

Waste Education & Behaviour Change Plan

2025-2026



DOUGLAS
SHIRE COUNCIL



Acknowledgement

Douglas Shire Council acknowledges the traditional Country of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Peoples and the Djabugay Nation People of the coastal areas and rainforest of the Douglas Shire.

We recognise that these have always been and continue to be places of cultural and spiritual significance. We acknowledge and cherish the important contribution made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the Douglas Shire community, and pay respects to their Elders – past, present and emerging.

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Purpose

The purpose of the Waste Education and Behaviour Change Plan 2025 -2026 (WEBCP) is to foster a well-informed and engaged community that actively participates in reducing waste, increasing recycling, and supporting a local circular economy.

This plan outlines targeted programs to improve knowledge, shift behaviours, and reduce waste volumes and recycling contamination across households, businesses, schools, and various industry sectors.

Snapshot of the Shire

The Douglas Shire region is located in Far North Queensland, Australia. The region extends from Degarra in the north to south of Wangetti. Famous for its 'rainforest to reef' setting, the Shire is at the interface of two World Heritage Listed areas, the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics which includes the ancient Daintree rainforest.

Approximately 70% of the Shires residents reside in Port Douglas and Mossman. Other urban areas include the beachside communities of Wonga Beach, Newell and Cooya Beach.

2435

square kilometres
of land area



12,500

residents (2021 ABS)



DOUGLAS SHIRE



Opportunities and Challenges

Education and behaviour change are essential drivers in improving waste outcomes for Douglas Shire. While our community is environmentally conscious, shifting long-term behaviours and habits around waste requires consistent engagement, targeted education, and supportive infrastructure.

Empowering residents, schools, and businesses through tailored education programs and behaviour change initiatives that promote waste reduction, recycling, and organics recovery is crucial.

Early education offers a strong foundation for lifelong habits. Partnerships with early learning centres, primary and secondary schools provide an ideal setting to build awareness of recycling, composting, and waste avoidance from a young age.

Community workshops, bin review programs, and digital campaigns can guide residents on proper bin use, reducing contamination, and adopting practices like home composting and reusable alternatives.

Tailored training and waste assessments can support commercial operators to understand their waste streams and implement effective separation, recycling, and reuse practices. Sectors such as hospitality, construction, and tourism present strong potential for targeted support and behaviour-focused campaigns.

Local champions, event organisers, and sustainability advocates play a critical role in normalising positive waste behaviours. Programs that recognise and support these groups help build momentum and shift social norms.

While education and engagement tools are powerful, several barriers can limit behaviour change.

Long-standing routines and confusion around recycling rules contribute to contamination and poor separation. Clear, consistent messaging is required to break these habits.

Limited access to kerbside recycling in some areas and confusion around transfer station usage can discourage proper disposal behaviours.

The temporary loss of the regional resource recovery facility has impacted processible waste diversion and may lead to resident disengagement if not addressed through transparent communication and viable solutions.

A mix of permanent residents, transient workers, and international visitors means messaging must be adaptable and multilingual to reach all audiences effectively.

Delivering personalised education across a small but geographically spread population requires creative and cost-effective solutions, such as digital platforms, local champions, and peer-led engagement.



Corporate Alignment

Douglas Shire Council is committed to leading our community towards a cleaner, greener future. Our vision is to reduce waste generation, maximise resource recovery, and protect our unique natural environment through innovation, education, and collaboration.

There are a number of national and state legislative and policy requirements that guide the direction of Australia's waste and resource recovery management.

The *Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011* (WRR Act) requires every Queensland local government to adopt a Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan, which must set clear guidelines for waste management within the local government area. The Douglas Shire Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan 2025 -2030 and the Queensland Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy 2019 provide direction and priorities for the development of this WEBCP.

This WEBCP will deliver focused education and behaviour change initiatives that empower the region to make meaningful progress towards achieving our waste priorities.

By fostering a circular economy, encouraging responsible consumption, and supporting sustainable practices, we will ensure that Douglas Shire remains a vibrant and resilient region for generations to come.

Douglas Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030

Waste management has the potential to impact a wide range of areas and consequently has strong linkages throughout various corporate strategies. Waste management is addressed in the Councils' Corporate Plan and Operation Plan, specifically under the following themes:

-  1. Liveability
1.7 Investigate and promote environmental, green, eco-friendly and nature focused initiatives.
-  3. Service Delivery
3.9 Preserve, protect and improve our unique environment.

FNQROC Regional Resource Recovery Plan

The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) regional plan presents a series of actions to collaboratively deliver resource recovery outcomes and provide positive impact across all participating council regions.

Douglas Shire Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan 2025-2030

The Douglas Shire Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan 2025-2030 was developed to compliment the Councils' Corporate Plan and subsequent Operation Plans, the FNQROC Regional Resource Recovery Plan and the Queensland Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy 2019.

While this WEBCP has been developed to fulfil various elements of the Douglas Shire Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan 2025-2030, it specifically delivers on:

- Strategic Priority 1 - Reducing the impact of waste on the environment
Action #2: Develop and implement annual Waste Education and Behaviour Change Plan targeting community wide waste reduction, recycling and organics diversion.

Waste and Resource Management Hierarchy

The waste and resource management hierarchy underpins most national and state policies and plans. This is a framework that guides the order of preference for managing waste. It emphasises waste avoidance as the priority, after which options for reuse, recycle, recover and treat should be explored, before the least preferable option of disposal. This WEBCP will follow the waste and resource management hierarchy in the development and implementation of all programs and initiatives.

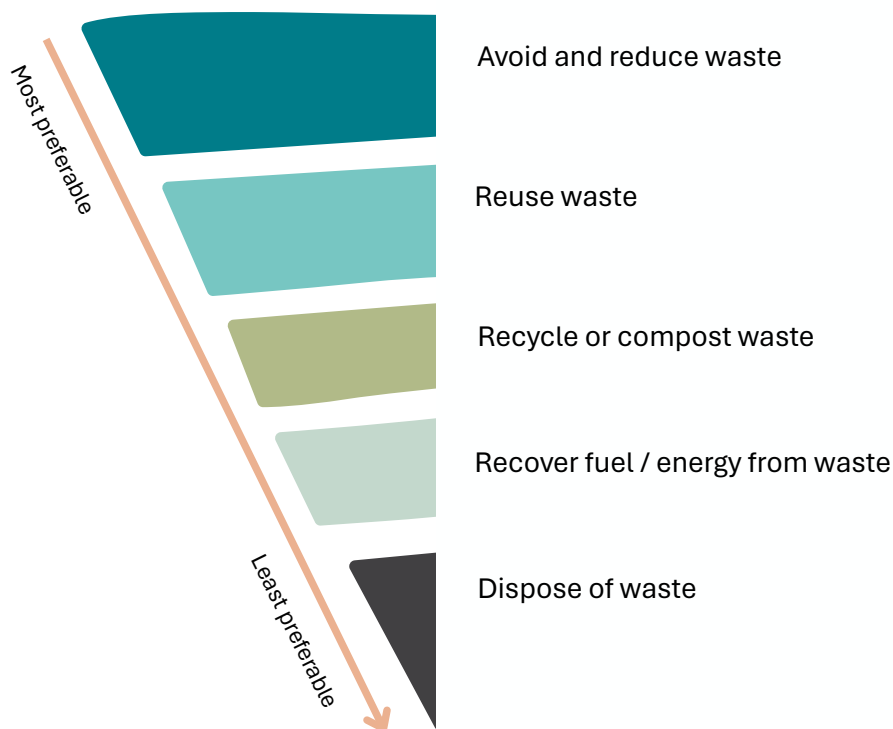


Figure 1: The Waste and Resource Management Hierarchy

Behaviour Insights

Understanding current waste behaviours across Douglas Shire is critical to designing effective education and engagement initiatives that lead to lasting change. Waste audits, service data, and community engagement activities provide valuable insights into how residents, businesses, and visitors interact with the local waste system.

High Waste Generation per Household

In 2023 -2024 households in Douglas Shire generate approximately 0.57 tonnes of waste per capita per year, inline above the Queensland baseline of 0.54 tonnes (2018). This highlights the need for waste avoidance behaviours, including reducing consumption, preventing food waste, and composting at home to achieve the 15% reduction required by 2030.

Significant Lost Resource Recovery Opportunities

Waste audits reveal that 70% of the contents of household general waste bins could be diverted. This suggests a gap in either knowledge, convenience, or motivation when it comes to sorting waste correctly, particularly for organics and recyclables.

Recycling Contamination is Low but Present

The average contamination rate in yellow-lidded recycling bins is 8%. While this is lower than many Queensland councils, it still represents an opportunity for improvement. Targeted education on common contaminants like bagged recyclables, soft plastics, and food residues can further improve recycling outcomes.

Community Engagement is Driving Improvement

Recent education programs, including bin tagging and school-based initiatives, have had a measurable impact:

- The 2024 bin tagging program improved household bin performance by 7% over two rounds.
- Strong participation in school education programs indicates high community interest in sustainability.

These results highlight the importance of continued, well-targeted education combined with positive reinforcement and feedback.

Tourism and Transience Influence Waste Behaviour

With over 1.2 million annual visitors, plus seasonal workers and short-term international residents, Douglas Shire experiences a highly transient population. This creates challenges in consistently communicating waste expectations. Visitor accommodation, rental properties, and tourism operators require additional support and simple, visible messaging to ensure correct disposal practices.

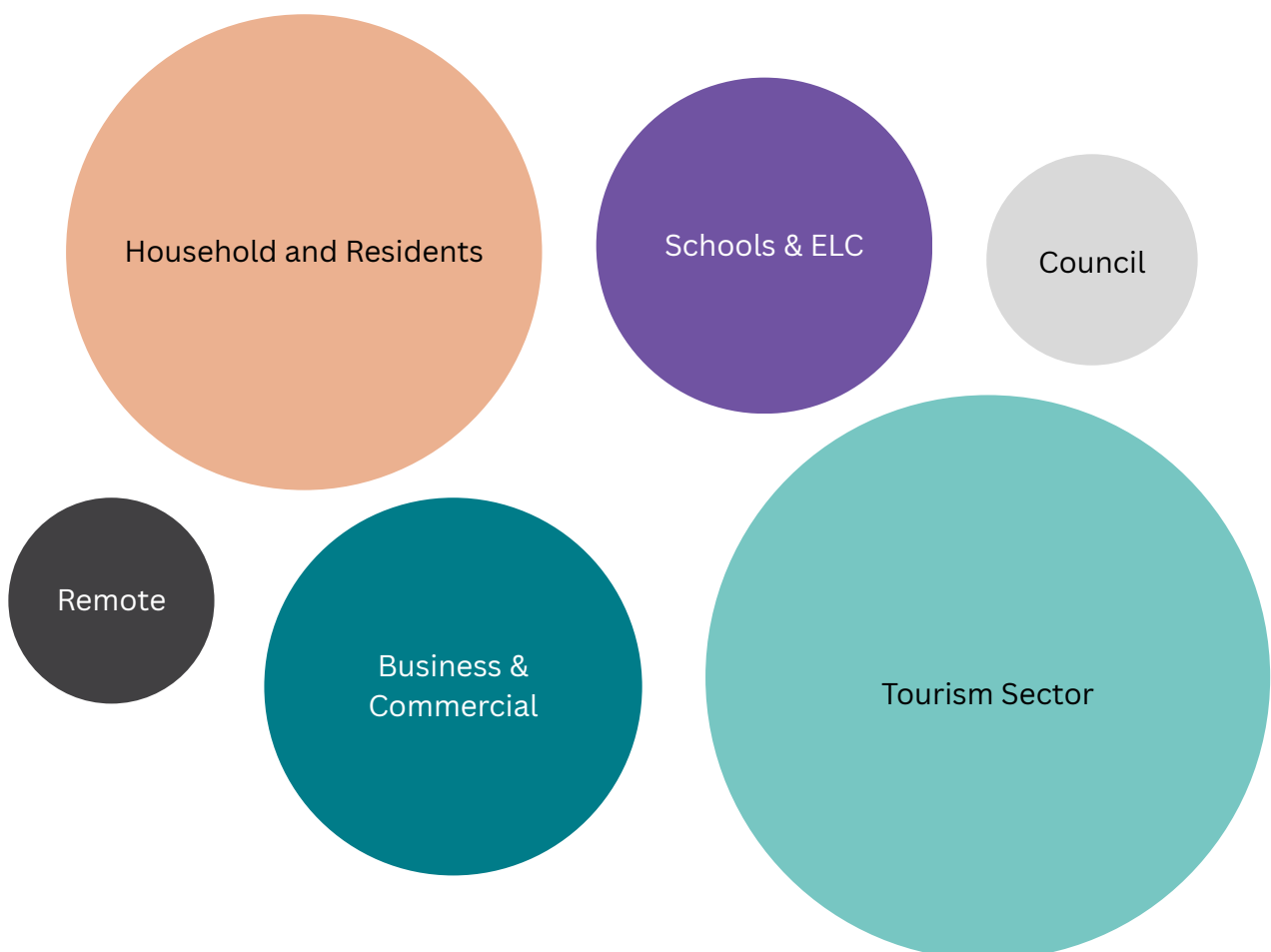
Rural and Remote Access Barriers

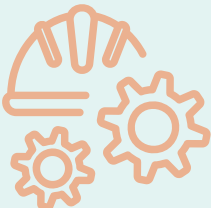
Properties outside the kerbside collection area rely on transfer stations and self-haul systems. These communities may face challenges with access, sorting knowledge, or disposal practices. Locally relevant engagement, better signage, mobile education initiatives, and convenient collection points can support these residents and reduce illegal dumping.

Target Audiences

Effective education and behaviour change requires a clear understanding of who we are engaging, and how best to support their journey toward more sustainable waste practices. The Douglas Shire Waste Education and Behaviour Change Plan 2025–2026 identifies the following key audiences, each with distinct needs, behaviours, and opportunities for impact:

- Households and Residents; this group includes individual residents, families, and multi-unit dwellings across the Shire.
- Schools and Early Learning Centres; educators and students across all age groups play a vital role in long-term change.
- Businesses and Commercial Operators; from hospitality venues and accommodation providers to retailers, offices, and trades.
- Tourism Sector; the Shire hosts approximately 1.2 million visitors annually, creating a unique need for targeted education.
- Remote Communities; including residents without kerbside collection services and those relying on transfer stations.
- Council Staff and Contractors; internal stakeholders play a key role in modelling best practice and delivering waste services.



	Focus	Approach
Household & Residents	 Reducing contamination, increasing recycling participation, encouraging home composting, and reducing overall waste generation.	Community workshops, circular economy initiatives, accessible guides (e.g., Recycle Mate), social media campaigns, and bin performance feedback.
Schools & ELC	 Building early awareness of waste hierarchy principles, normalising good waste practices, and encouraging student-led sustainability initiatives.	Classroom presentations, interactive workshops, curriculum-aligned resource kits, student competitions, and teacher support materials.
Business & Commercial	 Waste audits, improved back-of-house separation, reducing single-use items, and engaging staff in best-practice waste management.	On-site support, resource toolkits, sector-specific workshops, case studies, and partnerships with sustainability programs.
Tourism Sector	 Visitor-facing messaging, short term accommodation waste education, and aligning tourism operators with local sustainability values.	Signage and collateral in accommodation venues, QR-code based multilingual resources, partnerships with tour providers, and promotion of reusables.
Remote Communities	 Reducing illegal dumping, promoting proper use of transfer stations, and encouraging resource recovery through community engagement.	On-the-ground outreach, visual guides, and locally led education events, trial of resource recovery stations at convenient points.
Council	 Leading by example, reducing waste in Council operations, and enhancing service delivery and community education.	Staff training, internal campaigns, and alignment with Council's sustainable procurement and waste practices.



Objectives

Based on the Waste Reduction and Recycling Plan 2025–2030 and behaviour-focused education principals, below are the key objectives for Douglas Shire in 2025 -2026:

- **Reduce Waste Generation**
Empower residents, schools, and businesses to make informed decisions that avoid waste being created in the first instance, with a focus on food waste prevention, mindful consumption, and responsible purchasing behaviours.
- **Reduce Kerbside Bin Contamination**
Increase the community's understanding of what belongs in each bin through targeted education campaigns, bin feedback programs, and the promotion of tools like Recycle Mate.
- **Strengthen Engagement with High-Impact and Hard-to-Reach Audiences**
Deliver tailored messaging and support to key groups below to promote consistent waste practices across the Shire:
 - Short-term visitors and tourism operators
 - Remote communities
 - Multi-unit dwellings
 - Commercial and industrial sectors
- **Increase Resource Recovery**
Encourage behaviour change in households, businesses, and the various industry sectors to recover more materials through correct sorting, reuse, and participation in stewardship and drop-off programs.
- **Foster a Culture of Shared Responsibility and Circular Thinking**
Build community ownership of waste challenges by celebrating positive action, supporting local sustainability leaders, and embedding circular economy principles through education, collaboration, and Council led initiatives.

Annual Action Plan

Objective – Reduce Waste Generation

- #1 Community Food Waste Challenge; A four week campaign encouraging tracking and reduction of food waste, with workshops, meal planning resources, and incentives for participation.
- #2 Promote Reusables and Responsible Purchasing; Distribute digital and print materials that promote reusable alternatives (e.g. coffee cups, shopping bags, containers) and provide tips for reducing packaging waste at home and while shopping.
- #3 Garage Sale Trail Program; Plan and implement ‘garage sale’ activities across the Shire to reduce waste to landfill, prevent illegal dumping and engage residents in a circular economy.

Objective – Reduce Kerbside Bin Contamination

- #4 Promote the Recycle Mate App; Run a digital campaign and community stalls encouraging residents to download and use the Recycle Mate app to get instant sorting advice.
- #5 Bin Performance Feedback Program; Consistent and routine resident communication regarding contamination of yellow-lidded recycling bins.
- #6 Collaborate with Multi-Unit Dwellings; Provide direct support to apartment complexes and rental properties, including bin signage, tailored communication, and on-site visits where needed.

Objective – Reduce Littering and Illegal Dumping

- #7 Implement a combined education and enforcement campaign focusing on illegal dumping hotspots and problem waste types such as green waste, vehicles and car parts like tyres.
- #8 Develop a “Cover Your Load” awareness campaign primarily aimed at tradies, contractors, and construction workers to reduce roadside litter and debris.

Objective – Strengthen Engagement with High-Impact and Hard-to-Reach Audiences

- #9 Develop a Tourism Sector Waste Toolkit; Co-design a waste education kit with local tourism operators, including printable resources and QR codes for visitor use in accommodation and tour vehicles.
- #10 Deliver Pop-Up Education; Host regular stalls at local events, transfer stations and local markets to reach remote residents and raise awareness of sorting rules and drop-off options.
- #11 Recycle Station Trial; Set up a community bulk bin recycling compound near the ferry to trial the community's engagement with an easily accessible recycling option.

Objective – Increase Resource Recovery

- #12 Organics Diversion and Home Composting; Support households with home composting education, support sourcing compost bins or worm farms, and how-to guides to reduce organic waste going to landfill.
- #13 Transfer Station Education Program; Improve use of transfer stations, focus on waste separation, accepted materials, resource recovery.
- #14 Council Generated Waste Program; Identify and review all waste generated from Council activities and ensure best practice waste mgt.

Objective – Foster a Culture of Shared Responsibility and Circular Thinking

- #15 Douglas Chooses to Reuse; Support the roll out of the reusable coffee cup pilot program within Port Douglas.
- #16 Local Waste Champions Recognition Program; Highlight schools, businesses, households, and individuals who demonstrate leadership in waste reduction through social media, local media, and Council publications.
- #17 Whole-of-School Waste Education Program; Partner with Early Learning Centres, primary schools, and high schools across the Shire to deliver age-appropriate, curriculum-aligned waste education that builds lifelong sustainable habits.

Measuring Success

The success of the Waste Education and Behaviour Change Plan 2025–2026 will be measured through a combination of quantitative data, community feedback, and observable behaviour change across the key audience groups. Evaluation will focus not only on awareness but on actual improvements in waste practices.

Key Success Indicators:

- 15% reduction in kerbside yellow-lidded recycling bin contamination reports.
- Active community participation in education initiatives (e.g. number of workshops delivered, school involvement, toolkit uptake).
- Active community engagement in two circular economy initiatives supported within the region; Douglas Chooses to Reuse and Garage Sale Trail.
- Growth in composting and food waste diversion through uptake of home composting support.
- 1000 resident actively using the Recycle Mate app to guide appropriate waste disposal.
- School program supporting six early learning centres, 300 primary school students and 100 high school students.
- 10 multi-unit dwellings supported to reduce waste and increase resource recovery.
- 20 commercial entities supported to reduce waste and increase resource recovery.

Regular monitoring and reporting will ensure the Plan remains responsive, adaptive, and aligned with Douglas Shire’s broader waste reduction targets. Outcomes will inform future education strategies and contribute to long-term progress toward a circular economy.



Waste Awareness Calendar

JANUARY Focus: Repair Promote local repair options Community workshops	FEBRUARY Focus: Food Love food, hate waste Meal plan and prep Community workshops	MARCH Focus: Litter Illegal dumping awareness campaigns Clean Up Australia Day 1st Sunday
APRIL Focus: Batteries What to do with your batteries! B-Cycle	MAY Focus: Compost Compost & Worm Farms Community workshops	JUNE Focus: Less Waste World Enviro Day 5th Be Wheelie Wise
JULY Focus: Plastics The Problem with Plastic Plastic free options	AUGUST Focus: Reuse What is a circular economy? Scrap Shack Promo	SEPTEMBER Focus: Transfer Stations On-site education, pop-up stalls, face-to-face engagement
OCTOBER Focus: Recycling National Recycling Week Garage Sale Trail	NOVEMBER Focus: E-waste What is E-waste and what should you do with it Stewardships	DECEMBER Focus: Consumption Buy Better Program Sustainable local gift guide

