

B. How we prepared this report

Queensland Audit Office reports to parliament

The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) is Queensland's independent auditor of public sector entities and local governments.

QAO's independent public reporting is an important part of our mandate. It brings transparency and accountability to public sector performance and forms a vital part of the overall integrity of the system of government.

QAO provides valued assurance, insights and advice, and recommendations for improvement via the reports it tables in the Legislative Assembly, as mandated by the *Auditor-General Act 2009*. These reports may be on the results of our financial audits, on the results of our performance audits, or on our insights. Our insights reports may provide key facts or a topic overview, the insights we have gleaned from across our audit work, the outcomes of an investigation we conducted following a request for audit, or an update on the status of Auditor-General recommendations.

We share our planned reports to parliament in our 3-year forward work plan, which we update annually: www.qao.qld.gov.au/audit-program.

A fact sheet on how we prepare, consult on, and table our reports to parliament is available on our website: www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/fact-sheets.

Performance audits

Through our performance audit program, we evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of public service delivery. We select the topics for these audits via a robust process that reflects strategic risks entities are facing. We develop or identify suitable criteria for each audit and evaluate the audited entities' performance against it. We report to parliament on the outcome.

Our performance audit reports help parliament hold entities to account for the use of public resources. In our reports, we provide recommendations or insights for improvement, and may include actions, advice, or better practice examples for entities to consider.

About this report

QAO prepares its reports on performance audits under the *Auditor-General Act 2009*:

- section 37A, which outlines that the Auditor-General may conduct a performance audit of all or any particular activities of a public sector entity.

This report communicates the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from our performance audit on reducing organic waste sent to landfill. Our audit was a reasonable assurance engagement, conducted under the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards* and the Australian Standard on Assurance Engagements ASAE 3500 Performance Engagements. We complied with the independence and other relevant ethical requirements related to assurance engagements. The conclusions in our report provide reasonable assurance about the audited entities' performance against the identified criteria. Our objectives and criteria are set out below.



Audit objective and criteria

The objective of the audit is to assess how effective the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's and selected South East Queensland councils' strategies are in reducing organic household waste sent to landfill.

The audit addressed the objective through the following sub-objectives and criteria:

Sub-objective 1: To assess the effectiveness of the department in designing, implementing, and overseeing the *Queensland Organics Strategy 2022–2032* (organics strategy) and the *Queensland Organics Action Plan 2022–2032* (action plan).

Criteria

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| 1.1 | The department has effectively designed the organics strategy and action plan and implemented selected programs to support the government's objectives. |
| 1.2 | The department is effectively overseeing the implementation of the organics strategy and action plan. |

Sub-objective 2: To assess the effectiveness of selected South East Queensland councils in designing and implementing organics plans and programs.

Criteria

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|-----|---|
| 2.1 | Councils have effectively designed plans and programs that reduce organic household waste, in accordance with state strategies and targets. |
| 2.2 | Councils effectively implement actions from state and local organics plans. |
| 2.3 | Councils monitor, review, and update organics waste plans and programs. |

Entities we audited

The Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation is responsible for designing and overseeing the implementation of key waste reduction and recycling strategies. Local governments are responsible for waste services in their areas.

Our audit included the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation and the following 3 councils in South East Queensland:

- Brisbane City Council
- Council of the City of Gold Coast
- Sunshine Coast Council.

We considered several factors when selecting these councils. This included their population and volume of waste generated, number and variety of organic waste programs and initiatives, waste facilities, and how current their waste plans were. We note that the selected councils are not representative of all councils in Queensland.

Scope exclusions

We did not audit:

- commercial and industrial waste or construction and demolition waste given the diversion rates for these waste streams are progressing better against targets than household waste
- private operator and industrial body performance since these are not public sector or controlled entities
- regulatory and compliance activities as we have previously audited the supervision, monitoring, and enforcement of environmental conditions for resource and waste management activities.

Audit method and approach

We used multiple audit methods to understand this complex topic. Wherever possible, we sought stakeholder observations and experiences to provide valuable context to our audit findings. We present these throughout the report.

Field visits and interviews

We conducted interviews with stakeholders from across the waste and recycling sector. This included, but was not limited to:

- meetings with the:
 - Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation
 - 3 selected councils
 - Department of State Development, Infrastructure and planning
 - Council of Mayors South East Queensland
 - Waste and Recycling Industry of Queensland
 - Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia
 - Australian Organics Recycling Association
 - Local Government Association of Queensland
 - selected private operators in the waste recycling business
- site visits to selected landfill and resource recovery centres of the 3 selected councils.

Document review

We obtained and reviewed relevant documents from the entities involved in the audit. This included legislation, strategic plans including waste plans and strategies, annual plans, guidelines, correspondence, performance reports, independent waste audit reports, governance committee meeting packs, reviews, and evaluations. We also considered research from other jurisdictions.

Data analysis

Figures included in this report are based on data provided by the 3 selected councils and the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation. We analysed the following data:

- the number of green bins
- bin composition data (what was in the bins)
- amounts of garden organic waste recovered from landfill.



We undertook walkthroughs to identify councils' and the department's processes for capturing, validating, and reporting waste data. Based on these walkthroughs, we noted the following limitations that could impact the accuracy of the reported figures:

- Queensland annual recycling and waste report data is self-reported by councils and private operators, meaning there could be differences in the definitions and methods used to measure waste amounts.
- The department applies assumptions to the calculation of diversion rates due to challenges in tracking diverted waste back to the source.
- Bin audit results can vary between audits and councils due to differences in the sampling approach, waste categories, and timing of audits.

It should be noted that the annual amounts of garden waste diverted from landfill are subject to seasonality; however, this does not impact the accuracy of the reported figures.

Subject matter expert

We engaged a subject matter expert to provide insights about the organic waste and recycling environment, including key issues and risks. This expert offered advice and validated facts and concepts related to specific aspects of the audit. We discussed the engagement of the subject matter expert with the relevant entities. The expert did not have any conflicts of interest with the work that we engaged them to undertake.

