Central Adelaide Waste and Recycling Authority

Rethink Reset Recycle

2026 – 2030

Central Adelaide's waste, recycling and circular economy education plan

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Kaurna acknowledgement

CAWRA would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which we stand, the Kaurna People of the Adelaide Plains. It is upon their ancestral lands that the two Councils of the Central Adelaide region meet. It is also the Place of the Kardi, the Emu, whose story travels from the coast inland.

We pay respect to Elders past and present. We respect their spiritual beliefs and connections to land which are of continuing importance to the living Kaurna people of today. We further acknowledge the contributions and important role that Aboriginal people continue to play within our shared community.

Our recycling efforts need a rethink – a message from the CAWRA Board Chair

When asked, residents across the central Adelaide region express a strong commitment to recycling and to the environmental benefits it provides.

Waste reduction, recycling and composting not only save materials – they create jobs and save money, energy, water and greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Most people want to recycle correctly and believe they are recycling correctly.

Yet there are clear gaps in householders' knowledge and in household behaviours.

Waste bins contain material that could have been recycled. Recycling and organics bins contain material that is not suitable for recycling or composting. Most people have a stock of unwanted items they don't know how to get rid of safely and responsibly.

Some people worry that their recycling and organics aren't recovered at all.

Added to all of that is the reality that our waste changes over time. New types of waste create new problems and require new solutions.

A well-designed and effective education program is needed to help build the required knowledge, motivation and trust. It supports people to reduce the waste they generate and to do the right thing with items they no longer want or need.

This 5 year plan sets out central Adelaide's recycling and circular economy education program. It aims to inform and motivate residents, businesses and decision makers across the region to waste less and recycle better.

Our old habits need a re-think. Let's reset our knowledge and get our waste and recycling behaviours back on track.

David Spear
CAWRA Board Chair

Who is CAWRA?

Established in 2019, Central Adelaide Waste and Recycling Authority (CAWRA) is a regional subsidiary of the Cities of Charles Sturt and Port Adelaide Enfield.

Created to service the local communities, CAWRA owns a Material Recovery Facility that receives and processes kerbside recyclable material from Councils and other organisations to deliver efficient and effective recycling solutions for residents.

CAWRA is committed to driving sustainability and protecting our environment for future generations. With cutting-edge infrastructure and a team of dedicated professionals, we're leading the charge towards a greener, more sustainable future.

CAWRA also oversees a wide range of waste and recycling services on behalf of its two Councils, as laid out in the CAWRA Charter. From 2025, this includes the planning and delivery of strategic programs aimed at improving recycling and circular economy outcomes, management of kerbside waste, recycling and organics contracts and the planning and delivery of community education programs.

Why our waste and recycling habits matter

Over time, it has become increasingly clear that current patterns of consuming and disposing of goods are not serving us well. Growing environmental, social and economic challenges clearly signal the need for a new approach – one which supports quality of life while minimising negative impacts on the environment and the people around us.

Green Industries SA has highlighted the following, in South Australia's Waste Strategy 2025 – 2030 "*Accelerating SA's Transition to a Circular Economy*":

Environmental impacts

- 2024 was the hottest year on record at 1.55 +/- 0.13 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average
- Global resource extraction reached 106.6 billion tonnes in 2024 – 4 times as much as in 1970
- One-third of extracted material is discarded within a year
- Material use is the single largest determinant of Australian energy use and emissions, responsible for more than 50% of our global warming
- Every year, across the globe, more than 2 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste is generated

Challenge: to reduce environmental harm and regenerate nature by:

- Minimising the generation of waste
- Reducing pollution through preventing the release of hazardous substances throughout the life cycle of products and materials
- Limiting GHG emissions
- Reducing nutrient loss in food systems by recovering nutrients for recycling into agricultural production

Challenge: to reduce demand for resource extraction by:

- Changing the way materials and goods are produced and consumed, including designing for longevity and circularity
- Becoming more efficient in how resources are used and retaining their use and value in the economy
- Using fewer virgin materials to meet consumption needs, including through a circular built environment
- Raising consumer awareness about sustainability and developing circular economy knowledge and skills
- Shifting consumption patterns to goods and services that are less material intensive

Central Adelaide's top 5 themes

CAWRA consulted extensively with the region's stakeholders and communities in early 2025 as part of the development of Central Adelaide's first regional waste, recycling and circular economy strategy 'Going Circular to 2030'. This included discussions with key State Government agencies including Green Industries SA and the Environment Protection Authority, to ensure our programs align.

We held 6 in-person workshops in late 2024 and early 2025 and received written submissions from government agencies, individual community members and community groups across both Councils as part of that process.

This strategy applies that input to the issues and future trends impacting this region and its services.

The following 5 priority areas will guide our education efforts over the coming 5 years:

1. **Build trust in the recycling process**
   Strengthen public understanding and trust in how recycling works, where materials go and the social, environmental and economic benefits of doing it right.
2. **Get batteries out of bins**
   Raise awareness of the fire and safety risks associated with battery disposal in kerbside bins and promote safe drop-off services.
3. **Our 3 bins – recycle more, contaminate less**
   Support the community to use the three bin system correctly with a focus on increasing recycling rates and reducing contamination.
4. **What to do with 'other' wastes**
   Provide clear information on how to manage items that don't belong in kerbside bins including e-waste, batteries and textiles.
5. **Reduce consumption of textiles and plastics**
   Encourage more sustainable consumption habits by promoting reuse, repair and responsible purchasing.

Guiding principles

These guiding principles will be applied across all of CAWRA's education programs:

- **Evidence-based:** all programs will draw from the best available knowledge and promote behaviours and solutions that are sound and evidence-based. Messaging and approaches should consider psychological safety and cognitive load (for both community members and frontline workers).
- **Inclusive:** wherever possible, programs will be made accessible to all residents across the region. This includes renters as well as ratepayers, those living with a disability and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and all age groups.
- **Aligned and consistent:** where possible, public messaging will be aligned and consistent across both Councils and the State Government.
- **Accountable:** we are all responsible to manage our own waste safely and sustainably. It is reasonable to expect residents to correctly use bins and services to improve environmental outcomes and reduce safety risks.
- **Education before enforcement:** Efforts will be made to educate and support residents to do the right thing with their waste before enforcement action[1]. In some cases, exceptional social and other challenges may create a genuine need that differs from an average household.
- **Fun and engaging:** Where appropriate, our programs will be fun, engaging and motivating for residents and participants.

[1] Where required, enforcement action could take a number of forms. This may include financial penalties or the removal of recycling services that are not being used appropriately.

1 Build trust in the recycling process

Trust is critical when motivating people to do things differently.

Sadly, trust in the recycling process has declined in recent years.

While the recycling industry has worked hard to improve processes and outcomes, some highly publicised failures (including interstate and overseas) have reduced the sector's public credibility.

Scepticism can contribute to poor decisions and recycling outcomes. Impacts include an ongoing decline in recyclables placed in household bins and an increase in contamination of recycling and organics bins with non-recyclable waste.

If we want people to rethink their habits at home, they need to know their efforts are worthwhile. That means building trust in the recycling process and helping people understand what happens to their recyclables once they've placed it in our hands.

No.	Activity	Target	Key partners	Timing
1.1	Invite the public and other stakeholders to tour the CAWRA MRF and view recycling first-hand	800 MRF visitors per annum	Schools, service clubs, general public, other stakeholders	Ongoing
1.2	Use CAWRA and Council print and social media platforms to describe and promote the process and benefits of recycling and composting. To include a publicly shared video on the fate of recyclables vs. landfill	Monthly social media posts and regular articles in printed Council newsletters	Council communications	Ongoing
1.3	Partner with the private sector to improve recycling outcomes and promote 'cradle to cradle' recycling stories	To be featured in Council social media posts and printed newsletters	CAWRA MRF operators and other recyclers that receive CAWRA materials	Opportunities to be identified and implemented as they arise
1.4	Host and participate in public events and industry promotions (such as National Recycling Week) to promote the benefits of recycling	Min. 4 public events per annum	Local and regional community events	Ongoing
1.5	Build CAWRA's brand and recognition as a trusted source of information on waste and recycling issues	Stakeholder survey	State Government agencies, media outlets, Council staff and Elected Members	Ongoing

2 Get batteries out of bins

We need everyone's help to get batteries out of bins.

Batteries get damaged in standard waste, recycling and organics collection trucks, causing fires and putting the lives of waste and recycling workers at risk.

Major battery fires have destroyed entire recycling facilities and (in some cases interstate) caused house fires and deaths.

10-12,000 times a year, all over Australia, waste and recycling workers manage fires and smoulders inside vehicles, recycling facilities and landfills. These fires happen when damaged batteries ignite flammable materials (such as paper and plastics).

It's not just loose handheld batteries. Any item that can be plugged in and recharged contains an embedded battery. Most of these are lithium-ion batteries – which are prone to ignition when damaged and are very difficult to extinguish.

There are over 400 free drop-off locations across South Australia for loose handheld batteries. The State Government is also setting up a number of free drop-off locations for the safe disposal of appliances containing embedded batteries.

Our task now is to increase community use of these safe drop-off options.

No.	Activity	Targets	Key partners	Timing
2.1	Engage local media to increase public understanding of battery risks and safe disposal	Minimum of 2 media interviews/print stories per year	Council communications staff Metropolitan and country fire services	2025/26 and ongoing
2.2	Accept and promote handheld batteries for recycling in Civic Centres, libraries, community centres and the Beverley Recycling and Waste Centre	Council sites included in the B-Cycle collection program	B-Cycle Council staff	Ongoing
2.3	Actively promote the use of State Government and private sector funded options for the safe disposal of batteries (including embedded batteries) – including to school groups and other MRF visitors	Benchmark and measure increase in community awareness of local drop-off options (for handheld and embedded batteries)	Battery Stewardship Council (B-Cycle) Green Industries SA (drop-off sites for appliances with embedded batteries)	2025/26 and ongoing
2.4	Advocate for the EPA to develop and implement a compliance program to penalise disposal of	Compliance program in place and	Environment Protection Authority	To be determined

	batteries in domestic and commercial bins	widely promoted		
2.5	Work with the Councils' bin collection contractors, MRF operators and transfer station operators to reduce incidents and harm from battery fires	Track, measure and report battery related fires and smoulders (in trucks and at recycling facilities)	Bin collection contractors MRF operators City of Charles Sturt operations	Existing and ongoing

3 Our 3 bins – recycle more, contaminate less

Our kerbside 3 bin service has been in place across central Adelaide for over 20 years.

Yet our households still struggle to place the correct items in each bin.

When last measured, contamination of recycling and organics bins with rubbish was at the highest levels ever recorded across both Councils. Recyclable materials (including paper and cardboard) are still found in household waste bins.

A well-planned and carefully targeted effort is needed to turn these habits around. Clear and consistent communication is needed across our entire community.

We need to reset our habits and refocus on the simple 'Do's and Don'ts' of household recycling.

No.	Activity	Targets	Key partners	Timing
3.1	Periodically audit and publicly report on kerbside waste and recycling yields, including contamination	Independent kerbside bin audit per Council every 3-5 years	Kerbside waste/recycling collection contractors Independent auditors	April 2026 April 2029
3.2	Educate school and community groups on the correct use of 3 kerbside bins (including MRF tours)	800 MRF visitors per annum	Schools Community groups General community	2025/26 and ongoing
3.3	Prioritise and widely promote correct waste and recycling behaviours	Identify priority materials as a focus for education Measure and track improvements in community awareness and support for recycling	Both Councils Green Industries SA	Existing and ongoing
3.4	Develop and trial a program to reduce contamination in recycling and organics bins This program should: • Be targeted at those with high or repeated contamination and	10% contamination in recycling bins (down from 25-30% currently) 2% contamination in organics bins (down from 6-8% currently)	Private sector contractor to be selected Green Industries SA (funding partner and design of materials) Other Councils	Phase 1 - 2025/26 Phase 2 – 2026 to 2028

	• offer a program of support for those in genuine need.			
3.5	Work with Green Industries SA to continually improve their 'Which Bin' online resource	-	Green Industries SA	As required
3.6	Trial, measure and report on the effectiveness of weekly organics combined with fortnightly waste collection services	% reduction in landfill disposal of compostable organics	City of Charles Sturt	Trial dates and parameters to be determined
3.7	Upgrade CAWRA's education room to expand and enhance activities available to school groups and other visitors	Upgrade completed	Green Industries SA (funding partner)	2025/26 (subject to Council endorsement)
3.8	Inform residents of their options to request and pay for additional kerbside bins	-	Both Councils	Existing and ongoing

4 What to do with 'other wastes'

Not everything goes in a kerbside bin.

Bulky wastes (such as furniture and bedding), electrical and electronic wastes (from old lawnmowers to unwanted computer equipment), textiles, light globes, old paints, oils, chemicals and other items all need to be managed separately.

Some of these can be booked in for separate kerbside collection (as hard waste or as part of a mattress recycling program).

Others can be dropped off for recycling at a depot or shopfront near you.

With so many great services available, keeping our knowledge up to date is important.

It's easy to do the right thing with 'other wastes' once you know how.

No.	Activity	Targets	Key partners	Timing
4.1	Continue to promote and support kerbside and drop-off recycling options for soft plastic	Staged increase in number of participating households, subject to SPSA funding	Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia Participating Councils	Ongoing – subject to SPSA funding
4.2	Promote options for the reuse, recycling and disposal of bulky household wastes (including furniture, mattresses and green waste) Including the use of online marketplace listings and 'just in time' communications such as during renovations, moves or seasonal cleanups.	-	Council communications teams Contracted service providers (collections, recycling and disposal)	Ongoing
4.3	Promote drop-off locations for hazardous wastes and items covered by product stewardship schemes	-	Green Industries SA / Which Bin website Various product stewardship schemes	Ongoing
4.4	Promote the Beverley Recycling and Waste Centre and other drop-off facilities that provide convenient drop-off location for recycling	Report on number of transactions (and tonnes recycled) per annum	City of Charles Sturt Operations and Communications teams	Ongoing

4.5	Promote and develop skills in the repair and reuse of unwanted furniture and other bulky waste items	2 training sessions per year (1 per Council)	Local repair cafes and training providers	1 session per Council per year, commencing in 2026/27

5 Reduce consumption of textiles and plastics

We didn't always waste this much stuff.

That's because we didn't always buy this much stuff.

Reducing waste starts long before we go anywhere near a bin. Design of an item (and its packaging) and then the decision to purchase that item inevitably lead to their disposal at some future point.

Reducing waste means buying less. And especially buying less that is hard to recycle or compost.

Our communities know they are buying (and disposing of) more textiles and plastics than they need. But they need help resetting old habits.

It's not easy to resist the advertising. But there is a better, cheaper and more sustainable way to live well.

No.	Activity	Targets	Key partners	Timing
5.1	Promote the everyday household benefits of reduced consumption (including financial savings)	-	Green Industries SA	From 2026/27
5.2	Promote alternatives to 'fast fashion' (such as sustainable styling, capsule wardrobes, buying 2nd hand, repair and refashion)	A program of 'Sew it don't throw it' for each Council PLUS Monthly textile repair skill sessions PLUS 4 training sessions/tours per Council per annum sustainable fashion workshops Community wide promotion	Green Industries SA Local charity shops and training providers Online apps and resources such as Saveful, Too Good to Go, Buy Nothing New and others	From 2026/27
5.3	Promote and support local repair cafes	-	Community groups operating repair cafes	Ongoing
5.4	Facilitate skills development in the repair and refurbishment of	1 course of 3 training sessions per Council per annum	Local repair cafes and training providers	Commencing in 2026/27

	household items (including clothing and textiles)			
5.5	Actively promote and support State Government 'Set your clothes free' textile reuse/recycling events	Provide a local site for each event	Green Industries SA	Ongoing
5.6	Share knowledge on ways to reduce plastic in the home	2 articles or social media posts per Council per annum	Council communications teams	Commencing from 2025/26
5.7	Support State Government bans on single use plastics	-	Council customer service staff to be informed and link local businesses and residents to State Government information on the bans	Ongoing