

Case study: Food organics and garden organics collection in Cooma- Monaro



Photo: Fun branding is used to educate children about waste and sustainability.
(Cooma-Monaro Shire Council)

Home to a population of 10,114 people, the Cooma-Monaro area in south-east NSW is set among the rolling Monaro plains and Snowy Region peaks about 100 kilometres south of Canberra.

The Cooma-Monaro Shire Council is now part of the Snowy Monaro Regional Council.

Less waste, more compost

The Cooma-Monaro Shire Council used its \$339,499 grant funding to produce nutrient-rich compost. It introduced a new kerbside food organics and garden organics (FOGO) collection service and upgraded the council's organics processing facility.

Extending the life of landfill sites

After learning that 70% of waste in the red-lid landfill bins was organics and recyclable wastes, the council decided to introduce a fortnightly kerbside food and garden organics (FOGO) collection service across 3,100 households in the Cooma township.

Snowy Monaro Regional Council's Resource and Waste Operations Manager, Mandy Thurling, said, 'The council realised that a valuable resource was not being recovered and that this was putting further pressure on the environment and the life of the council's landfill sites.'

Funding from two programs under the NSW Environment Protection Authority's Waste Less, Recycle More Organics Infrastructure Fund has allowed the council to significantly reduce the amount of waste being sent to landfill and instead convert it into quality compost.

The Environment Protection Authority's Organics Collections Grants provide up to \$1.3 million to councils and business to introduce new food only or food and garden collection services. They are administered by the Environmental Trust and open for applications over several funding rounds.



Photo: Locally produced 'Coompost'.
(Cooma-Monaro Shire Council)



Photo: Household FOGO waste is converted into nutrient-rich compost.
(Cooma-Monaro Shire Council)

From kitchen to compost

In January 2015, a new fortnightly FOGO waste collection service was introduced across the Cooma township. To help collect food waste, each household was provided with:

- a new 240 litre green-lid bin
- a bench-top kitchen caddy
- a supply of compostable liners.

In just the first eight months of the new service, 416 tonnes of FOGO material were collected from the kerbside green-lid bins. With the support and involvement of residents, this otherwise wasted resource was diverted from landfill and converted into compost.

As an A-grade compost, the nutrient-rich product is processed at the Cooma Landfill and sold under a variation of the town's name: 'Coompost'. It is now used by residents, including community organisations, such as the Cooma Community Garden, to grow food and improve gardens.

Snowy Monaro Regional Council is also putting the product to good use on parks and sporting grounds, while the agriculture sector is using it to improve soil quality and increase production. What's more, 'Coompost' is also part of a three-year scientific trial to help improve soil fertility and carbon levels to assist with combating noxious weeds, such as African lovegrass.

Engaging the community

The council developed an education and communication plan that focused on educating residents to encourage them to adopt a more sustainable way of managing waste.

It created a local buzz with the delivery of bins to households over the Christmas period, making the most of the festive colours of the green-lid and red-lid bins.

The name 'Coompost' was also chosen through a competition at the local show, providing residents with the opportunity to become involved in a fun way.

A media campaign was rolled out and a phone hotline set up to answer questions and provide support to residents. Community groups also visited the Waste and Resource Centre to learn about sustainable waste management. Education and communication activities were specifically designed for children.

A local school competition was held to name the new waste collection truck and waste minimisation education shows were performed at local schools.

We have established great relationships with local schools over several years and delivered practical messages, which they then pass on to the broader community. Educate the kids and they will educate their parents.

**Mandy Thurling,
Resource and Waste
Operations Manager,
Snowy Monaro
Regional Council**

The branding on the waste collection trucks includes brightly coloured characters from a children's waste and sustainability book created by local garbo Trevor Nichols (pictured below) and his illustrator wife, Lynsey Nichols.



Photo: Trevor Nichols gives the new collection service the thumbs up.
(Cooma-Monaro Shire Council)

Widespread benefits achieved

The Resource and Waste Operations Manager, Mandy Thurling, said, 'The project has been well-received by the community with increased participation and the possibilities of expansion. The main benefits are the positive outcome of turning the FOGO into compost and having this product returned to the community.'

In the first 12 months the Cooma organics kerbside collection service:

- collected 463 tonnes of food and garden waste
- reduced waste going to landfill by 463 tonnes, equating to a massive 58 truckloads of waste
- reduced the amount of organics material in red-lid landfill bins by 51.6%.

The organics kerbside collection service has also:

- produced approximately 1,500 tonnes of nutrient-rich compost per annum, benefitting the community and agriculture sector and providing two jobs
- extended the life of the Cooma landfill by an estimated three to five years
- achieved a contamination rate of less than 3%.

The overall amount of recycling collected in yellow-lid bins also increased. This is a positive outcome of the waste recycling education program that was conducted to coincide with the introduction of the three-bin system.

Potential expansion

With the merger of Cooma-Monaro Shire Council into the larger Snowy Monaro Regional Council in 2016, staff are planning to investigate if the FOGO kerbside collection service can be expanded to other parts of the local government area.

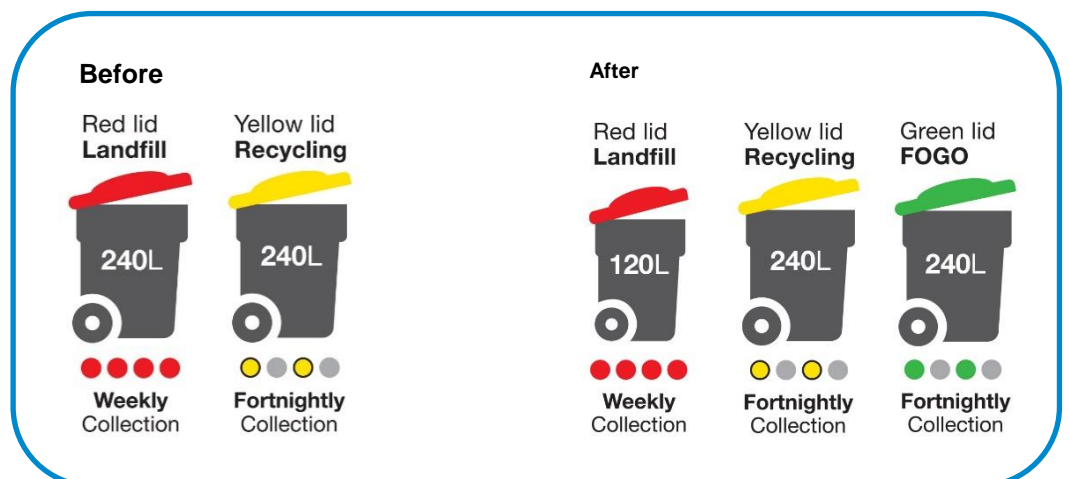


Figure: Changes to Cooma-Monaro Shire Council's kerbside bin collection service.

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