

Report summary

This report examines how effective the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's and 3 selected South East Queensland councils' strategies have been in reducing the amount of household organic waste sent to landfill.



What is important to know about this audit?

- Household organic waste sent to landfill can release methane, a harmful greenhouse gas.
- Reducing the amount sent to landfill requires effective strategies and a coordinated approach from state and local governments, industry, and the community.
- The Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (the department) is responsible for designing and overseeing Queensland's waste reduction strategies. The Queensland Government has set targets for reducing the amount of organic waste sent to landfill.

Figure A
Food and garden organic waste



The department reports that food and garden organic waste makes up about **50%** of what households throw away in their rubbish bins each week.

Source: The Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation.



What did we find?

The organics strategy has effective elements, but issues with data and measuring performance limit its effectiveness

- The *Queensland Organics Strategy 2022–2032* (organics strategy) aligns to the state's overarching *Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy* (waste strategy) introduced in 2019. It sets a clear vision for managing organic waste in Queensland, has clearly defined objectives, and is based on better practice waste management principles. The department designed the organics strategy after extensive consultation with key stakeholders.
- While the organics strategy has effective elements, there are some design issues that limit its effectiveness. The department set organic waste objectives and targets it cannot measure and therefore, it cannot determine if it is achieving those objectives. The department does not collect reliable data to identify the amount of organic waste households are sending to landfill. The department relies on measuring progress against broader household waste targets from the waste strategy, for which it does have data, but it is difficult to attribute reductions to organic waste actions.
- Additionally, the supporting action plan, *Queensland Organics Action Plan 2022–2032* (action plan), does not clearly attribute state government departments' responsibilities for actions or specify targets for all performance measures.
- We audited 3 large South East Queensland councils. All 3 have developed waste management plans that align to the organics strategy.

Queensland is not on track to achieve interim household waste targets

- Queensland is now a third of the way through its 10-year organics strategy and is not on track to achieve the interim household waste targets.
- The department has reported that the amount of household waste diverted from landfill has increased from 27 per cent in 2022–23 to 28 per cent in 2023–24. It remains well below the interim target, which aims to divert 55 per cent of household waste from landfill by 2025.

The department and the 3 councils have taken action to reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfill

- Between 2021–22 and 2023–24, councils collectively increased the number of green lid bins for household garden organic waste across the state by 55 per cent.
- Queensland has rolled out approximately half a million green lid bins for households across the state.
- All 3 councils we audited were solely using their green lid bins to collect garden organic waste and not for food organic waste. They are recycling the garden organic waste and creating products, like mulch, and reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. They are also trialling and implementing alternative solutions to kerbside collection, like food waste education and home composting.
- The department and councils have delivered educational and other behavioural change programs but have only evaluated some programs to identify whether they have been effective in reducing food organic waste.

Barriers have delayed progress in implementing the organics strategy

- Changes in the requirements for composting have created uncertainty for industry. These changes included limits on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in compost and new odour regulations for new or expanding facilities producing compost. This is likely to have slowed investment in infrastructure, such as composting facilities.
- The department identified regulatory barriers as a risk to achieving the objectives of the organics strategy at the time of its design. However, it did not adequately assess, mitigate, or manage changes to the risk.
- The department has recently adjusted its approach to managing PFAS in compost following a review of its PFAS limits. It will no longer impose limits on PFAS when issuing new approval conditions for composters or enforce limits on existing approvals. Instead, the department will work collaboratively with the compost industry to develop guidance and undertake further monitoring to manage PFAS risks. The department will need to closely monitor PFAS risks and ensure it balances any health and environmental risks against the need to promote industry growth.

The department and the 3 councils are regularly tracking their progress but there are weaknesses in reporting

- The department tracks implementation progress of the action plan and provides quarterly summaries to its executive leadership team. Its existing reporting does not accurately reflect progress against the objectives of the organics strategy or key risks.
- In December 2024, the department reported that 24 out of 29 actions were progressing as planned. This overstates progress. We found that 9 actions reported as being on track were either behind schedule or at risk because they were related to other actions that were delayed.
- All 3 councils are monitoring and reviewing their plans and organic waste programs. This includes monitoring contamination rates in household green lid bins to measure the amount of non-organic waste. The 3 councils use this information to identify households that require further education.



What do entities need to do?

We have made 5 recommendations to the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation that focus on:

- assessing whether the objectives, goals, and targets in the organics strategy remain achievable
- providing clarity about how it intends to manage the risk of PFAS in compost
- strengthening its risk management practices
- improving access to funding for organic waste initiatives and infrastructure
- enhancing how it monitors, evaluates, and reports performance against the organics strategy.