

# NSW Litter Prevention Strategy 2019–2022

December 2019



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# NSW Litter Prevention Strategy 2019–2022

New South Wales has a Premier’s Priority to reduce the volume of litter by 40% by 2020. We have already made a significant achievement towards this. We all need to continue to play our part to ensure we meet the target.

From 2012 to 2021, the NSW Government has provided \$50 million for litter reduction under the Waste Less Recycle More initiative. This Litter Prevention Strategy outlines the significant steps we need to take to reduce litter and change our behaviour for the long term.

Significant improvements have already been made, as set out in the **Report Card** that accompanies this strategy, but there is still more to do.

## What is our vision?

We want New South Wales to be a clean, safe and healthy environment that we can all share and enjoy.

To achieve this, we are committed to tackling litter, reflecting the strong expectations of the community who want a clean State now and in the future.

## What is litter and why is it important?

Litter is anything unwanted that has been thrown, blown or left in the wrong place (**Appendix A**).

Common litter items are drink containers (plastic and metal), cigarette butts, small pieces of paper, chip and lolly wrappers, fast food packaging, bottle caps, plastic straws, and pieces of glass bottles. Litter also includes advertising and promotional material left in the wrong place.

A littered environment has many consequences which may not be immediately obvious (Table 1).

This Strategy distinguishes between litter as roughly the size of a full supermarket bag or smaller, and illegal dumping that relates to larger items. Illegal dumping covers bulky waste such as general household rubbish, large household items like fridges and mattresses, garden material, building materials, clinical and hazardous waste, abandoned cars and tyres.

Although littering and illegal dumping have some similarities, there are different reasons behind each type of behaviour, which occur at different places, times and rates. Accordingly the NSW Government has developed the separate NSW Illegal Dumping Strategy 2017–2021. Our teams work closely to deliver these two strategies and to share information and tactics.

## What is our objective?

Our objective is to reduce the volume of litter by 40% by 2020. The baseline for this target is the 2013-14 volume data from the National Litter Index, which is managed independently by Keep Australia Beautiful (**Appendix B**). As of July 2019 we have already achieved a 35% reduction in litter volume – 5% off our target.

Litter volumes are inherently variable from year to year, so it is important to keep up the momentum to embed anti-litter behaviour for the long term beyond 2022. This means focusing on education and public awareness, keeping our infrastructure well-maintained, enforcing litter laws, and monitoring how well we are doing. We will do all of this working in partnership with businesses, communities, local councils and government agencies.

**Table 1: The impacts of litter**

Impact	Outcomes
Visual	Litter makes places look unsightly and uncared for and attracts more litter.
Health	Things like broken glass and syringes can injure people. The presence of litter makes it more likely that more serious anti-social behaviour will occur, like graffiti and property damage.
Environmental	Litter damages natural environments, including wildlife on land and in our waterways.
Economic	A 2016 survey of NSW local councils, public and private land managers and community groups found that more than \$180 million is spent each year on managing litter.
Resource	Easily recyclable resources, such as drink bottles, are lost when people litter.

## How will we achieve this?

This strategy provides the framework we use to prioritise funding and action to reduce litter and achieve our objectives. The strategy is a first for the State and clearly expresses a litter prevention agenda that everyone can use. We're all responsible for litter and we can all help. To do this, we need to integrate our approaches to litter prevention across five elements (Figure 1):

**APPROACH 1:** Rewarding responsible behaviour

**APPROACH 2:** Education and awareness

**APPROACH 3:** Infrastructure and clean-up

**APPROACH 4:** Regulation and enforcement

**APPROACH 5:** Evaluation and monitoring

These are covered in detail below.

A critical part of the strategy is the 2-year **Litter Prevention Implementation Plan 2019–2020** that outlines how everyone can contribute. This Plan will be reviewed at the end of 2020, and an updated Litter Implementation Plan put in place for 2021–2022. This review will provide an opportunity to assess progress towards the Premier's 2020 target, and set future objectives and actions required to achieve our vision of a safe, clean and healthy environment that we can all share and enjoy.

## How will we track progress?

A **Report Card** is included as part of this strategy to summarise progress towards our objectives. The Report Card will be updated every two years in line with the Litter Implementation Plan.

Detail on the current state of litter in NSW and information on how litter is measured and tracked is listed in **Appendix B**.

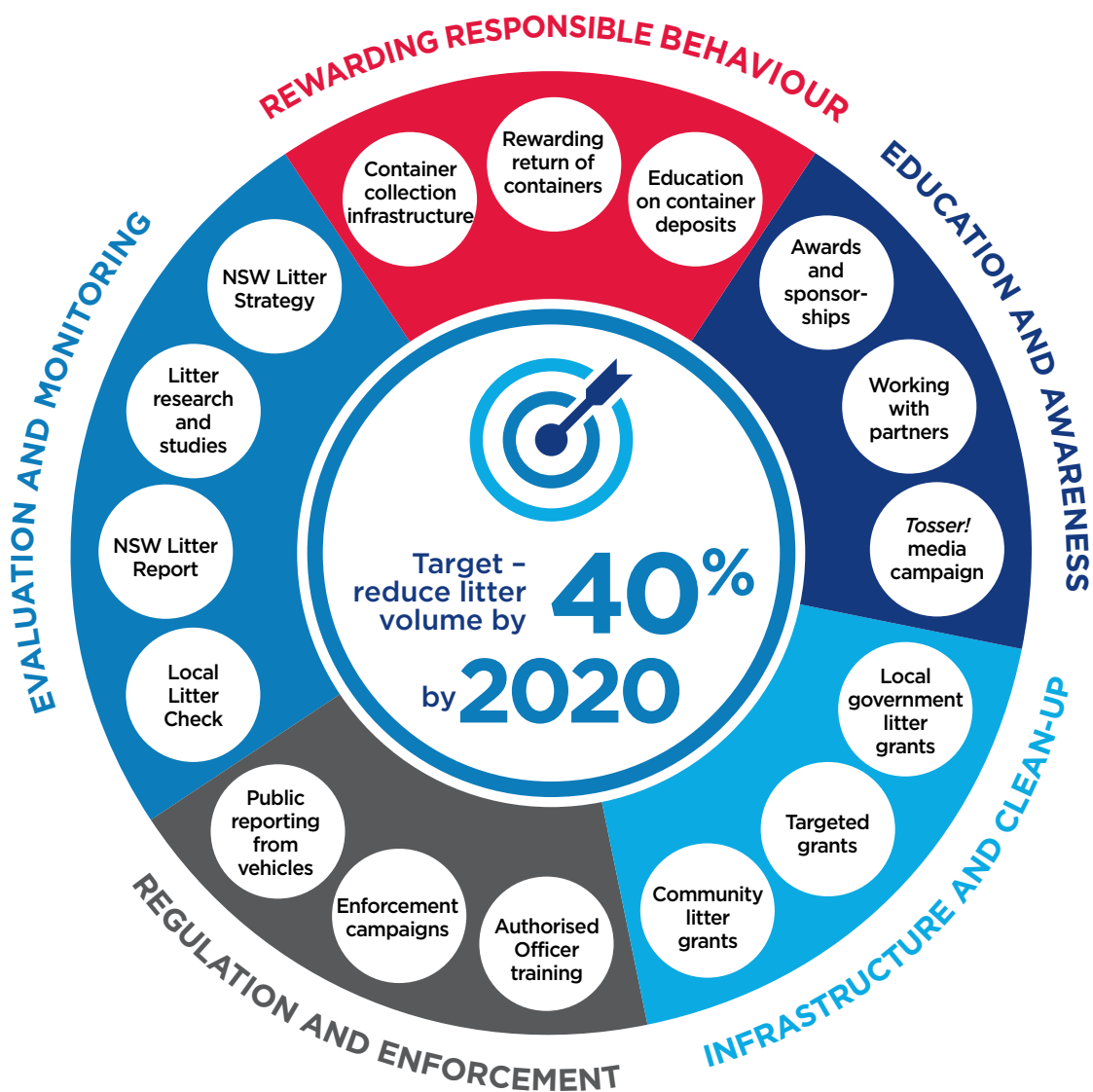


Figure 1: Integrated approach to litter prevention

## APPROACH 1: Rewarding responsible behaviour

### What is Return and Earn?

Return and Earn is the NSW Government's initiative to reward responsible behaviour, which reduces beverage container litter and increases recycling. It started on 1 December 2017.

This initiative influences littering behaviour in two ways: firstly, it encourages the person consuming a drink to hold on to the empty container and return it for a 10 cent refund and, secondly, it provides an incentive for other people to pick up littered containers and receive the refund.

Return and Earn complements kerbside recycling systems for households that are already in place and helps us reach our ambitious litter reduction and recycling targets.

The design of Return and Earn was based on advice from a Container Deposit Scheme Implementation Working Group and community feedback on the design options and draft legislation.

### Who runs Return and Earn?

A single Scheme Coordinator, Exchange for Change, oversees the Return and Earn scheme as the financial and reporting hub. Exchange for Change is a consortium of five beverage companies – Asashi, Carlton United Breweries, Coca-Cola Amatil, Coopers and Lion Group.

The Network Operator, TOMRA-Cleanaway, is responsible for establishing and managing collection points and collection infrastructure across NSW. TOMRA-Cleanaway is a joint venture between TOMRA and Cleanaway Waste Management Ltd. TOMRA is a Norwegian company that is a global provider of reverse vending technology, while Cleanaway is one of Australia's largest waste management companies.

### How does Return and Earn work?

Under Return and Earn, you receive the 10 cent refund when you return an empty container to an approved collection point. There are several options to return empty drink containers, including:

- Redeeming eligible containers at collection points
- Donating eligible containers to charities, schools, sporting groups or other community organisations who can redeem them to claim the refund.
- Placing eligible containers into the yellow recycling collection bin as normal. Councils will receive a share of the refund.

To find out where you can return eligible containers, go to [www.returnandearn.org.au](http://www.returnandearn.org.au). Returned containers need to be empty, uncrushed, unbroken and with the original label attached.



## APPROACH 2: Education and awareness

### Why is education important?

Community education is critical for changing behaviour.

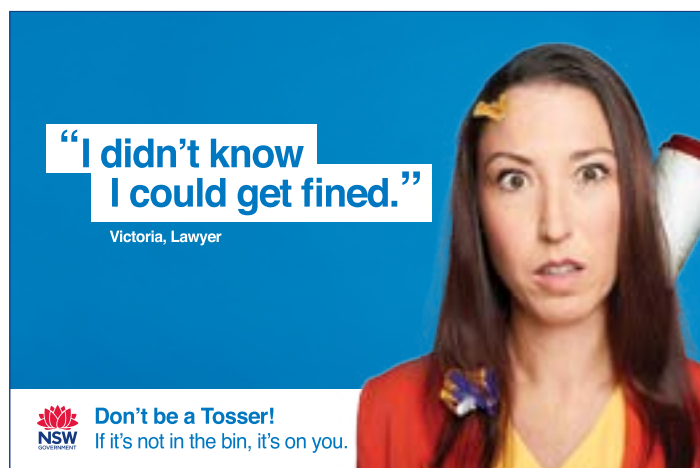
It raises awareness in the community about littering and builds the norm that littering is not the right thing to do.

### What is the *Tosser!* campaign?

The NSW Government launched the *Tosser!* campaign in 2014 to achieve broad spectrum behaviour change. The campaign aims to raise awareness and prompt the right behaviour – that is, taking rubbish with you or putting it in the bin.

The campaign is built on research from 2012 and 2017 that showed that nearly everyone knows littering is wrong, and people litter when they think no one is watching. The *Don't be a tosser!* campaign continues to shed light on our behaviour and show people how easy it is not to litter.

For schools, the message is 'Don't litter. Put it in the bin'. For Aboriginal communities and linguistically diverse communities we have developed tailored messages and materials.



### What litter prevention education resources are available?

We continue to develop new resources to help our community tackle litter.

- Social research results about litter and litterers, including smoking and cigarette litter.
- Information about designing good litter prevention programs.
- The online Local Litter Check to measure and evaluate litter projects.
- *Tosser!* materials, signs and other materials.

These resources and tools are available on our website – go to [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au) and search for 'Preventing litter'.

### Working with partners on education and awareness

Strong partnerships with local councils, state government agencies, schools and community groups will continue to enhance our litter education and awareness campaigns. Agencies that have partnered with the EPA to spread the anti-litter message include the following:

- Local councils across NSW
- Roads and Maritime Services
- Transport for NSW
- NSW Police
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Local Land Services NSW
- Service NSW
- Keep Australia Beautiful NSW.

Businesses also partner with local councils and the EPA to reduce litter and spread the *Tosser!* message. In particular, McDonalds, Woolworths and Caltex have used their service centres and restaurants to promote *Tosser!* messages that target takeaway food litter.

## APPROACH 3: Infrastructure and clean up

### What are we doing about litter prevention?

The right bin makes it easier for people to dispose of their rubbish correctly. Bins come in all shapes and sizes, including cigarette butt bins and recycling bins. Each bin and its placement sends a signal about what should happen with rubbish at a site.

We need to provide clean, well-maintained bins that are site-specific, taking into account who uses a site and how they use it. For example, a bin close to food outlets may need to take large pizza boxes and other food packaging. Bins in parks might need features to stop bird scavenging. What works in one area may not work in another.

### Why is clean up important?

As well as bins, we must keep sites clean to reduce litter. This is vital for sending the message that litter doesn't belong.

Sites that are clean stay cleaner, while littered sites signal that littering is the norm.

### What grant funding is available?

To date, we've given over \$9 million in grants to NSW local councils. This has helped them roll out integrated programs with renewed infrastructure and clean up as key elements, along with enforcement, education and evaluation. From 2018 to 2020, the NSW Government is committing another \$1.6 million for local government litter grants.

The NSW Government has supported litter prevention, infrastructure and clean up through our Community Litter Prevention Grant Program. From 2012 to 2017 we gave over \$365,000 to community groups. We are committing a further \$1.5 million for community litter grants up to 2021. The Program will start in 2019.

## What about reducing the creation of waste?

The Litter Prevention Strategy focuses on waste once it is in our hands, when it has the potential to become litter. However, our efforts at reducing litter are supported by broader efforts to reduce waste in general.

The NSW Government has a NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2014-21, which includes a target to reduce waste generation by 2021-22.

One key concern is plastic bag litter. The NSW Government supports the Australia-wide industry initiative to phase out single use lightweight plastic shopping bags that commenced in July 2018. Harris Farm, Woolworths, Aldi and Coles are committed to the initiative. The Government has begun work on a comprehensive single-use plastics plan to be released for consultation in 2019



## APPROACH 4: Regulation and enforcement

### Why do we need to enforce litter laws?

Enforcement of litter offences is part of underpinning the *Tosser!* message that 'every bit of litter gets noticed'. It is an important strategy for changing the social norm around littering. This is the key reason why we enforce litter laws.

Many state and local government agencies can enforce litter offences, depending on where the offence occurs, such as on roads and highways, national parks, coastal land, beaches and inland waterways, or built up areas and transport corridors. Some of the agencies authorised to enforce litter prevention are Road and Maritime Services, Transport for NSW, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, Western Sydney Parklands Trust and some staff under the *Forestry Act 2012*. To find out who is responsible, call Environment Line (131 555) or your local council.

### What are the litter laws?

The main law concerning litter is the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* (POEO Act). Under the Act, 'litter' is defined very broadly and includes objects or liquid or any material that is deposited in a public place or 'open private place' (for example a private car park).

Among other things, the POEO Act covers:

<b>Advertising leaflets</b>	Advertising and promotional material must be placed under a door, in a letterbox or in a newspaper container. It must not be put, for instance, under windscreen wipers. These rules do not apply to newspapers.
<b>Bill posting</b>	Bill posting becomes a littering offence if the material has fallen off or is likely to fall off, creating litter. (The actual act of posting bills is dealt with under the <i>Graffiti Control Act 2008</i> ).

### What are the fines?

The POEO Act is often enforced through penalty notices. If the agency enforcing the litter laws takes



Other laws that regulate litter and littering are:

<b>Rural Fires Act 1997</b>	Without legal authority, people may not drop a lit cigarette, match, or any other incandescent material on anyland.
<b>Companion Animals Act 1998</b>	If a dog poos in a public place, the dog owner or the person in charge of the dog at the time must immediately remove the dog poo and dispose of it properly.
<b>National Parks smoking ban</b>	To help reduce cigarette butts, there is a no smoking ban in all national parks. It doesn't apply to commercial buildings or private homes in a park.

**33%** of the world's turtles and **43%** of the world's seabirds **have swallowed plastic.**



someone to court rather than issuing a penalty notice, the court may impose a heavier fine. Penalty notice fines include:

- \$80 for littering with small items, such as bottle tops and cigarette butts
- \$250 for general littering
- \$250 for littering from a vehicle by an individual
- \$500 for littering from a vehicle by a corporation
- \$450 for aggravated littering by an individual
- \$900 for aggravated littering by a corporation.

'Aggravated littering' means littering that threatens public safety or the environment, such as intentionally breaking glass or littering lit cigarettes during fire season.

Some of the penalty notices under other legislation are:

- \$275 (at least) for not cleaning up after dog poo
- \$660 for littering a lit cigarette or match from a vehicle
- \$1320 for littering a lit cigarette or match from a vehicle during a total fire ban.

## How can you report litter?

We have created an online system to let the public report litter thrown or blown from cars. You can

**Cigarette butts are made from plastic – not from cotton, wool or paper.**

report via our online system – visit [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au) or search for Report to EPA. So far, 90% of littering reported from cars has been cigarette butt littering. The EPA can issue a \$250 fine based on the report.

You can also report cigarette tossers through the NSW Rural Fire Service's webpage – visit [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au) and search for Report a Cigarette Butt Tosser.

## Regulation and enforcement projects

The EPA is committed to delivering a comprehensive regulation and enforcement program. It is committed to lead at least two targeted litter compliance campaigns across NSW each year. It will continue to deliver capacity building courses for all authorised officers to effectively enforce anti littering legislation.

The EPA will also continue to upgrade and promote Report to EPA, our community-based web app system for reporting littering from vehicles.

## APPROACH 5: Evaluation and monitoring

### Why do we need to monitor our work?

Anyone tackling litter needs to know what works, what does not work, and why. We need to continue strengthening evaluation and monitoring.

The Litter Prevention and Enforcement Fund, established by the *Waste Less Recycle More* initiative, now totals \$50 million and includes funding for evaluation of our litter reduction actions.

### What is being monitored?

The NSW Government has developed a litter prevention monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the success of activities against this Strategy. It will use multiple evaluation methods to monitor progress on delivery of our objectives.

The key to tracking our progress against our targets is the National Litter Index (NLI), which is prepared by Keep Australia Beautiful (Appendix B). From this data we will publish a NSW Litter Report every two years.

We are working with other state jurisdictions to review and strengthen litter data, to ensure we have relevant, accurate and reliable information for policy, planning and strategy development.

In addition to the NLI, we will continue to support social research that tracks the attitudes and behaviours of NSW communities regarding litter trends and the effectiveness of our programs.

We commission other research such as litter audits of specific areas, as well as longer-term projects such as the monitoring of key littered items in coastal waterways from 2017-2020. We work with state and local government, universities and community organisations, and others interested in an evidence base for taking action on litter, to find out how their efforts can add to our store of reliable data.

The information we gather is used to inform effective programs and strategies in the future.



**Takeaway containers and plastic bottles can take from 10 to 450 years to break down. Glass bottles take up to 1 million years to break down.**

# APPENDIX A

## Understanding litter

### What do people think of litter?

We recently did a state-wide survey about litter:

- 90% think that littering is socially unacceptable
- 92% agreed that litter damages the environment
- 88% agreed that litter wastes resources that could be recycled
- 86% of people said litter is an important issue for them.

What this shows is that, overwhelmingly, the New South Wales community knows about litter and some of the impacts that it can have. As a community, we strongly believe that littering is unacceptable. These beliefs are informing our consistent actions.

Social research from NSW, Australia and the United Kingdom shows that we have different ideas about what litter is. People tend to be more accepting of organic litter, such as food, cardboard and paper. Meanwhile, syringes, broken glass, nappies and dog poo are seen as the worst types of litter (Figure 2).

### Why do people litter?

Research shows that there is no such thing as a typical litterer. The same person may litter in one place but not in another. Their behaviour can change even with the same piece of litter. For example, a person may walk 30 metres to put a plastic cup in a bin at a park or at the beach, but would leave the same item under the seat at a football stadium (Table 2).

### Worst type of litter

(non-biodegradable or harmful)

Table 2: Littering behaviour cues

Behaviour cue	Outcomes
Type of item	People are most likely to litter cigarette butts, probably because there is no bin nearby or butts are seen as 'only small'.
Type of place	People are more likely to litter in places such as bus stops or where they think they will not be seen.
Cleanliness of the place	People are less likely to litter somewhere that is clean, with well cared-for street furniture and bins, and no graffiti or vandalism.
Bins	People are less likely to litter if there is a bin nearby, however they are more likely to do so if the bin itself is dirty.
Signs	People are more likely to put waste in the right place if there are clear, consistent and relevant signs nearby.
Knowledge	People may be less likely to litter when they understand where their litter ends up.
What others are doing	People will litter if others do. For example, people may leave litter piled next to a bin or under stadium seats because others have.

### More acceptable types of litter

(will decompose or animals will eat)

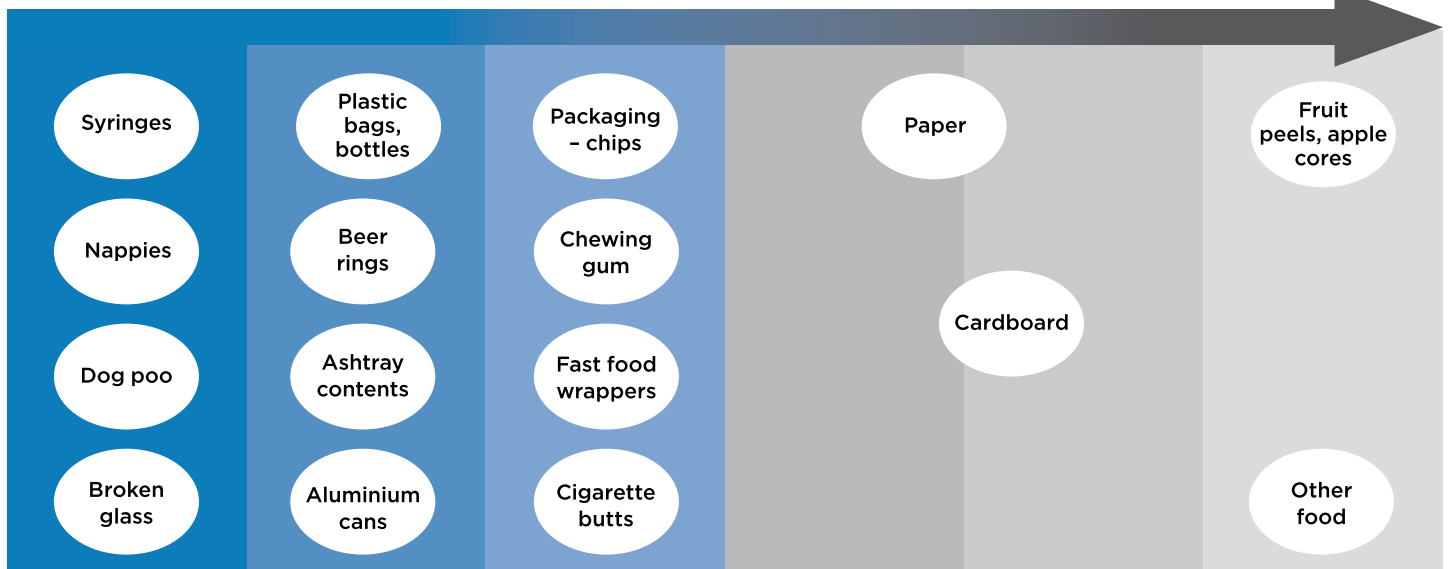


Figure 2: Worst to more acceptable litter types

# APPENDIX B

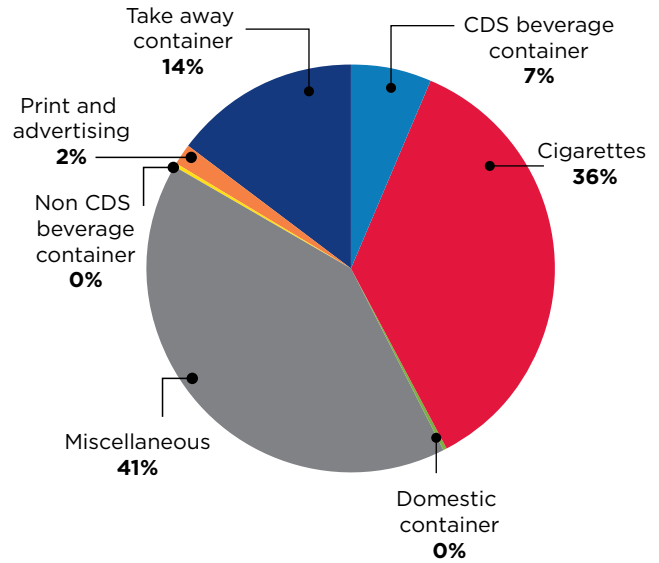
## How do we measure litter?

### The National Litter Index

The litter data we have is not perfect, but it gives a useful starting point to guide priorities and target our actions.

The longest standing survey we have that measures litter across Australia is the National Litter Index (the Index), a yearly report by Keep Australia Beautiful. It is a broad survey that measures litter by the number of littered items across 983 sites nationally (151 in New South Wales). The volume of litter is then calculated from the items counted. You can find out more on the Keep Australia Beautiful website – visit [www.kab.org.au](http://www.kab.org.au), click on the Programs tab and then Litter Research.

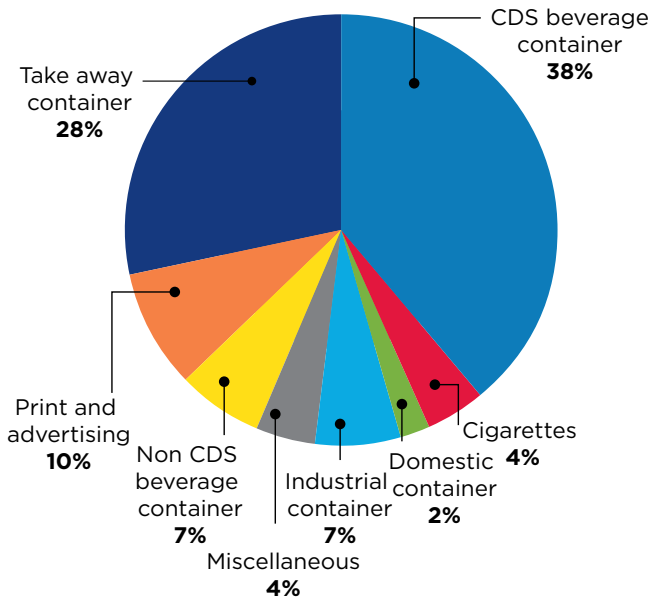
Each measure (volume or item count) tells a different story. In terms of volume, the Index shows that drink containers covered by Return and Earn are a large proportion of the NSW litter stream (Figure 3). Cigarette butts contribute very little volume to the litter stream but they continue to be the most littered item, representing around 36% of all items (Figure 4). Although they have shown a steady downward trend over many years, they are still ever present and a major concern for the community.



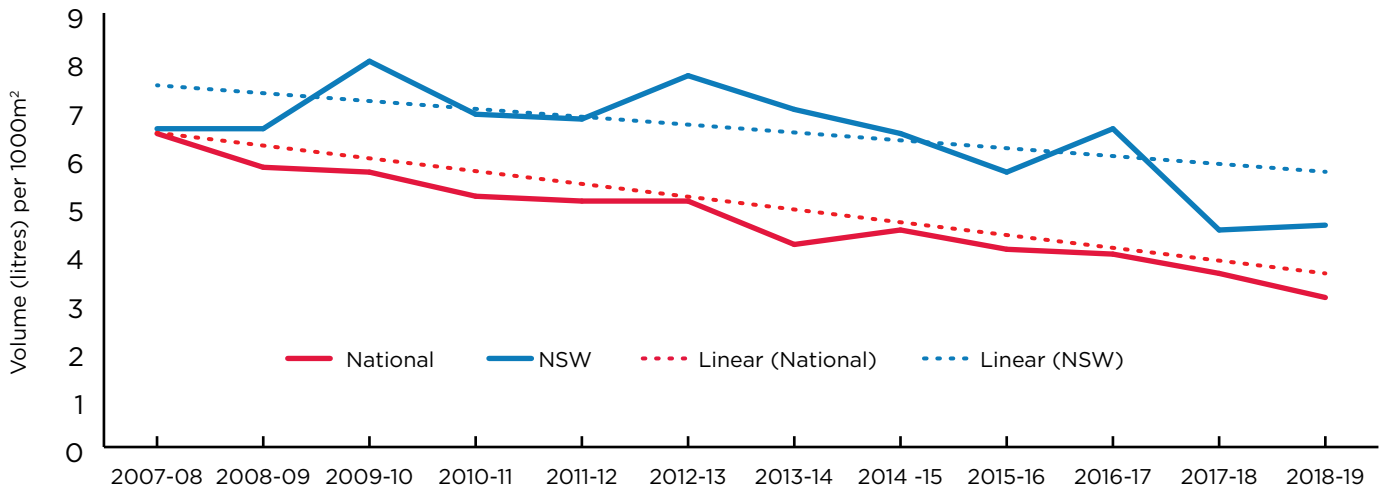
**Figure 4: Item count per EPA category – NLI 2018-19**

Miscellaneous items (including broken bits of plastic, clothing items, nappies and paper bags) make up 35% of littered items, while takeaway litter makes up 14%. Drink containers, included in the NSW Return and Earn scheme, make up 7% of littered items counted.

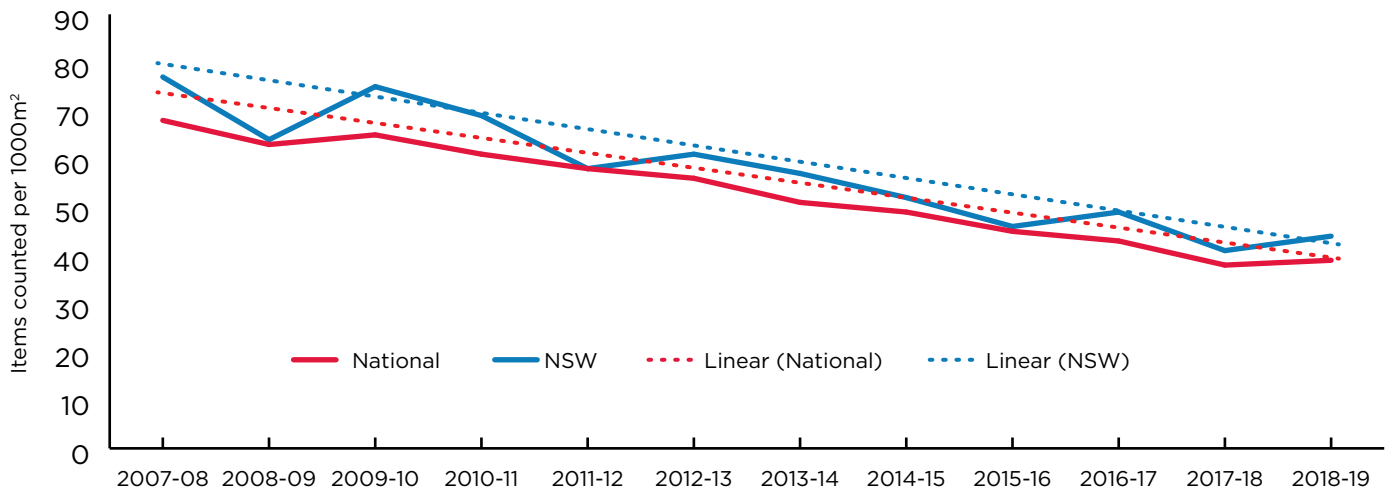
Our state has been reducing litter since the Index began in 2005-2006, at around the same rate as national trends (Figure 5 and Figure 6). The recent sharp downward trend in volume in 2016-17 (Figure 5) can be mostly attributed to the effect of the introduction of Return and Earn on 1 December 2017 that had a large impact on the number of littered drink containers.



**Figure 3: Volume of litter per EPA category – NLI 2018-19**



**Figure 5: Litter volume trends - NSW and nationally**



**Figure 6: Litter count trends - NSW and nationally**



# NSW Litter Prevention Strategy

This Report Card provides a snapshot of performance against the NSW Litter Prevention Strategy. It reports key outcomes and actions towards achieving our key objective to reduce litter volume in NSW by 40% by 2020

The Report Card will be updated every two years in line with the Litter Implementation Plan.

Headline  
outcomes<sup>1</sup>

35% reduction in  
litter volume

23% reduction in  
litter items

## Key Actions<sup>2</sup>

### APPROACH 1: Rewarding responsible behaviour

The Return and Earn container deposit scheme was introduced into NSW on 1 December 2017. Since its introduction, **over 2.7 billion beverage containers have been returned**, and 630+ Return and Earn collection points established.

An **Implementation Campaign has been delivered** to promote the scheme and an **education and behaviour-based campaign**, started in December 2018, is helping educate the community on the scheme and its benefits.

National Litter Index data from 2018-19 show that since the Scheme's introduction, eligible **beverage container litter has reduced by 40%**.

### APPROACH 2: Education and awareness

Since 2013, **seven Tosser! Education and awareness campaign phases have been delivered**. These campaigns are a key element of successful behaviour change.

The *Tosser!* Campaign has been well received by the NSW community, with **over 92% community support** and over **67% community recall** of the campaign recorded in social research.

Partnerships have been formed with a range of stakeholders to deliver the *Tosser!* campaign and spread the anti-littering message. Partnerships have included **Roads and Maritime Services, Transport for NSW, Service NSW, the NSW Police Force, Woolworths, McDonalds, and local councils and community groups**.

A revamped *Don't Be A Tosser!* was launched in 2018 across TV, bus sides, billboards, radio and online to drive a change in social norms around littering and its impacts.

Further campaigns are planned for 2020, including a **new Marine-based Tosser! Campaign** to raise awareness of the impact of litter in the marine environment.

The NSW Government continues to support community action on litter prevention through **sponsorship and awards**. The NSW Government has sponsored the annual **Keep Australia Beautiful Litter Congress** since 2014, as well as the Tidy Towns / Blue Star community awards since 2015. These partnerships are vital in spreading the anti-littering message across the State and recognising the valuable work of the community in litter prevention.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the Keep Australia Beautiful National Index - baseline year 2013-14.

<sup>2</sup> Actions completed under the \$50 million litter prevention program, *Waste Less, Recycle More* initiative - since 2012

### APPROACH 3: Infrastructure and clean-Up

The NSW Government has provided over **\$9 million in litter grants to local government and the community** since 2014. These grants have supported local councils, Regional Waste Groups and community groups to deliver **over 220 litter prevention projects** that answer community needs. These projects play an important role in achieving long-term goals for litter reduction in NSW.

Since 2014, 13 grant rounds have been opened, providing

- \$5.1 million provided local councils
- \$3.6 million provided to Regional Waste Groups and
- \$366,000 to local community groups.

Evaluation of grant projects show an average litter reduction of 70% at target sites.

Another \$1.6 million of litter grant funding will be available up to 2021.

### APPROACH 4: Regulation and enforcement

The Report to EPA program began on 1 February 2015, allowing community members to register and report littering from vehicles. As of 1 December 2019, there are **over 45,000 community reporters** registered on the system. They have submitted **over 48,000 observations** of littering from vehicles, resulting in over **40,000 penalty notices** being issued by the EPA.

The EPA has conducted a number of enforcement 'blitzes', starting with Operation Vortex targeting people attending the Bathurst 1000 in 2014. This has been followed by several Report a Tosser campaigns; a Snow Campaign in 2016 targeting travellers to NSW snow fields; and a targeted enforcement campaign in partnerships with local councils and NSW Police.

Since 2013, over **330 council officers have been trained in litter enforcement** through the AELERT program. More training will be available in 2019.

### APPROACH 5: Evaluation and monitoring

A **Local Litter Check** was developed in 2013 to help councils and community groups understand their local litter problems and develop evidence-based solutions. This tool also allows users to track litter and littering behaviour over time, and to evaluate the project success. In 2018, the Local Litter Check went online, allowing more efficient data collection and for public access to litter data that had been unavailable up till then.

Several **key litter studies** have been completed to better understand litter behaviour in NSW and develop effective solutions. These include leading research into **cigarette butt littering behaviour**, followed by a **cigarette butt litter behaviour change trial** in partnership with 16 local councils.

A Cigarette Butt Litter Behaviour Change program will be developed for roll-out in 2019-20.

A **Key Littered Items study of marine debris** was undertaken in 2018, to assess the impact of the Return and Earn scheme on reducing beverage container litter in our marine estate, as well as other items of interest, such as plastic bags and fishing gear. The Study will also be used to help develop a marine litter campaign in 2020.

A NSW Litter Report is due for publication in 2020.

Published by:

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ISBN 978 1 922260 77 2 EPA 2019P1753

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