Waste Services Review and Customer Satisfaction Survey
2024 Listening Report

bega valley shire council

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Bega Valley Shire Council acknowledges and pays our respects to the traditional custodians of the lands, waterways and airspace of the shire.

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Introduction

Bega Valley Shire Council's adopted "Recycling the Future" Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy 2018-2028 is due for review and update.

The project will redevelop the strategy, reflecting on progress against the existing objectives and ensuring a new strategy is fit for the future based on evolving community needs/wants, technology, environment and regulation.

Council is responsible for providing waste collection and waste management services to its community. These services are highly technical, both scientific and engineered, requiring a carefully considered balance of operational activity, asset management and business administration to achieve strategic outcomes.

A service area strategy is required to guide the provision of services now and into the future that is fit for purpose, meets our legislative requirements, *meets community expectations*, is sustainable, and aligns insofar as is possible with adopted and emerging best practice.

To understand community expectations, the project team has undertaken two key activities:

1. The formation of a community strategic working group
2. Development of a community survey. The output from these two activities will heavily inform the strategy.

How was the survey developed and what were its limitations? What have we learnt in conducting a survey?

The purpose of the survey was to gauge general community sentiment and the level of satisfaction with:

1. the waste services provided by Council
2. value for money
3. general perceptions toward waste and sustainability
4. the future role and activities of Council's waste department.

As such the survey was designed to be considered in five parts:

1. Demographic Questions (addressed in the "Who was surveyed" section below) (questions 1-4)
2. Service Satisfaction (questions 5-26)
3. Perceived Value for Money (questions 27-28)
4. Community Attitudes Towards Waste (questions 30)
5. Prioritisation for Future Investment and Role of Council (question 29-31).

The survey was designed primarily as an online survey. There were no changes in how questions were asked for paper surveys taken at community engagement events.

The survey was comprehensive, with most respondents completing it in 10-12 minutes.. Ninety-Four incomplete surveys were recorded, although many of these were still useful in understanding service satisfaction.

The question design for the "Choose your top 3" questions, specifically questions 29 and 31, resulted in some respondents selecting more than three options on the paper surveys. This invalidated a total of 31 answers, which had a minor influence on the data. This issue did not occur with online surveys. While this may affect the individual percentage scores for each option, it is not expected to change the overall ranking or order of community preferences.

Due to the number of paper surveys completed (145) at market engagement activities and spikes in online completions following those events, it is highly recommended future Council surveys undertake this type of engagement.

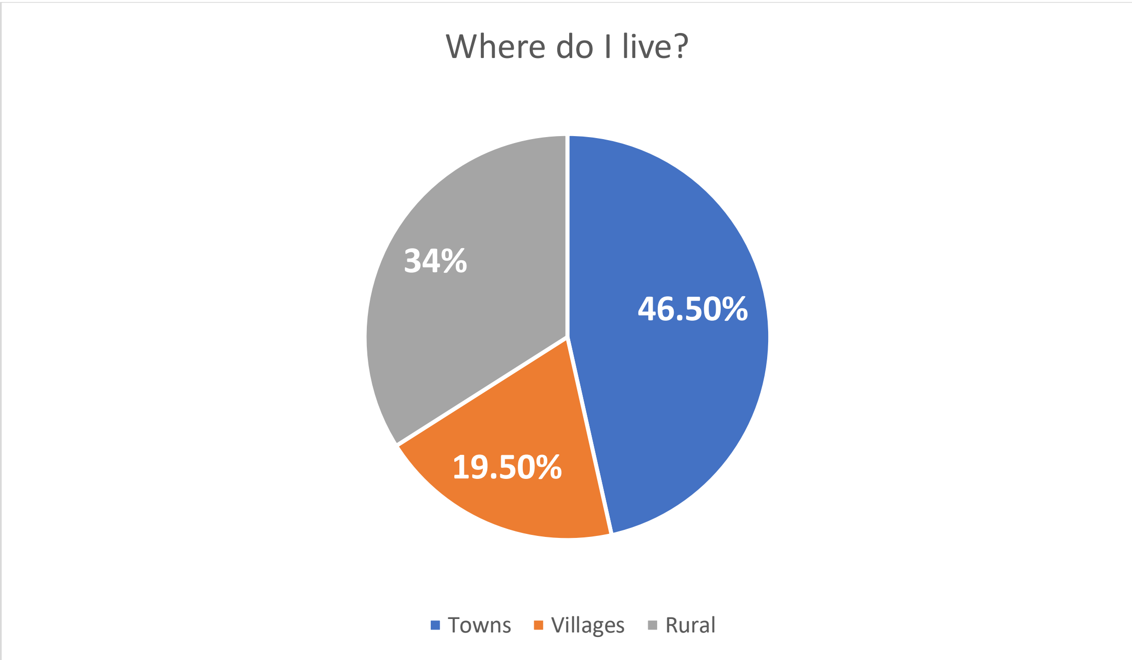
Many responses to the survey satisfaction questions recorded a 'Neutral – 3' score, with corresponding comments indicating the respondent doesn't use the service. The survey is designed to have those responses entered as 'Don't Use – 0', with the intention of having no impact on the overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction score. If we are to count these 'Neutral 3' scores as 'Don't Use 0' scores, the overall effect increases customer satisfaction levels.

It should also be accepted that while someone may not use a service, they may have a valid opinion about it.

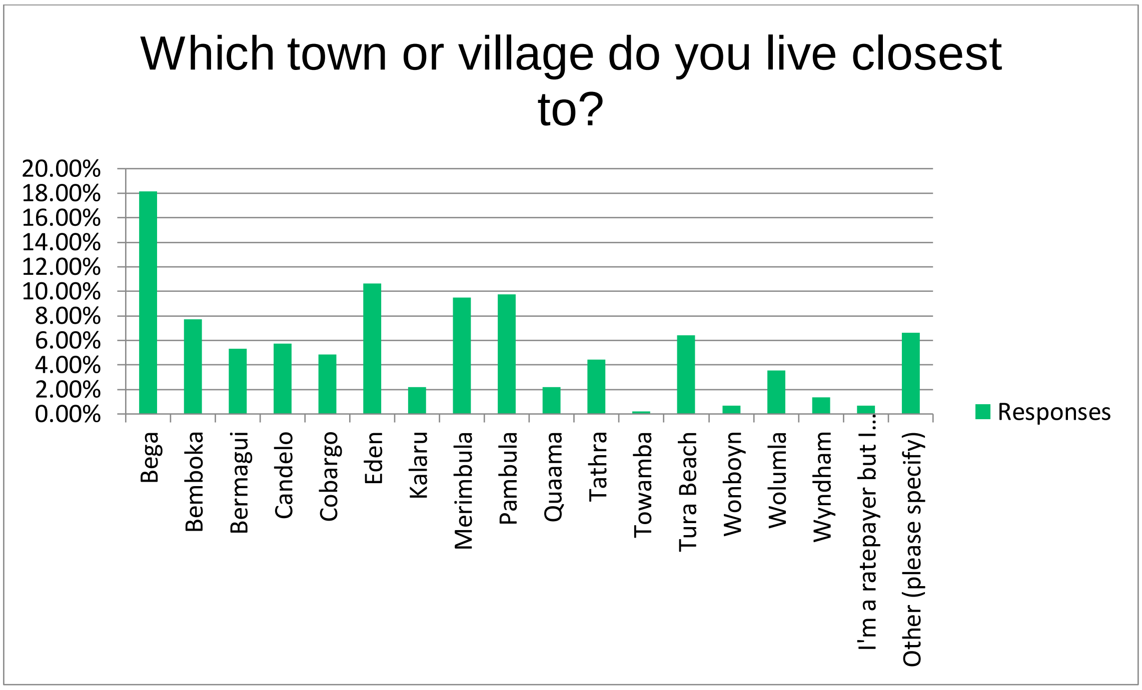
Who was surveyed?

- We received a total of 452 Surveys
  - Based on the SurveyMonkey tool, using number of households (18,990), a survey sample size of 377 gives 95% confidence in accuracy of the results
  - There are 358 complete surveys
  - There are 94 incomplete surveys, 50 of which still provide complete service satisfaction data and comments
  - There are 39 Internal (BVSC) staff surveys, of which 23 were complete, and 16 were incomplete
  - There were 145 paper surveys collected at community engagement events that were manually entered into SurveyMonkey

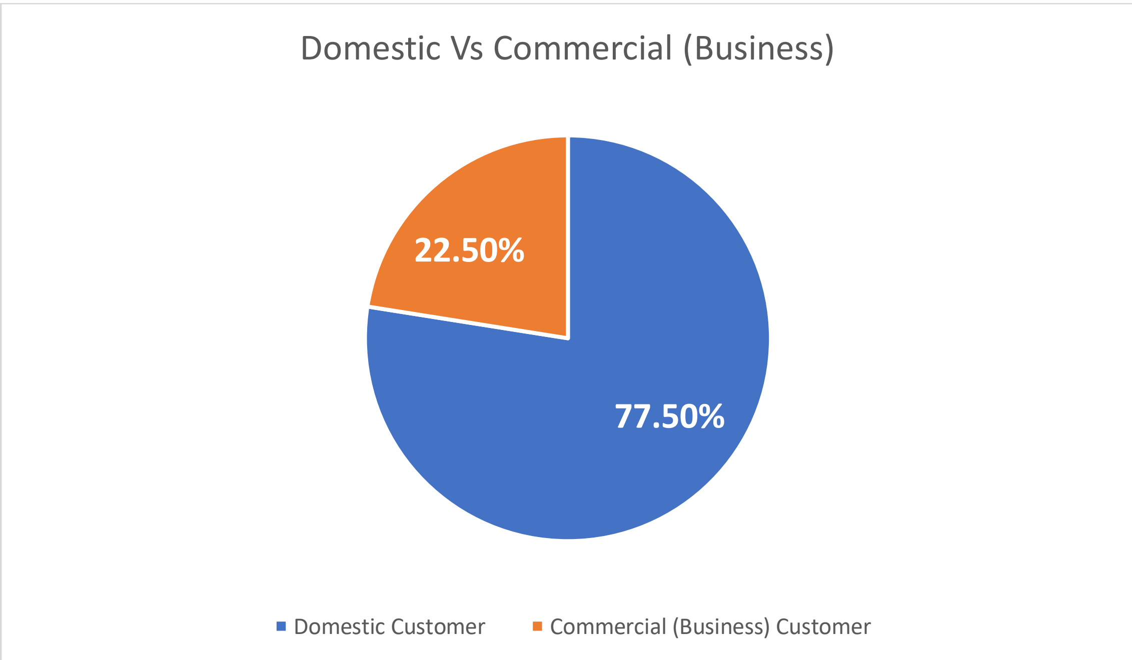
- Respondents lived (Q2)
  - 46.5% in towns
  - 19.5% in villages
  - 34% in rural



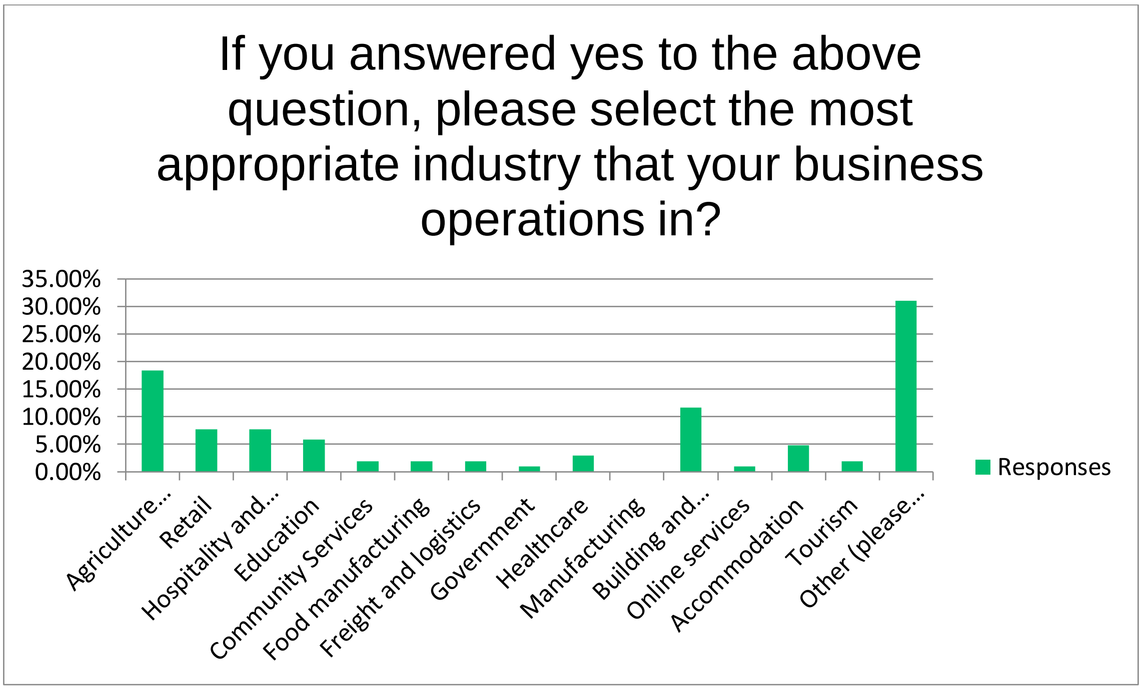
- The breakdown of where respondents lived was (Q1)



- Respondents answered as (Q3)
  - 77.5% domestic customers
  - 22.5% commercial (I own or run a business)



- Those that own or run a business included (Q4)



  - The variety of occupations provided in responses to “Other” were diverse. Most responses could have been categorised as an occupational option listed in the question.

How was the survey engagement conducted?

The survey was conducted over two periods.

1. The internal staff survey was conducted 22 February – 7 March
2. The external public survey was conducted 15 March – 15 May

The survey was provided online, with a supporting media release and social media posts.

The survey team also attended several community events:

• Eden Markets	16-March
• Men's Shed Muster (Merimbula)	19-March
• Bega (Zingel Place) Markets	22-March
• Candelo Markets	7-April
• Cobargo Market	13-April
• Merimbula Seaside Market	21-April
• Nethercote Market	27-April
• Bermagui Breakers AFL Fixtures	11-May

With the following survey options:

1. Paper survey
2. Online survey conducted on a provided tablet
3. QR Code to complete on respondent's own device (at Candelo Markets and subsequent events)

Due to illness, the survey team were unable to attend the Bermagui *Sculptures by the Sea* event. The team instead attended several Bermagui Breakers AFL fixtures.

In addition to paper surveys collected at the events, there were notable spikes in online surveys following:

- Bega Zingel Place Markets (9 that day, and 101 in the following 4 days)
- Candelo Markets (11 that day)
- Merimbula Seaside Markets (16 that day)
- Nethercote Markets (12 that day)

The Nethercote Markets had the most engagement, with 17 paper surveys plus 12 online surveys that day. Community event engagements generally achieved 20 surveys (+-5).

A radio advertising campaign ran from 1 May – 15 May, on 2EC and Power FM. Over that period 57 online surveys were completed with spikes on 3 May (Fri), 8 May (Wed) and 10 May (Fri). Across those three days there were 34 online surveys completed.

The survey team checked results throughout the survey period. It was noted there were only four surveys from Bemboka residents (two online, two paper) prior to 1 May. The survey team spoke with proprietors of the Bemboka Hotel and Bemboka Post Office Thu 2 May and left QR code flyers at both. There were an additional 35 surveys completed online from Bemboka residents between 2-6 May, as well as some organic social media posts drawing attention to the survey.

Due to the timing – it is difficult to discern whether the radio ads or QR code flyers – or a combination of both - are responsible for the uptick in surveys in the final two weeks, or which influenced Bemboka residents most.

How did people respond?

Service Satisfaction

The survey satisfaction results have been adjusted to account for question methodology, specifically providing an option for 'Don't Use = 0'.

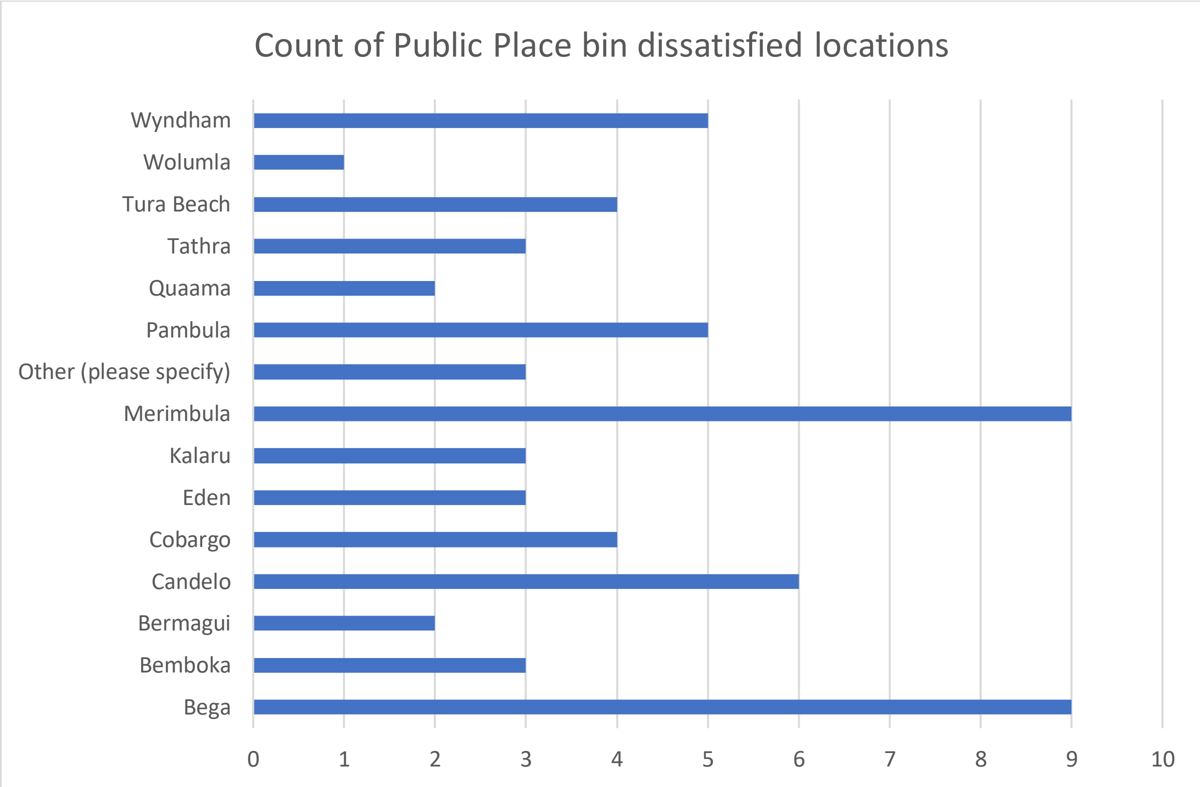
A satisfaction score of 1-5 was used with 1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being very satisfied, and 3 being neutral.

The notable results are:

- All service areas surveyed received a positive satisfaction rating (an average score of more than 3.0).
- The average satisfaction score across all services was 3.61
- The services with highest satisfaction were:
    - Kerbside recycling collection (4.05)
    - Free waste disposal vouchers (3.95)
    - Waste App (3.88) *noting a high 'Don't Use' response (35.32%)
    - Kerbside FOGO collection (3.83)
    - Waste and Recycling Centre – recycling drop-off (3.81)
- The services with lowest overall satisfaction score were:
    - Brick and concrete disposal at Eden (3.20) – note this is predominantly a commercial service
    - Commercial disposal at the CWF (3.22) – note this is a commercial service
    - Mobile Community Recycling Centres (3.25)
- The services with largest number of dissatisfied responses (Scoring 1 or 2)
    - Kerbside landfill collection (68) dissatisfied responses
    - Public litter bins (62)
    - Green waste disposal at waste and recycling centres (45)
    - Compost purchase (44)
    - General Waste Disposal at waste and recycling centres (38)

Regarding public bins, negative feedback was received indicating a perceived lack of bins, infrequent emptying, overflowing rubbish, dirtiness, unpleasant smells, ugly design, and a need for more recycling bins.

Conversely there were many comments indicating satisfaction with the number and servicing of public bins. It can be concluded that issues with public bins is limited to specific hotspot locations. The locations where respondents live that had greatest dissatisfaction are:



The comments generally identify Merimbula, Bega and Candelo as areas with issues. For instance, of the five responses from Wyndham, three directly or indirectly refer to bins across the shire or in Merimbula, not specifically in Wyndham.

Perceived Value for Money

Answering questions (27 and 28) about fair pricing and value:

- 62.5% responded our services ARE fairly priced
- 37.5% responded our services ARE NOT fairly priced

Between questions 27 and 28, 517 written responses provided insight into respondents' answers. This feedback provided more insight than any other question in the survey.

- A very large number of comments supported that Waste Services fees were fair
- A very large number of comments had the opinion that our fees were too high/expensive without detailing a specific service
    - Many of these comments referred in general to Council rates, rather than specifically waste fees and charges
- A large number of responses questioned/didn't like that green waste disposal and compost sales both attract fees i.e. green waste disposal should be free
- Several responses questioned the perceived high cost of mattress disposal

Community Attitudes Towards Waste

The majority of respondents (59.24%) disagree and a further (17.92%) were neutral with the statement.

"As long as my bins are emptied, I don't think about waste management i.e its Council's responsibility"

The vast majority of respondents (85.38%) believe waste can be a valuable resource.

The vast majority of respondents (89.65) think about reducing waste in their everyday lives.

The vast majority of respondents (87.32%) find it easy to sort waste at home.

The vast majority of respondents (80.00%) find recycling makes them feel good.

Only a small majority of respondents (55.98%) want to learn more about sustainable waste management. *

*This answer is at odds with the responses to *Question 29. "What role(s) do you think Council should play in helping to improve waste management in the Bega Valley? (Choose up to 3 answers)"* where the top response was "Waste Education and Awareness Programs".

Prioritisation for Future Investment and the Role of Council

The following indicates clear priorities from survey respondents.

Question 29 *"What role(s) do you think Council should play in helping to improve waste management in the Bega Valley? (Choose up to 3 answers)"*

- A majority of respondents (55.15%) would like Council to conduct Waste Education and Awareness Programs
- A leading minority of respondents (34.26%) would like Council to conduct compliance and enforcement programs to tackle bin contamination, illegal dumping and littering
- A leading minority of respondents (27.3%) would like Council to promote existing waste services and infrastructure*
- A minority of respondents (22.56% and 22.28% respectively) asked for new or additional waste collection services or new or additional waste and recycling infrastructure.

*This is supported by the many written responses indicating respondents were unaware of many of the services we surveyed.

To Question 31 *"Thinking more broadly about waste management, resource recovery and recycling within the Bega Valley Shire region, is there anything else you would like to raise that hasn't been covered already or that you see as an issue or priority?"*

- A majority of respondents (53.2%) wanted Council to deal with littering and illegal dumping
- A near majority of respondents (40.67%) wanted Council to deal with items put in the red (landfill) bin that could have been recovered
- A leading minority of respondents (31.2%) wanted Council to deal with contamination in the yellow (recycling) and green (FOGO) bins
- Additionally, three options were related to enhancing our Waste Transfer Stations (Waste and Recycling Centres). Taken collectively, they represent 250 preferred responses—far exceeding any other option. This underscores the priority placed on improving our waste facilities.
    - *"Improving the current Reuse (tip) shops at Council's Transfer Stations"*
    - *"Expanded Community Recycling Centre (CRC) facilities - to accept more types of problem household waste for recycling at more Transfer Stations"*
    - *"Improving transfer station consistency in waste types accepted, opening hours and layout/design. (Currently not all transfer stations accept all waste types, and have varying operating hours)"*

Was there a difference between what different demographics told us?

Town/Village vs Rural

There were several key differences between these two demographics.

- Town/Villages were less happy with kerbside landfill (red bin) collection than rural, reflecting comments around fortnightly vs weekly collection.
- Rural residents were less satisfied (but only slightly) with:
  - green waste disposal at sites, citing cost and distance.
  - Re-use shops,
  - Compost, citing they use their own or issues with quality/contamination
  - Website, citing they don't have internet or don't use computers.
  - They also reported less use of the Waste App
- Kerbside FOGO collection was a very contentious question in the rural demographic. Based on the survey design and results, further engagement is required with this demographic on this issue to properly understand the issue.
  - Of the 142 respondents in the rural demographic, only 25 people left a rating. The vast majority selected don't use which reflects the service is not available rurally.
  - Of the 25 people who left a rating, 14 responded they were dissatisfied leading to an overall dissatisfied rating (2.16). However this only accounts for 1 in 10 in the whole demographic being dissatisfied.
  - In the comments there were:
    - 14 comments indicating they want the service
    - 10 comments indicating they don't want it/already compost at home

A key theme in comments was the additional distance and related costs to access waste transfer stations for rural residents.

There was a larger difference in opinion on value for money, where only 57.63% of rural respondents through fees and charges were fair, vs 65.14% for town/village respondents.

In terms of prioritising effort and resources, there was very strong alignment between the two demographics. Towns/villages would prefer to prioritise new or additional collection services and making vouchers more accessible, where rural respondents would prioritise new or additional infrastructure and improving Re-use shops. This could reflect a difference in attitude between the two demographics towards the effort/method to dispose of waste, and re-use over disposal.

Resident vs Business

There was strong alignment in responses between these two demographics. Generally, the business demographic was reported slightly lower satisfaction on most service areas.

Notable differences included lower satisfaction in the business demographic for:

- kerbside collections
- compost purchase
- special recycling
- website app
- CRCs.

There was slightly higher satisfaction for Brick and Concrete disposal.

The business demographic was only slightly unhappier about value for money, with a 3.9% difference.

Interestingly, there was also very strong alignment in prioritisation with most of the “Top 5” issues the same between demographics. Business respondents would prefer priority be given to expanding CRCs and hazardous waste collection and disposal, and residential demographic would prefer priority be given to Re-use Shops, new infrastructure and making waste vouchers more accessible.

Notably, both demographics ranked “Development of tools, resources and programs to educate about waste avoidance and improve recycling *for businesses*” as 6th priority for Question 29.

Internal Staff vs All Community

N.B. there will be staff who completed the survey as part of the public survey (only 23 complete internal responses during the internal only period).

In general the internal staff surveys aligned very closely with the overall public feedback received. The only notable difference is that adopting a User Pays system for fees and charges was higher in priority for internal staff than for the public.

In general, what did people say? (the content of written comments)

Most questions allowed respondents to leave a comment. In total, across all questions there were more than 3200 comments provided. There was on average, 130 comments per question.

There were approximately 37 comments asking for a regular hard waste roadside collection service (key terms: hard, curbside, kerbside, pickup) and this was a common theme in face-to-face conversations at engagement events and consistent with regular feedback the Waste team receive. The main reason given is that people don't have Utes or trailers, can't afford disposal fees or are renters who don't receive waste vouchers. There was a prevailing attitude this should be free, although some indicated a book-in service as an option.

There were many responses from town/village residents wanting weekly red bin collection and/or larger bin sizes, or rural residents currently liking the weekly collection. This is consistent with regular feedback the Waste team receive. Conversely, there were many comments that fortnightly red bin collection and allocated bin sizes are good. There were also many comments that indicate people are unaware they can change the size of their bin.

There were many responses that yellow bin recycling kerbside pickup should be weekly.

There were a significant number of responses (52) indicating the respondent didn't know about a service or issue. These were predominantly against questions relating to the CRC, CRS (Libraries), Mobile CRC, Waste Grants, Waste App, Eden Brick and Concrete disposal and the CWF.

There were many responses indicating a lack of faith in recycling systems, and that it isn't clear what can be recycled. There were lots of responses about losing a soft plastics recycling pathway. Most acknowledged it was not Council's fault, but are seeking a Council solution.

The confusion and/or change in allowable inputs into FOGO was mentioned many times, indicating that people are not clear on what can be disposed of, or why.

Several comments asked for Council to provide Return and Earn stations (Container Deposit Scheme), especially in Bermagui. This is supported by a presentation from the Bermagui Men's Shed where they claimed to be reimbursing $15,000-$18,000 annually in CDS revenue thanks to support from community members.

We received comments complaining that site opening hours were inconvenient for them, especially sites that only open a few days per week.

Regarding Re-use shops, while the sentiment is largely positive, there are many complaints about the quality of items and infrastructure, and that more could go into the shops from general waste or scrap metal disposal.

Regarding compost, while the sentiment is largely positive, there are many complaints about availability, small contamination (glass, plastic), weeds, pH, and nutrient content.

While largely positive about the BVSC Waste webpages and Waste App there were comments indicating some respondents do not use computers or devices and want other means of accessing information. There were several comments that the website as a whole is difficult to navigate and information is not up to date.

There were many comments against any further permanent site closures, with emphasis on Wallagoot, Candelo and Bemboka. There were several comments asking for Cobargo to be redeveloped as a site.

What conclusions can we draw from the survey?

In general, community satisfaction with the waste service is very high, with a clear majority of respondents saying our services are fair value for money. Those who do not feel it is value for money feel very strongly that it is not but are often taking issue with the total fees and charges for Council's services (e.g. rates, waste and potentially water and sewer). They are a significant minority at (37.5%).

There is a clear desire for:

1. more/better education (although only half of respondents want to learn more),
2. better sites (open more often) with opportunities to divert more waste from landfill
3. tackling illegal dumping and littering
4. respondents also want Council to deal with contamination more actively in all three streams (red, yellow and green bins).

Where education is concerned there is a desire to focus on existing services, non-Council disposal options for items and an opportunity to be more convincing and transparent about end-to-end recycling systems we utilise.

There is very strong desire for a hard waste kerbside collection, but vouchers are also viewed very positively among respondents.

There are localised problems with public place litter bins, notably in Merimbula, Bega and Candelo that need to be addressed.

A weekly red bin service is a contentious issue, with most comments in favour, but many comments also in favour of fortnightly. This should not be conflated with overall satisfaction with the current services which is high.

Regarding FOGO Kerbside collection and the rural demographic (who are not currently serviced) the survey results indicated further engagement is required with this demographic to properly understand this issue.

There is little recognition in the community around "commercial and industrial" or "construction and demolition" waste streams and tackling those to reach diversion targets.

What's Next?

This listening report has been provided directly to Council's leadership executive, and Councillors.

The Waste Strategy project team will compare the results of the survey with the outputs from an internal staff Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis that was conducted in February 2024. It will also be considered in the context of the NSW Government targets under the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy. This will then inform the major strategic themes under the Waste Strategy, and the program of strategic projects Council will commit to undertake.

The results will be provided to the Waste Strategy Community Working Group for consideration and comment in the final workshop.

Finally, the DRAFT Strategy will be prepared for the Council to consider and place on public exhibition for a final HAVE YOUR SAY, prior to determination by Council. The Strategy may be amended or adjusted based on the results of the final HAVE YOUR SAY.

Timeline for Strategy Adoption	
June - July 2024	Analyse results of Survey, SWOT, prior feedback from working group and WASM Strategy
August 2024	Final Community Working Group session
August – October 2024	Finalise DRAFT Strategy
November - December 2024	Council Consideration and Have your Say
January – February 2025	Adopt Strategy

Thank You for Your Feedback

452 people provided survey submissions

8 face to face community events

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