

Respecting Country

A sustainable waste strategy for First Nation communities



APRIL 2021





Acknowledgment of Country

We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of the land and sea, their spirits and their legacy. The foundations laid by these ancestors – our First Nations peoples – give strength, inspiration and courage to current and future generations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, towards creating a better Queensland.

Our shared vision

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils will become significant contributors to the state's zero-waste ambitions, where waste is avoided, re-used and recycled. This will be delivered by initiatives appropriate to the unique cultural and geographic contexts of communities.



Introduction

The Queensland Government released its Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy (Queensland Waste Strategy) in 2019, outlining a vision for a zero-waste society.

Current 'take-make-use-dispose' approaches have passed their use-by date and we are now striving for a circular system that keeps materials in use longer, extracts maximum use from them, diverts as much as possible away from landfill and creates economic opportunities from waste management.

This requires an innovative approach for Queensland's 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, which face unique challenges including scarce resources, high costs for products, geographic isolation, long transport distances by land or water, and often harsh and unpredictable climates. This approach also recognises that councils themselves have the most informed understanding of these challenges and that 'one size fits all' doesn't work.

Each community warrants an appropriate waste management solution that fits its geographic and resourcing circumstances, while accommodating and honouring its cultural and custodial relationships with the land and sea.

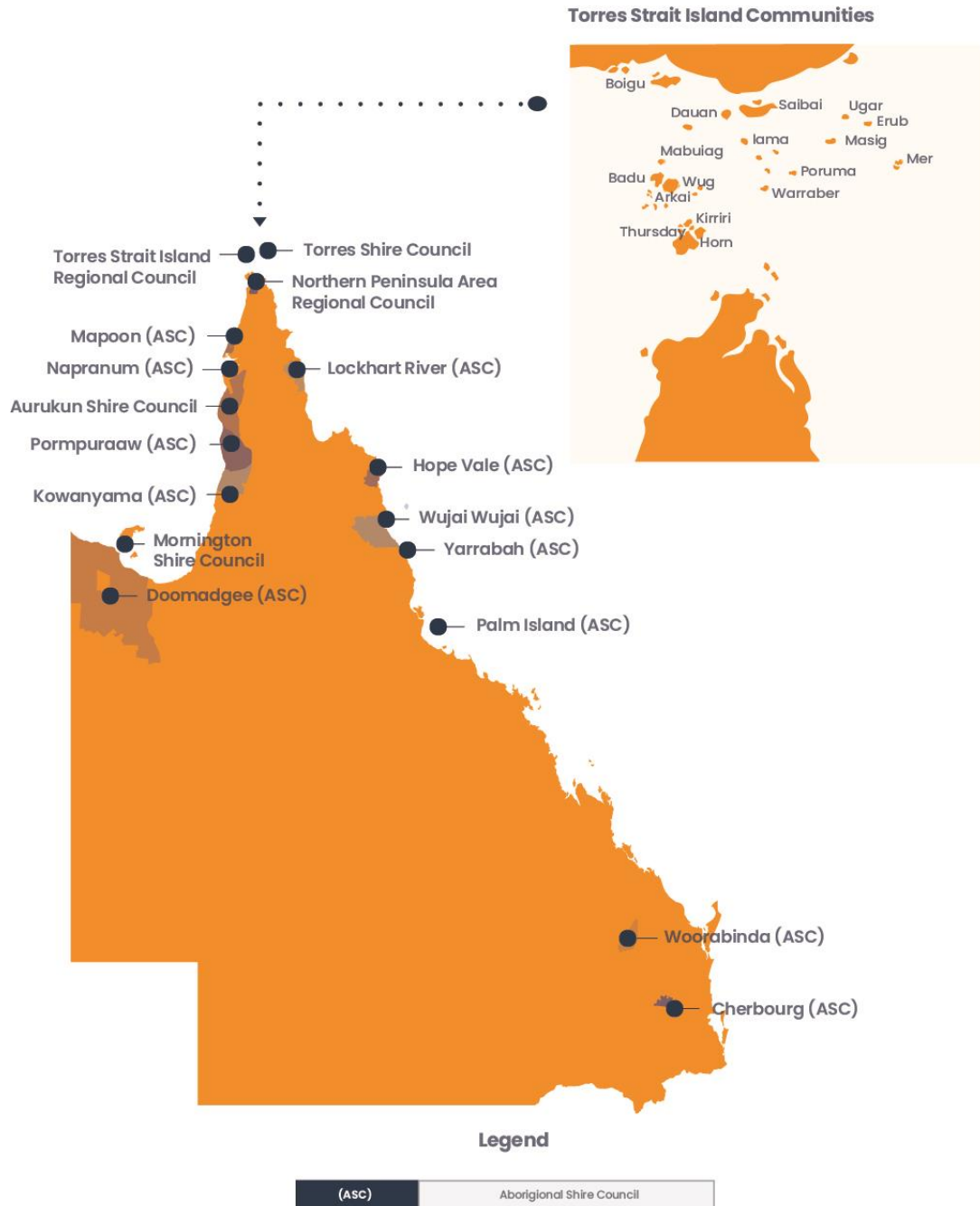
Meeting these challenges – while optimising the opportunities they present – necessitates a stand-alone *Respecting Country – A sustainable waste strategy for First Nation communities* (the strategy). This supports the Queensland Waste Strategy while enabling and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils to deliver appropriate, tailored waste management solutions that create economic opportunities for innovative new enterprises and employment within their communities.

The strategy is the result of a partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, informed by site visits and meetings and overseen by a project steering group comprising council CEOs, Department of Environment and Science (DES), the project consultant and Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).

The strategy will serve as the overarching resource to guide the development of Regional Waste Management Plans (regional plans). These will be customised to fit the needs and opportunities identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities while also contributing to the targets of the Queensland Waste Strategy. Councils are committed to reviewing the strategy every three years to ensure it remains relevant and current and that it is contributing to the targets and meeting the needs of communities.

Strategy for shared commitment

The strategy applies to all aspects of waste management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and their communities in these local government areas.





What does the strategy do?

The strategy establishes a framework for Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, government and industry to guide current and future waste management and recycling activities across their communities.

It provides direction and identifies priorities and responses that are intended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils’ transition out of existing waste systems, processes and practices into new approaches that contribute to improved regional outcomes.

Local community ownership remains the cornerstone of delivering successful outcomes. Each council will manage decision-making responsibilities to determine on-ground improvements, implementation and the investments needed to achieve more sustainable waste management practices.

Identifying and supporting local responses that are underpinned by key guiding principles will foster sustainable, long term solutions that lead to greater economic and employment opportunities across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils.

Guiding principles

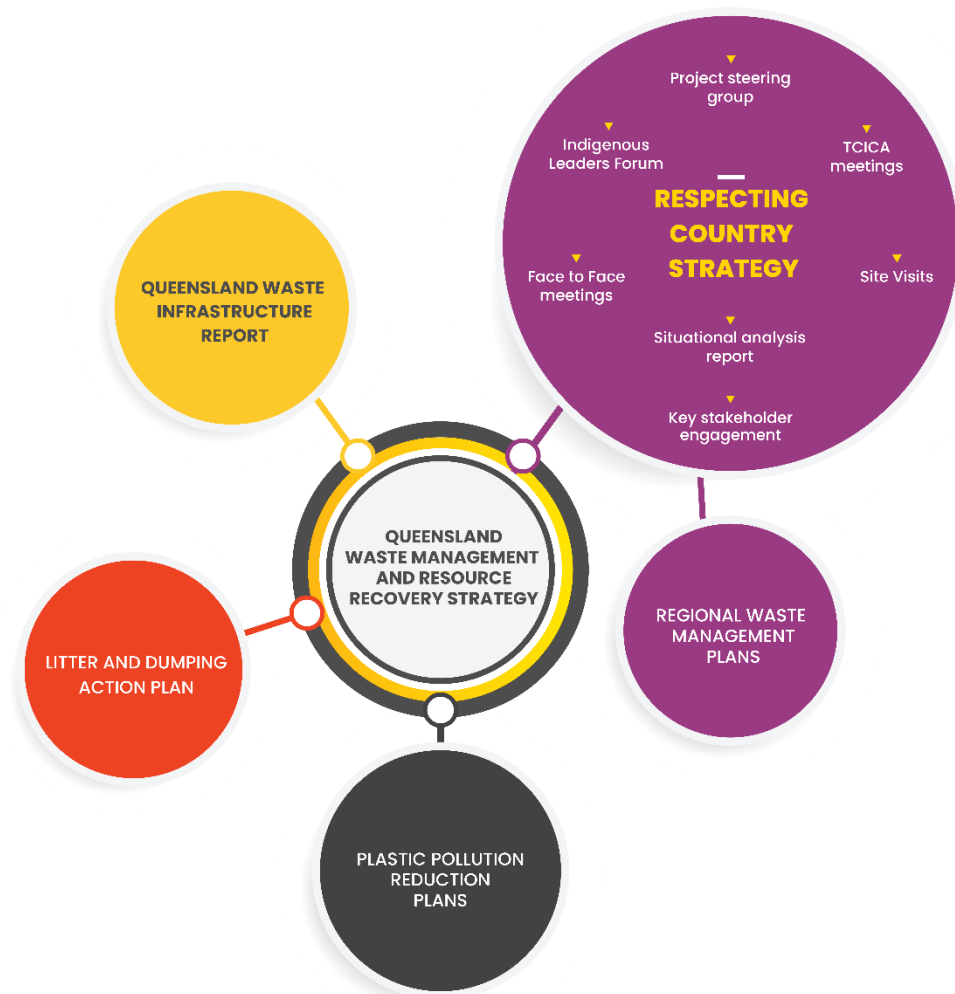
- Respect rights and responsibilities to govern and manage healthy Country*
- Respect self-determination, by empowering, rather than mandating*
- Keep solutions practical, implementable, and suited to local circumstances*
- Co-design and deliver through strengthened regional partnerships*
- Build education, awareness and community support*
- Create local employment and business enterprise opportunities*

How we got here

The strategy builds on key State Government initiatives, including the Queensland Waste Strategy, Litter and Dumping Action Plan, Plastic Pollution Reduction Plan and the Queensland Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Report.

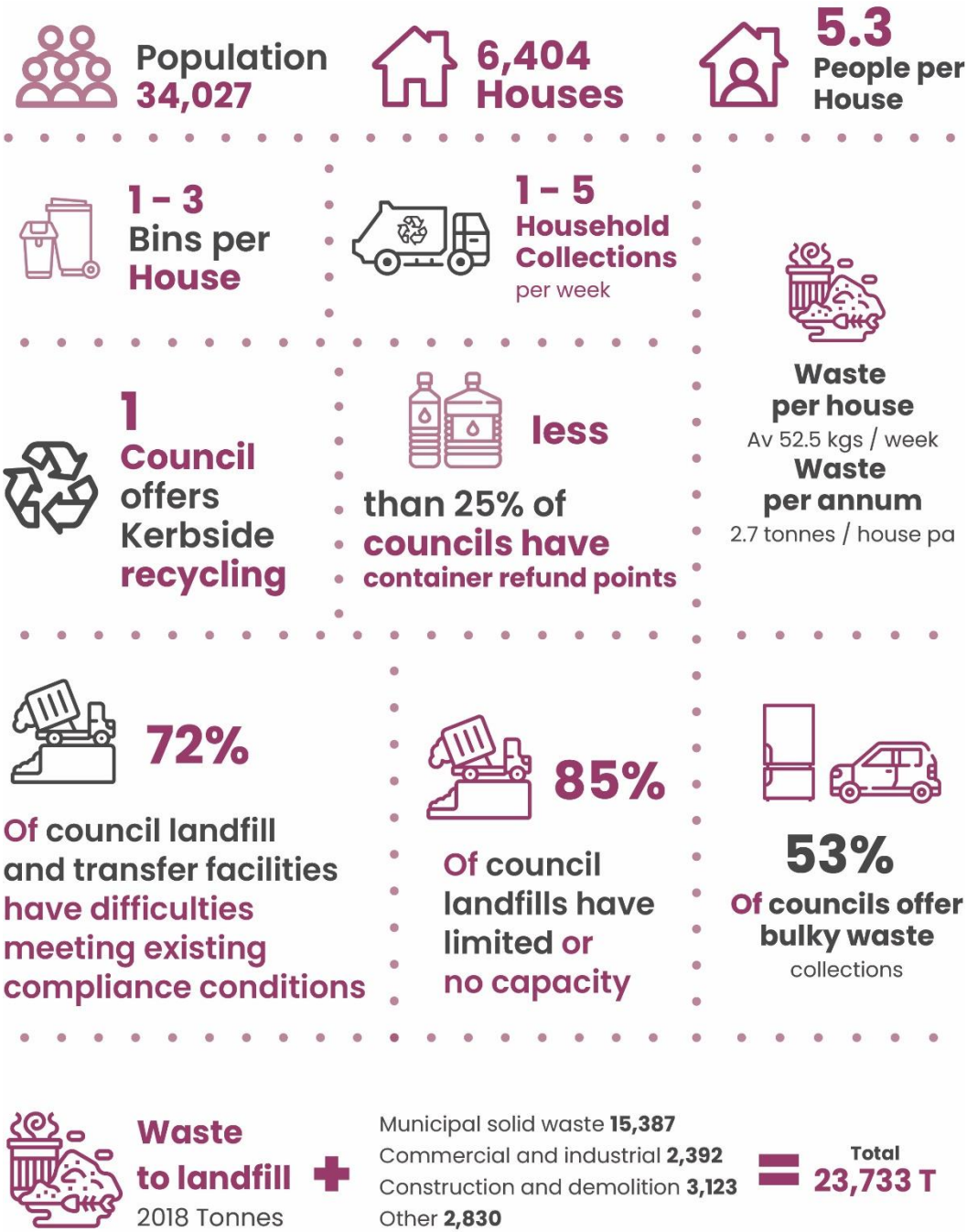
Direct council and community engagement – through face-to-face meetings and site visits – has been key to developing a strategy that aligns with the ambitions of the Queensland Waste Strategy and that will deliver outcomes in partnership with neighbouring councils. Progress updates provided to mayors, councillors and CEOs at the Indigenous Leaders Forum (ILF) and through the Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance (TCICA) have ensured the strategy meets the expectations of their councils and local communities.

Project steering group oversight with council CEO representation, DES, the project consultant and LGAQ ensures the strategy meets its vision and guiding principles and will drive the development of regional plans in partnership with councils.



Waste in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils

This snapshot of the 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils shows they are unique, not just when compared to other Queensland councils, but vastly different to one another.





Our direction

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils are innovating to overcome obstacles such as geographic isolation to support better waste outcomes. The strategy acknowledges and respects these obstacles, the finite resources available, and the importance of regional partnerships in the creation and implementation of sustainable waste management and resource recovery solutions.

Connection to Country, land and sea

This strategy has been developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' important connection to Country and association with land and sea at its heart. These connections are central to the strategy's approach to creating sustainable waste and recycling solutions – and ultimately sustainable communities.

Unique challenges with finite resources

The strategy recognises the finite financial and technical resources available for waste and resource recovery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These, coupled with geographic constraints, limit the operational capacity of communities to deliver services and present very real obstacles to achieving sustainable and regulatory compliance outcomes.

Working together regionally

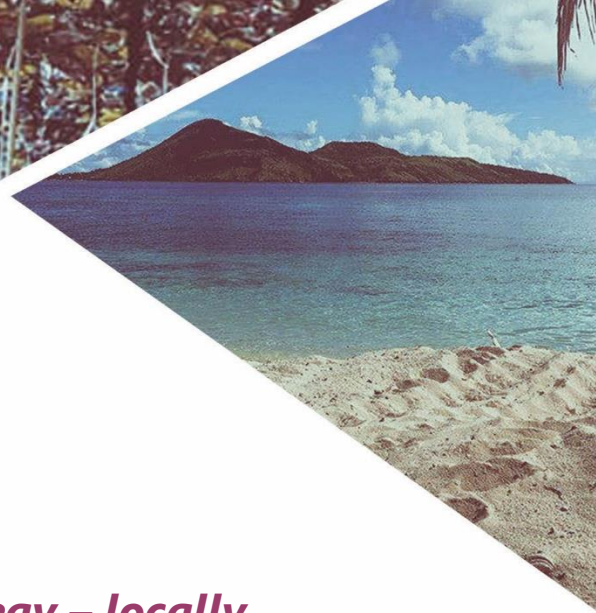
There are significant opportunities to collaborate on a regional approach to finding sustainable solutions. Challenging logistics, quarantine, isolation and weather present many unique circumstances for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities impacting, and to some extent limiting, new waste management solutions. A coordinated regional approach will bring greater opportunities to partner with neighbouring councils, the State Government and other stakeholders.

Waste creates new opportunities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face a range of unique challenges, both existing and emerging. Acknowledging the nature of these obstacles will require different approaches, such as innovative, fit-for-purpose solutions that will also create new enterprises, promote investor certainty, market development and employment opportunities across the regions. This includes providing opportunities to develop skills in local young people and boost local enterprises.

The journey to overcome these unique challenges and finding sustainable waste solutions is best reflected in the following diagram.





Delivering the Queensland Waste Strategy – locally

The strategy acknowledges the Queensland Waste Strategy's state-wide targets. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils will help deliver these by implementing appropriate activities that fall within their areas of influence, including (but not limited to):

- provision of kerbside collection services
- litter and dumping management responses
- operation of compliant waste and resource recovery facilities.

The Queensland Waste Strategy identifies targets for 2050 that incorporate a reduction in household waste and waste going to landfill, with an increase in recycling rates:

- 25% reduction in household waste
- 90% of waste is recovered and does not go to landfill
- 75% recycling rates across all waste types.

The strategy is part of the framework delivering on the three strategic priorities identified in the Queensland Waste Strategy:

- Reducing the impact of waste on the environment and communities
- Transitioning to a circular economy
- Building economic opportunity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils will look to partner with the State Government and industry to co-design and fulfil these clearly defined yet flexible opportunities.

To contribute to achieving the state-wide priorities, the strategy encompasses nine key outcome areas. The strategy outcome areas identify a range of initiatives that require place-based approaches supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and deemed appropriate for councils and communities taking into consideration the unique challenges and opportunities presented to them.

The following table captures the nine outcome areas and key deliverables that will form the basis of targeted regional plans for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils.

<i>Key outcome areas</i>	<i>Deliverables</i>	<i>Strategic priorities</i>		
		<i>1 - Reducing the impact of waste on the environment and communities</i>	<i>2 - Transitioning to a circular economy</i>	<i>3 - Building economic opportunity</i>
<i>Acting regionally</i>	<p><i>Regional coordination and partnerships</i></p> <p>Establish the Waste Strategy Group to work in partnership with existing networks, including Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance (TCICA) and relevant regional organisations of councils (ROCs) to assist in the delivery of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinated waste management and resource recovery activities, • funding submissions, • waste reporting, • procurement, and • shared education and messaging. 	✓	✓	✓
	<p><i>Delivering across regions</i></p> <p>Establish Regional Waste Strategy Groups with neighbouring councils that will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and prioritise regional waste management solutions, • facilitate knowledge and resource sharing, • collaborate on common waste issues, • liaise with relevant ROCs and State Government departments, • respond to legacy waste challenges including car bodies and whitegoods, and • lead the development of Regional Waste Management Plans that identify and prioritise waste management activities. 	✓	✓	✓
	<p><i>Education and awareness</i></p> <p>Improve community understanding of recycling and waste avoidance through targeted, place-based and broader shared messages across councils.</p>	✓	✓	
	<p><i>Regional Waste Management Plans</i></p> <p>Prepare Regional Waste Management Plans for each Regional Waste Strategy Group to guide investments, new business enterprise opportunities and upgrades to waste and resource recovery facilities and operations.</p>	✓	✓	✓

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		<i>1 - Reducing the impact of waste on the environment and communities</i>	<i>2 - Transitioning to a circular economy</i>	<i>3 - Building economic opportunity</i>
<i>Creating value from waste</i>	<i>Creating jobs from waste</i> Identify new waste enterprise opportunities in council corporate plans that can assist in the reduction, re-use and recycling of wastes and creation of local jobs, where proximity and commercial opportunities allow.	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Creating business opportunities</i> Support new innovative waste enterprises that identify co-design and partnership opportunities with key industry groups and State Government.	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Container Refund Scheme (CRS)</i> Support the establishment of fit-for-purpose Container Refund Points in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils in partnership with key stakeholders.	✓	✓	✓
<i>Regulated activities</i>	Partner with the State Government to reduce regulatory complexity and ensure waste activities are fit for purpose and place.	✓		
	Operate waste activities safely and in accordance with relevant conditions to prevent environmental harm.	✓		
<i>Legacy and bulky waste</i>	Explore and develop options for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collection of bulk scrap metals including legacy car bodies and whitegoods that maximise regional collection efficiencies, identifying opportunities for regional partnerships and joint contracting for the removal of wastes (including legacy waste), identifying opportunities to overcome the challenges that prevent materials being returned to markets, and identifying viable local or regional market opportunities. 	✓	✓	✓

Key outcome areas	Deliverables	Strategic priorities		
		1 - Reducing the impact of waste on the environment and communities	2 - Transitioning to a circular economy	3 - Building economic opportunity
Waste and resource recovery collections and infrastructure	Waste and resource recovery collection services Deliver and maintain waste and resource recovery collection services appropriate for each local council and community.	✓	✓	
	Continuously review and improve the appropriateness of existing collection services.	✓	✓	✓
	Waste management infrastructure Identify opportunities for regional waste management solutions (e.g. potential for regional landfills) or rationalisation of landfills and establishment of transfer stations where deemed appropriate due to site, capacity and environmental concerns.	✓	✓	✓
	Identify opportunities to incorporate dedicated areas for the separation and safe stockpiling and/or storage of waste streams such as scrap metals, whitegoods, cars, car batteries, tyres, motor oils, cooking oils, e-waste, paints and hazardous materials into the design and construction of new and existing landfills and transfer stations.	✓	✓	✓
	Collaborate with regional groups to maximise efficiencies in sharing heavy plant and equipment for waste and resource recovery operations.	✓	✓	✓
	Resource recovery Explore options to increase in-community resource recovery solutions.	✓	✓	✓
	Explore alternative community uses of excess building materials prior to disposal or removal from local communities.	✓	✓	✓

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		<i>1 - Reducing the impact of waste on the environment and communities</i>	<i>2 - Transitioning to a circular economy</i>	<i>3 - Building economic opportunity</i>
Litter and dumping	Support the development and delivery of co-designed principles for litter and dumping communications to help communities and reflect care for Country.	✓	✓	✓
	Support and contribute to broad targets and actions under the Queensland Litter and Dumping Management Plan.	✓	✓	
	Respond to litter and dumping concerns through the provision of adequate public litter bins at various 'hotspot' and high-use areas.	✓	✓	
Procurement	Purchasing Support bulk purchase opportunities for new and upgraded facilities through consistent approaches to waste transfer facility design, waste receptacle design and standard signage.	✓	✓	
	Investigate bulk purchase arrangements for goods and services that can help to minimise packaging and other waste and maximise logistics and purchasing power.	✓	✓	
	Identify opportunities for the use of recycled-content from locally sourced recovered materials in Council and contractor infrastructure projects.	✓	✓	
	Tendering Develop Waste Management Operating Guidelines for the disposal of waste products and construction and demolition materials generated by contractors.	✓	✓	✓
	Packaging Identify and prioritise actions to reduce the economic and environmental impacts of unnecessary and problematic packaging.	✓	✓	

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<i>Procurement</i>	<i>Logistics and transport</i> Explore partnerships with key stakeholders to leverage transport efficiencies through existing relationships with Sea Swift, Community Enterprise Qld (CEQ), Container Exchange (CoEX) and the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW).	✓	✓	✓
	Identify opportunities for efficiencies and systems to offset the costs of transporting materials to regional markets.	✓	✓	✓
<i>Funding</i>	Explore options to co-design innovative funding approaches to deliver the key outcome areas of the strategy.	✓	✓	✓
<i>Reporting</i>	<i>Financial reporting</i> Develop financial reporting templates, tools and training to assist in the capture and recording of all costs associated with waste management operations.	✓	✓	
	<i>Waste data reporting</i> Investigate the suitability of current waste measuring, data collection and reporting practices and identify suitable options for future waste and resource recovery reporting requirements.	✓	✓	

Measuring achievements

The strategy will rely on a suite of measurable performance outcomes delivered across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils.

Performance outcomes will be measured over short (1-2 years), medium (3-4 years) and long (5+ year) terms. Both short and medium timeframes are measurable and aligned in terms of State and local government cycles.

<i>Performance outcome</i>	<i>Number of councils / timeframes</i>		
	<i>Short-term (1-2 years)</i>	<i>Medium-term (3-4 years)</i>	<i>Long-term (5+ years)</i>
1. Active participation in the Waste Strategy Group	12 councils	14 councils	All councils
2. Establishment of new or expanded business and employment opportunities delivering new waste management and resource recovery solutions.	8 councils	14 councils	All councils
3. Councils developing and implementing regional waste management plans.	11 councils	All councils	All councils
4. Councils with a container refund point.	All councils	All councils	All councils
5. Councils offering regular bulky waste solutions.	12 councils	15 councils	All councils
6. Councils able to report accurately on waste data and budgets (operating and capital).	All councils	All councils	All councils
7. Councils implementing waste education program(s).	12 councils	All councils	All councils
8. Councils operate landfills, transfer stations and other operations compliant with their environmental authorities (EAs).	5 councils	10 councils	All councils
9. Councils implementing litter and dumping avoidance and management strategies.	12 councils	All councils	All councils



Regional collaboration that delivers locally

The strategy provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and communities with a roadmap that includes the overarching vision, guiding principles and areas of influence in response to waste and recycling challenges and opportunities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, working in collaboration with neighbouring councils, can lead the planning and rollout of waste management improvements. These improvements will be captured in the development of regional plans, which will build momentum by bringing together neighbouring councils to form Regional Waste Strategy Groups with a vested interest to develop all-inclusive approaches in their own regionally appropriate plans.

Councils typically operate in isolation because of their geographic locations, while undertaking all the mainstream service delivery functions that are expected of local governments.

The strategy encourages councils to participate in the development of regional plans to deliver sustainable solutions, while respecting connections to Country, recognising resourcing limitations, the importance of regional partnerships and the broader economic and employment opportunities that current and new approaches to waste management may present.

In addition to greater collaboration and partnerships, creating economic and employment opportunities, the development of regional plans will fulfil the legislative requirement for councils to develop their own waste management plans, leading to greater efficiencies and savings for all councils.

Queensland Government departments will partner in the development and support of regional plans that underpin the strategy.

The state's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils are active partners in the future success of the Queensland Waste Strategy and creating productive outcomes for the communities they represent.

Support for the strategy and regional plans is vital to ensuring these councils are early adopters and catalysts of the new circular economy.

