



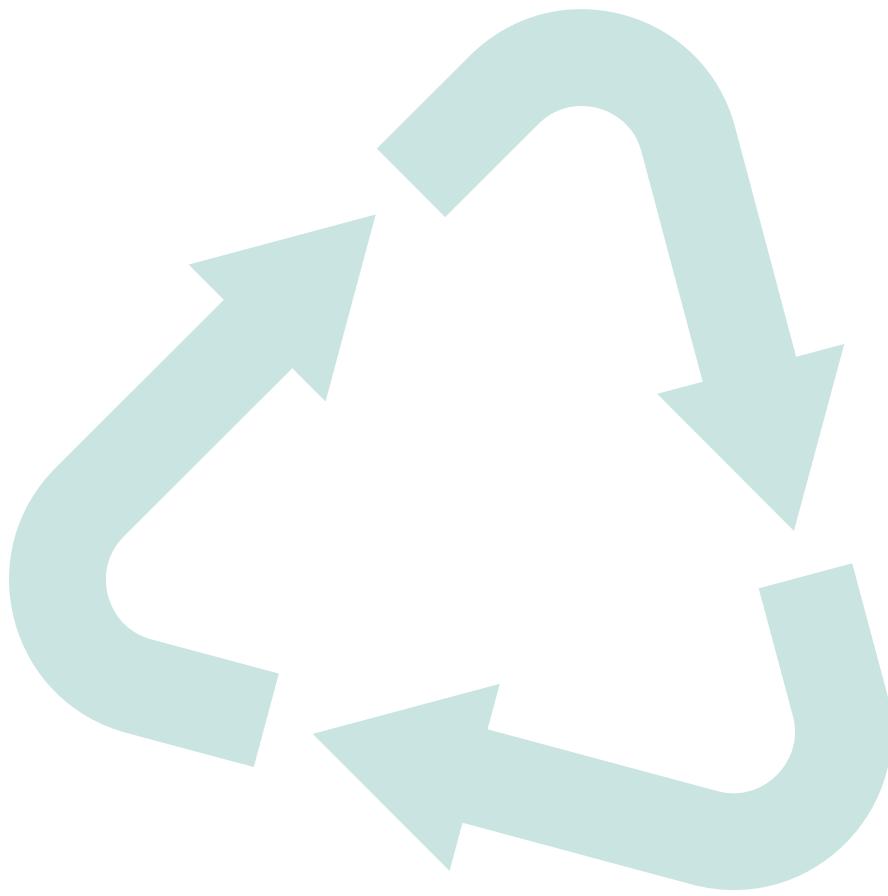
# National Plastics Action Plan

## for Aotearoa New Zealand



Ministry for the  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*

New Zealand Government



This document may be cited as: Ministry for the Environment. 2021. *National Plastics Action Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

Published in September 2021 by the  
Ministry for the Environment  
Manatū Mō Te Taiao  
PO Box 10362, Wellington 6143  
New Zealand

ISBN: 978-1-99-003379-7  
Publication number: ME 1583

© Crown copyright New Zealand 2021

This document is available on the Ministry for the Environment website: [environment.govt.nz](https://environment.govt.nz).





# National Plastics Action Plan

Taking action on plastic waste is a key step in New Zealand's journey to a low-waste economy with an effective resource recovery and recycling system.

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) has already taken significant steps to lift New Zealand's waste performance and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon circular economy. The National Plastics Action Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand provides the broad scope of the Government's actions on plastics and highlights the next steps on our journey. MfE will drive the Action Plan. The Plan builds on the recommendations of the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor in *Rethinking Plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand*. The Plan aligns with and supports the work already underway to transform the waste sector in Aotearoa New Zealand.



EACH YEAR, EVERY  
NEW ZEALANDER SENDS

AT  
LEAST **60kg**

OF PLASTIC WASTE TO LANDFILL\*

\*Calculated from data in *Rethinking Plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor.

## We need to change the way we use plastics...

Plastic is used throughout the New Zealand economy and its benefits mean we will continue to use it for many applications. However, on a per-capita basis, Aotearoa New Zealand is one of the most wasteful nations in the world. Each year, every New Zealander sends at least 60 kilograms of plastic to landfill and we have low recovery and recycling rates. Globally, most plastic is produced from fossil fuels, consuming around 4–8 per cent of global oil production.

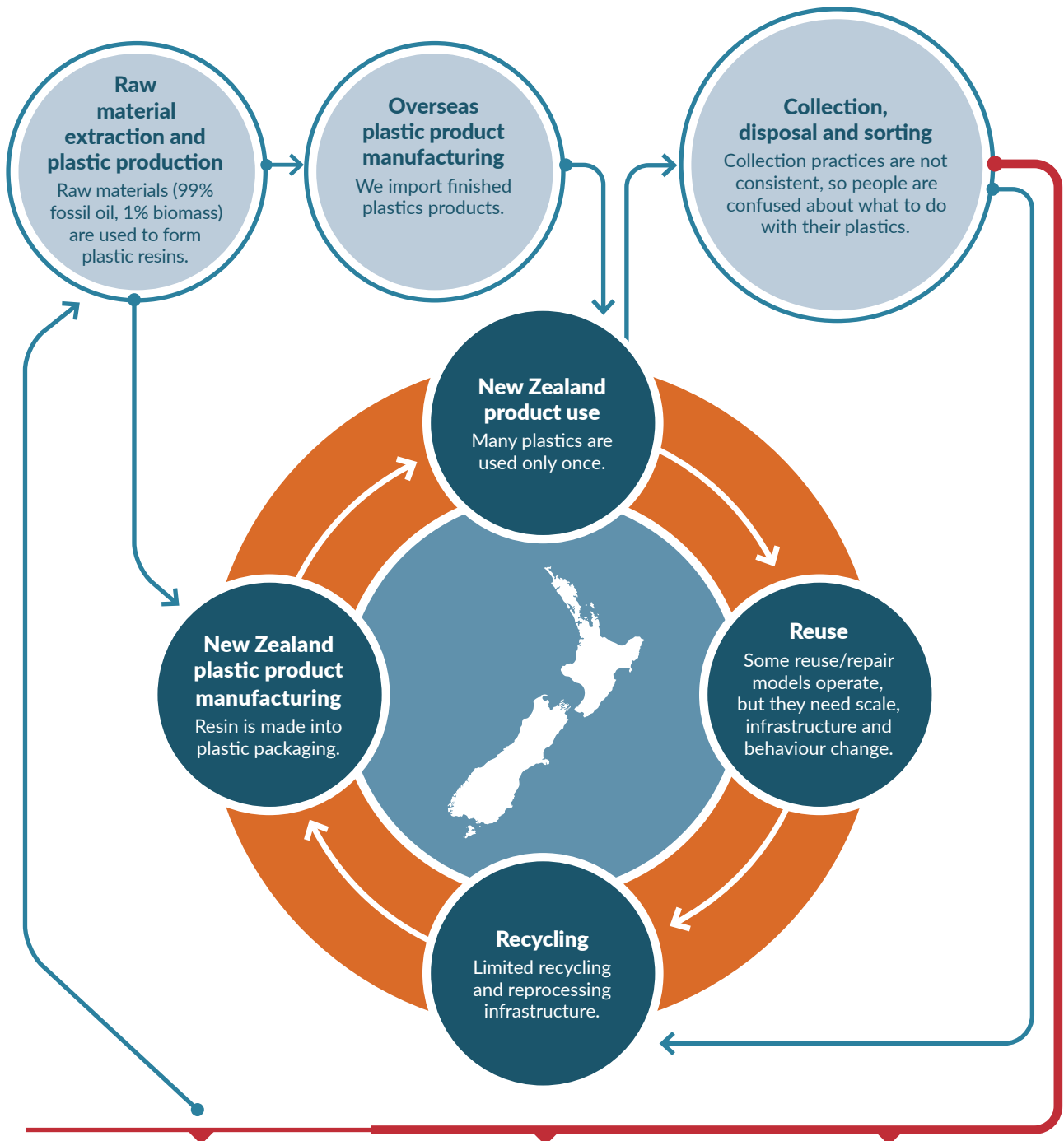
## ...because plastics are causing harm

The way we use plastics causes harm and pollutes our environment – plastic is present in our soils, water, food and even the air we breathe. It harms our wildlife through entanglement, ingestion and toxicity, and may pose risks to our health. Given the value that communities and tangata whenua place on our natural environment, action on plastics contributes to restoring the mana and mauri of te taiao.

## ...it's time to rethink plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The build-up of plastic waste in the environment is one of the top concerns for New Zealanders (2020 [Better Futures report](#) by Colmar Brunton). Building on the transformation of our waste system and our domestic and international commitments, we have an opportunity to change behaviours, and redesign products, services and systems to avoid using plastics, and enable plastic reuse and repair.

# Our current plastics system



<p><b>Overseas recycling</b></p> <p>Some of our waste is recycled offshore, but offshore markets for plastic waste are limited.</p>	<p><b>Plastic in the environment</b></p> <p>Occurs via littering, leakage into waste water systems, and poor waste management.</p>	<p><b>Landfill</b></p> <p>Most plastic waste goes to landfill – some of it is not suitable for recycling, some of it is incorrectly disposed of.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Most of New Zealand's plastic ends up here.**

# Our future plastics system

## Our vision

We envisage a New Zealand where plastic use is sustainable and innovative, and where plastics are used in a way that protects the environment and benefits society. The National Plastics Action Plan accelerates the transition to a low-carbon circular economy.



### Less plastic

We need to reduce our plastic use to a sustainable level by changing our collective behaviours and expectations.



### More circular

We need to use plastic in ways that allow it to circulate around the economy by building better systems for reusing, recycling and repairing materials.



### Better for the environment

We need to minimise plastic use that harms the environment and our health, restore damaged environments and reduce the build-up of plastic in the environment.



## Transforming our waste system

Transforming Aotearoa New Zealand's waste system will help to reduce the amount of waste we produce and its impacts on our environment. MfE is reviewing the Waste Minimisation Act (WMA) and the Litter Act because they are no longer fit-for-purpose and are not driving the changes needed to achieve a circular economy. Along with changes to legislation, MfE is also developing a national waste strategy, increasing and expanding the waste levy, collecting better data and information, and increasing capacity and capability in compliance, monitoring and enforcement.

The work in the National Plastics Action Plan is already well underway, including phasing out single-use and hard-to-recycle plastic items, introducing regulated product stewardship for six waste streams and investing approximately \$100 million in resource recovery infrastructure.

## What next?

MfE will drive the National Plastics Action Plan together with industry, agencies and other stakeholders. The Ministry will also continue to identify opportunities and build connections with central government, local government, industry, research institutes and communities. These connections will help us to identify and fill gaps, maximise synergies, share lessons and enable a coordinated approach to tackling plastics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### Learn more

For more details on the Ministry's response to the Rethinking Plastics report, please visit the [Ministry for the Environment website](#).

INVESTING

# \$100m

IN RESOURCE RECOVERY  
INFRASTRUCTURE



# Taking action on plastics

Work is already underway to progress actions in the National Plastics Action Plan. These actions will transform the way we make, use and dispose of plastic in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of the highlights are described below and the full plan follows on page 9.



## Regulated product stewardship

The Government has declared six priority products for regulated product stewardship, including farm plastics and plastic packaging. New regulations would increase incentives for circular resource use of these products, and place responsibility on producers to manage the end of a product's life. MfE will work with stakeholders to co-design options for these regulated product stewardship schemes.



## Potential container return scheme

A container return scheme incentivises consumers and businesses to return beverage containers for recycling and/or refilling, by including a refundable deposit in the price of the purchase. The refund is provided when consumers return their empty container(s) to a drop-off point. Following the completion of a co-design process, MfE will advise Ministers on the design of such a scheme.



## Kerbside collection

MfE is developing options for kerbside recycling standardisation to increase consistency, reduce confusion for householders, improve material quality and reduce residual rubbish to landfill.



## Compostable packaging

MfE is preparing a position statement on the use of compostable packaging, and scoping research to better understand impacts of compostable plastics on soils and the food chain. This will enable us to consider using overseas standards for compostable packaging in New Zealand.



## Phase-out of single-use and hard-to-recycle plastics

The Government has recently announced action to phase out certain plastics by July 2025. These plastics often end up as waste in landfills and pollute our environment.

- ▶ Hard-to-recycle food and drink packaging made from PVC and polystyrene and degradable plastic products (such as those made of oxo- or photo-degradable plastic).
- ▶ Single-use plastic items, including drink stirrers, cotton buds, single-use produce bags, cutlery, plates and bowls, straws and fruit labels.



## Plastics Innovation Fund and infrastructure investment

The Government has recently announced a \$50m Plastics Innovation Fund to support projects that reimagine how we make, use and dispose of plastics. The fund opens for expressions of interest in November 2021. In addition, the Government has also invested approximately \$100m in recycling infrastructure through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, including optical sorters to enable better separation of plastics.



# National Plastics Action Plan

Behaviour change	CURRENT STATE	PLANNED ACTIONS				
		2021	2022	2023	2024	
<p><b>Recycling and reuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase out of hard-to-recycle and single-use plastics.</li> <li>Co-designing regulated product stewardship scheme for plastic packaging and farm plastics.</li> <li>Following completion of a co-design process, advise Ministers on container return scheme for beverage containers.</li> <li>Developing options for kerbside recycling standardisation.</li> <li>Territorial Authorities' Officers (TAO) Forum received funding from the Waste Minimisation Fund (WMF) to address recontamination in recycling through the <i>Rethinking Rubbish and Recycling</i> project.</li> </ul> <p><b>Public campaigns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing behaviour change campaigns: eg, WMF funds RefillNZ to promote a reusable culture and provide refillable infrastructure, WMF funding to the TAO Forum to promote the Plastic Free July campaign.</li> <li>The national waste strategy may provide other opportunities for waste disposal levy funds to be used for behaviour change.</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WMF has funded Ecostore to set up a programme and education resources to motivate households to return their empty Ecostore bottles to local schools for collection.</li> </ul> <p><b>Standards for compostable plastics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey on attitudes and experiences of home-composting of compostable plastics.</li> <li>MfE funded Scion to determine if products certified to overseas standards compost in NZ conditions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recycling and reuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase out hard-to-recycle plastic packaging and single-use plastics. <span>L, M, B</span></li> </ul> <p><b>Depending on ministerial decisions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement regulated product stewardship for plastic packaging and farm plastics. <span>L, M, B</span></li> <li>Implement container return scheme. <span>M</span></li> <li>Implement changes to kerbside recycling and consider options for recyclability labelling. <span>M</span></li> </ul>					
	<p><b>Standards for compostable plastics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope research to better understand impacts of compostable plastics on the soils and food chain. <span>M, B</span></li> <li>MfE to prepare a position statement on compostable packaging. <span>M, B</span></li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify opportunities to improve teacher resources on plastics. Coordinate with future public behaviour change campaigns. <span>L, M, B</span></li> </ul>		
	<p><b>Standards for compostable plastics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider role of overseas standards in NZ. <span>M, B</span></li> </ul>					
	<p><b>Compliance, monitoring and enforcement (CME)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WMA CME strategy published.</li> <li>CME policies and procedures updated to align with best practice.</li> <li>Additional CME resources, including investigations and strategic staff.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Release a CME performance monitoring report. <span>B</span></li> <li>Annual audit programmes including a programme for managing the response to plastic bans and product stewardship. <span>B</span></li> </ul>		

L  
**Less plastic**

---

M  
**More circular**

---

B  
**Better for the environment**

	CURRENT STATE	PLANNED ACTIONS			
		2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Government procurement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing procurement guidelines promote sustainability without being specific about plastic use.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to identify new initiatives and priority areas for 2021/2022 and explore options to encourage sustainable use of plastic in government procurement. <span>L</span> <span>M</span>			
<b>Data and information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial plastics material flow analysis completed in 2021.</li> <li>Cabinet has agreed to improve the availability of waste data. New regulations will require landfills, cleanfills and transfer stations to report on which activities are generating waste.</li> </ul>	Conduct a comprehensive plastics material flow analysis. <span>M</span>			
		Identify data needs to meet international reporting commitments and targets for the new national waste strategy, and any global agreement to tackle plastic pollution (see also, International). <span>L</span> <span>M</span> <span>B</span>			
		Use landfill data to identify gaps and opportunities for waste minimisation activities and identify which resources are being landfilled. Further investment in waste composition studies. <span>L</span>			
		National waste strategy will guide use of levy funds, including for data and information collection. <span>L</span> <span>M</span> <span>B</span>			
<b>Research and innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$50m Plastics Innovation Fund (PIF) to reimagine how we make, use and dispose of plastics.</li> <li>New Zealand and Australia are collaborating on lifecycle assessments of single-use plastics and alternatives.</li> </ul>	New Zealand research, innovation and investment priorities for plastics to be published in 2021 and reviewed and updated regularly to inform research and funding decisions for the PIF and across government. <span>L</span> <span>M</span> <span>B</span>			
		Explore options for New Zealand-focused lifecycle framework to provide guidance for an optimal plastics system and decision-making about use of plastics. <span>M</span> <span>B</span>			

		PLANNED ACTIONS			
		2021	2022	2023	2024
Sector engagement	<b>Current State</b> <b>Sector pilot</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Working with specific sectors, including the agricultural sector, on regulated product stewardship of agrichemicals and farm plastics.</li> <li>▶ MfE is supporting a Sustainable Business Network governance group, including Auckland DHBs, to reduce plastics in healthcare.</li> </ul>				
	<b>Support successful product and business model innovations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ PIF and WMF support product and business model innovations eg, funding Plastics NZ to develop industry-wide solutions for plastic packaging and products.</li> </ul>				
	<b>Whole of government international approach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Implementing new requirements under the Basel Convention, meaning that New Zealanders will need a permit to import or export hard-to-recycle plastic waste.</li> <li>▶ Ongoing engagement with Australia's federal government on waste-related issues.</li> </ul>				
	<b>Development spend in the Pacific</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ MFAT currently addresses some of these recommendations through official development assistance and will continue to assess new opportunities in line with Pacific Island countries' priorities.</li> <li>▶ MFAT monitors remediation opportunities in the Pacific.</li> </ul>				
Infrastructure	<b>Changes to the waste disposal levy and infrastructure funding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ A national waste strategy will guide future use of levy funds.</li> <li>▶ COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund approved for infrastructure projects and optical sorters to enable better separation of plastic types.</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop and implement a long-term waste infrastructure plan, supported by an infrastructure and services stocktake to guide infrastructure investment.</li> <li>▶ Administer the PIF and WMF.</li> </ul>				





Ministry for the  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*

New Zealand Government