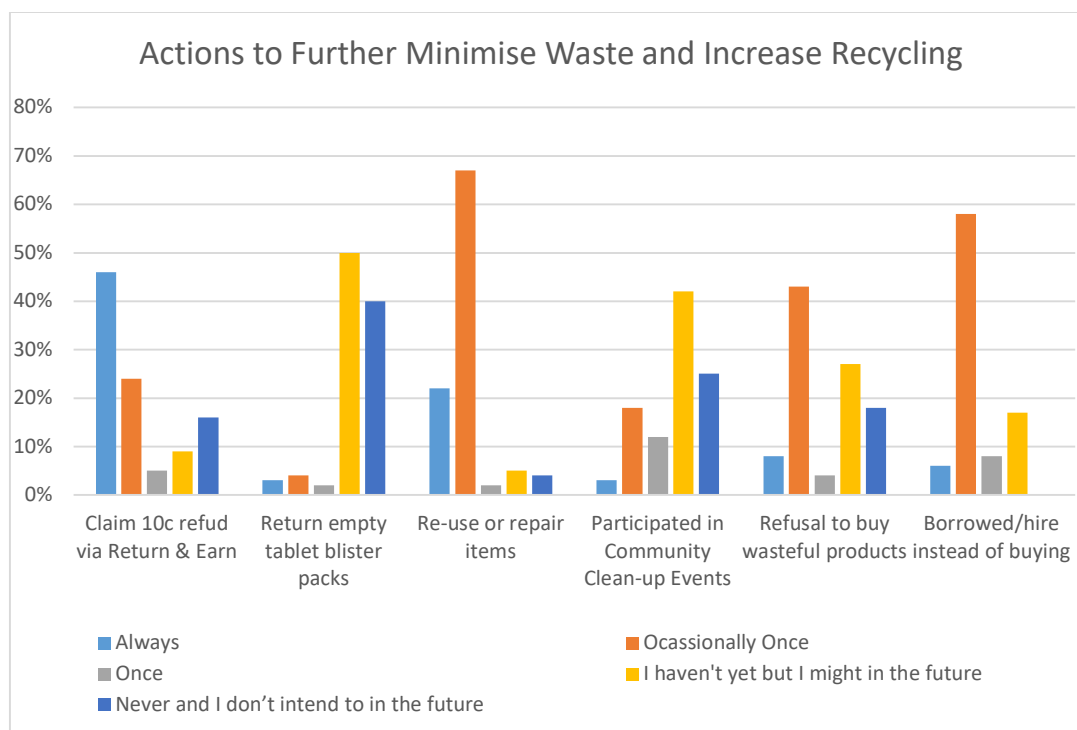


Figure 23: 2024 Waste Strategy Additional Recycling and Waste Minimisation Actions

This question also had an open comments option which received more than 270 responses. Common comments (quoted verbatim with no spelling or grammar corrections) received included:

"When I walk my dog through a small park on Weston I pick up at least three bits of rubbish every day. It's only a small contribution but it all adds up."

"We freeze leftovers. We repair damaged clothes we restore furniture and thoughtfully recycle."

"Composting scraps, repurposing items, using old clothing for rags if not donated, donating toys to others for a second life."

"At-home composting; Donating usable/wearable items to Op shops; Listing items for free on FB marketplace (one man's trash is another man's treasure."

BRING BACK THE TIP SHOP!"

11. Continual Consultation

In concluding the survey, a question was asked if respondents would be willing to participate in a small focus group (of 1-2 hours) to provide more information on the topics covered in the survey. 234 (16.86%) respondents answered yes and provided contact details to enable this continual consultation.

The final survey question advised that there are a variety of events throughout the year (including free drop-offs, workshops and giveaways) run by the Environment and Waste team. 426 (30.69%) respondents provided an email address to receive direct notice of these events via an email newsletter.