

Cook Islands
Solid Waste Management Policy
2016 - 2026

Compiled by:
Infrastructure Cook Islands
in collaboration with our partner agencies and key stakeholders

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this document:

ADF	Advanced Disposal Fee
ICI	(Ministry of) Infrastructure Cook Islands
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NES	National Environment Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
ODS	Ozone Depleting Substances
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PET	Polyethylene terephthalate (the most common type of polyester)
POPs	Persistent Organic Pollutants
WATSAN	Water, Waste and Sanitation Division (of ICI)

1 Introduction

The management of solid waste is a matter that needs to be addressed because of its potential impact on the economy, human health and the environment. The Cook Islands faces some particular challenges in managing solid waste due to the lack of legislation, limited institutional capacity, high transport costs, lack of investment in related infrastructure, and poor management of hazardous waste. This Solid Waste Management Policy establishes the broad response to these challenges, recognising that strategies will need to be developed to set out in more detail the actions required.

This policy identifies the vision, purpose, scope and timeframe. It then outlines the context, setting out the issues and challenges faced by the Cook Islands, and identifying how this policy links to the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020. The policy outlines five principles that need to be taken into account, and sets out the objectives and policies which seek to achieve the policy vision. The objectives and policies address waste minimisation, the institutional and legislative framework, appropriate infrastructure, sustainable financing, education and awareness, and monitoring and evaluation. The policy then covers roles and responsibilities, implementation arrangements, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

2 Vision

The vision for this policy is:

'An informed and proactive community taking responsibility for sustainable solid waste management, aspiring towards Zero Waste Cook Islands.'

The Zero Waste Cook Islands envisioned is one based on the 4Rs (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) of waste minimisation where:

Refuse

- The necessity, alternatives and ease of disposal of a product is considered before importation and/or purchase.

Reduce

- The amount of potential waste to landfill is minimised through responsible supplier and consumer behaviour, supported by legal instruments, and enforced by government.

Reuse

- Waste resulting from consumer products are first reused for other purposes.

Recycle

- Waste products that are recyclable are exported for recycling.

Hazardous waste and other products that cannot be recycled or appropriately processed or disposed of on-shore are temporarily stored in appropriate containment facilities to be transferred to facilities overseas for processing. Export will only occur where the Cook Islands Government is satisfied there will be appropriate processing and safe disposal of this waste in the receiving country.

Only when all the above alternatives have been explored, and have been deemed technically and, or economically unviable, is non-hazardous waste be considered for final disposal using available disposal solutions e.g. incineration or landfill.

3 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to improve the Cook Islands management of solid waste and promote shared responsibility for waste management by all stakeholders.

The policy provides the higher level framework within which more detailed solid waste strategy or strategies will operate. Strategies will set out the actions required to give effect to the policy.

4 Scope and timeframe

The timeframe for this policy is ten years i.e. 2016 to 2026. There will be an interim review every four years. A full review will occur at the end of the ten year period, or earlier if required.

The policy applies across the whole of the Cook Islands and covers solid waste as defined in this policy.

5 Context

5.1 Background

The Cook Islands National Solid Waste Management Strategy 2013-2016 was developed by the National Solid Waste Management Committee and contained a mix of policy elements and more specific strategies. Those policy elements have formed the foundation for this document.

5.2 Issues and challenges

The Cook Islands faces a number of unique challenges as it deals with externalities of economic development and its integration into the global economy. Solid waste management is a significant challenge because of its impact on human health and ecosystems. The contextual challenges include:

- Lack of legislation heightens ambiguous role responsibilities
- Limited institutional capacity due to small population
- High transport costs related to small dispersed land masses
- Lack of investment in infrastructure to manage solid waste
- Asymmetrical trade balance, with the vast majority of consumables imported
- Human and environmental health threatened by poor management of hazardous waste.

Lack of legislation heightens ambiguous role responsibilities

The management of solid waste in the Cook Islands currently requires collaboration between government agencies, resulting in inconsistencies and confusion in the community. The key agencies are NES, ICI, MOH and the Island Governments. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a key weakness has been the absence of a single point of accountability with a coherent legislative framework to drive the implementation of all waste management initiatives.

Different plans and strategies relating to waste have sat with the NES and ICI, but there has been slow progress in implementing them. Reasons for this include limited human resources, and low priority rating for budget appropriation.

Limited institutional capacity due to small population

The limited number of knowledgeable staff working in solid waste management presents a significant challenge for the government to advance proper solid waste management. This issue is compounded by the country's depopulation trends. There is no appropriately resourced focal point within government that takes responsibility for waste management.

Consistent data collection on waste and different waste streams has been haphazard in the past. The information for Rarotonga improved following the installation of an industrial baler at the waste facility in 2012. However lack of coordination, resources and reliable information for decision-making continue to be issues.

High transport costs related to small dispersed land masses

There are significant distances between the capital island, Rarotonga, and Te Pa Enuā. This factor, combined with the Cook Islands isolation from metropolitan countries that have recycling facilities, increases the cost of recycling. This has inhibited solid waste recycling and the safe disposal of hazardous waste.

Lack of investment in infrastructure to manage solid waste

The Cook Islands has a narrow and limited economic base which has at times been poorly managed. Lack of investment into solid waste management infrastructure has contributed to limited capacity, unsustainable funding and inadequate maintenance of solid waste facilities. This includes the absence of safe storage for hazardous waste.

Asymmetrical trade balance

Imports to the Cook Islands far exceed exports. The provisional balance of trade figures for 2015 are NZ\$157.2M for the value of imports, and NZ\$20.2M for the value of exports¹. This is a negative trade balance of NZ\$137.0M. The 2015 provisional figures categorise 25% of imports (by total value) as food and live animals, with a further 6% categorised as beverages and tobacco². Packaging from food, beverages and tobacco contributes significantly to the generation of waste. This waste stream increases to meet the additional consumption needs of visitors. In addition to this import export imbalance, many shipping containers return to New Zealand empty.

Human and environmental health threatened by hazardous substances

Human and environmental health are at risk from toxic substances contained in or produced by the degradation of waste which has not been disposed of appropriately. Hazardous substances include persistent organic pollutants or POPs (pesticides and dioxins from plastics), heavy metals (mercury, lead, cadmium) and ozone depleting substances (refrigerant gases and fumigants). Special attention will also be required to safeguard against the risks associated with the wastes generated by any future deep sea mining.

Global warming, as a result of climate change, has been shown to increase POP emissions and concentrations. Extreme weather events that cause flooding trigger secondary emissions of POPs in agricultural lands and storage sites. Climate change is also predicted to increase precipitation in some areas therefore attention also needs to be focused on landfill management as increases of leachate from increased precipitation is a very real threat to the surrounding environment including the lagoon.

¹ p2, Cook Islands Statistical Bulletin, MFEM, March 2016

² ibid, p6

The above risk factors have the potential to degrade ecosystems that form the basis of the Cook Islands economy and well-being of its people. This includes subsistence lifestyles as well as tourism, black pearls and agriculture.

Litter has far reaching national and international consequences which are detrimental to human health, wildlife and the environment. This includes degradation of the aesthetic quality of the local environment, impacting negatively on tourist perceptions and, harming wildlife. Much of the litter that is dropped on land will end up in the ocean, eventually becoming part of the “Pacific Garbage Patch”. The Pacific Garbage Patch is a body of plastic waste in Pacific Ocean that, due to ocean currents, has converged to form a mass as large as the state of Texas, in the United States. Oceanic litter is responsible for contamination that reaches the human food web.

5.3 Links to National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020

The National Vision, as set out in the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020 (NSDP) is:

“To enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with our culture and environment”

The NSDP sets sixteen national development goals. Goal 3 is of most direct relevance to this policy. It states as follows:

“3. Promote sustainable practices and effectively manage solid and hazardous waste”

The NSDP has identified two indicators to measure progress towards this goal. Indicator 3.1 tracks total waste recycled. Indicator 3.2 tracks the percentage of hazardous waste that is accounted for and managed.

Other NSDP goals of particular relevance are:

“4. Sustainable management of water and sanitation”

“11. Promote sustainable land use, management of terrestrial ecosystems, and protect biodiversity”

“12. Sustainable management of the oceans, lagoons and marine resources”

These goals are of particular relevance because of the adverse effects that poor solid waste management can have on the natural environment.

6 Principles

The following principles are integral to the development of this policy and need to be taken into account in its implementation:

1. Polluter pays principle

Those responsible for causing pollution or generating solid waste should pay for the cost of dealing with the pollution, or for managing solid waste collection and disposal in order to maintain ecological health and diversity. Individual responsibility for solid waste management should be encouraged. It is essential to develop funding mechanisms based on the polluter pays principle, which will sustain solid waste management in the future.

2. Precautionary principle

When an activity may lead to unacceptable but scientifically uncertain harm to human health or the environment, actions will be taken to avoid or diminish that harm without having to await the completion of further scientific research.

3. Consultation principle

All levels of government, communities and organisations should be consulted throughout the development and implementation of solid waste management strategies and action plans. Such strategies or plans should be openly accessible to those in the community who are interested.

4. Waste hierarchy principle

The 'Waste Hierarchy' is a strategic tool which prioritises actions for solid waste management. The general hierarchical model that will be used under this policy consists of 4 'Rs – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. This model prioritises waste avoidance and reduction methods, before reuse, recycling, and final disposal. In the Cook Islands, the first R, (Refuse) places the onus on importers and consumers to reject the purchase of products that produce waste that is difficult and expensive to dispose of in an environmentally sound manner.

5. Proximity principle

Solid waste should be managed as close to the source as possible. This recognises the need for producers of waste to take responsibility for the management of that waste. It also recognises that there are costs - both environmental and financial - associated with transporting waste over longer distances.

7 Objectives and policies

7.1 Waste minimisation

Objective 1

1. Minimise the generation of solid waste.

Policies

- 1.1 Follow the waste hierarchy model of the four 'R's - Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle - prioritising waste avoidance and reduction, before reuse, recycling and final disposal.
- 1.2 Promote responsible supplier and consumer behaviour using advocacy, education, incentives and regulation.
- 1.3 Encourage and require reduction of waste.
- 1.4 Implement waste prevention and reduction approaches in all activities undertaken by government agencies.
- 1.5 Encourage businesses and industry to adopt waste minimisation practices, including cleaner production technologies.

Explanation of Objective 1 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 1 is minimum generation of solid waste. This outcome is essential to achieving the policy vision of sustainable solid waste management, aspiring

towards Zero Waste Cook Islands. The associated policies give effect to Objective 1 by following the waste hierarchy model of refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle which is consistent with a zero waste approach. The policies recognise that minimisation of waste is the shared responsibility of a range of stakeholders including suppliers, consumers, government, businesses and industry. The policies also recognise that advocacy, education, incentives and regulation, are all important tools that need to work together to minimise the generation of solid waste.

7.2 Institutional and legislative framework

Objective 2

2. Develop a clear and robust institutional and legislative framework.

Policies

2.1 Establish a regulatory framework that:

- a. Addresses solid waste prevention, recycling and management of different waste streams
- b. Articulates the roles and responsibilities of agencies responsible for the coordination of solid waste management
- c. Supports the waste hierarchy model of the four 'R's - Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

2.2 Implement an institutional framework to ensure co-ordinated, effective and efficient management of solid waste including supporting facilities and services.

2.3 Build capacity to ensure qualified and competent staff.

Explanation of Objective 2 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 2 is an institutional and legislative framework which can support the policy vision of sustainable solid waste management. This addresses two of the challenges identified in section 5.2 of this policy - the lack of legislation which heightens ambiguous role responsibilities, and the limited institutional capacity due to the small population. Policy 2.1 gives effect to the objective by recognising that a clear and robust legislative framework needs to address all aspects of the solid waste stream; clarify the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved; and support the waste hierarchy model. Policies 2.2 and 2.3 give effect to the objective by providing for the institutional framework with capacity building to ensure qualified and competent staff.

7.3 Appropriate infrastructure

Objective 3

3. Develop appropriate waste management infrastructure including separation and storage facilities.

Policies

3.1 Provide appropriate and effective waste management facilities across the country including community recycling centres and solid waste storage sites.

3.2 Store hazardous waste (including e-waste) safely as an interim arrangement, prior to its transfer to environmentally sound disposal facilities overseas.

3.3 Ensure waste management facilities are fit for purpose and are financially and operationally sustainable.

Explanation of Objective 3 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 3 is the infrastructure needed to achieve the policy vision of sustainable waste management. This addresses two of the challenges identified in section 5.2 of this policy - the lack of investment in infrastructure to manage solid waste, and human and environmental health threatened by hazardous substances. The associated policies give effect to the objective by providing for appropriately located facilities which are of the necessary standard for their intended use and which are financially and operationally sustainable. Policy 3.2 recognises the particular needs of hazardous waste which poses the most serious risks to human and environmental health.

7.4 Sustainable financing

Objective 4

4. Develop sustainable financing to manage solid waste.

Policies

- 4.1 Introduce appropriate cost recovery measures such as: Advanced Disposal Fees, user pays for collection of household waste, use of fees from fines.
- 4.2 Give particular regard to cost recovery measures which encourage behaviour modification and more responsible waste management.
- 4.3 Undertake an economic assessment of the costs of solid waste management in the Cook Islands to inform cost recovery mechanisms.

Explanation of Objective 4 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 4 is the sustainable financing needed to achieve the policy vision of sustainable waste management. This addresses two of the challenges identified in section 5.2 of this policy - the high transport costs related to small dispersed land masses, and the lack of investment in infrastructure to manage solid waste. The associated policies give effect to the objective by providing for cost recovery measures and an economic assessment of the costs of solid waste management. Policy 4.2 recognises that cost recovery measures can also promote responsible behaviour such as by encouraging recycling or requiring the consumer to contribute directly towards the costs of disposal.

7.5 Education and awareness

Objective 5

5. Promote individual and community responsibility for solid waste management.

Policies

- 5.1 Undertake education and awareness, targeting the following groups:
 - Business and large scale waste producers
 - General adult population
 - Youth and children.

5.2 Develop and implement a communication strategy for solid waste management.

Explanation of Objective 5 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 5 is the individual and community responsibility needed to achieve the aspect of the vision expressed as 'an informed and proactive community taking

responsibility...' This objective recognises that all stakeholders need to play an active role in moving to a zero waste approach. The policies give effect to the objective by providing for education and awareness, and a communication strategy.

7.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Objective 6

6. Develop a strong monitoring and evaluation system.

Policies

6.1 Collect accurate and up-to-date national statistics on solid waste.

6.2 Ensure solid waste disposal facilities are monitored and managed in accordance with approved standards to minimise environmental damage.

Explanation of Objective 6 and Policies

The outcome sought by Objective 6 is the monitoring and evaluation required to measure progress towards achievement of the vision. The policies give effect to the objective by providing for accurate and up-to-date statistics, and the monitoring of environmental standards at waste disposal facilities.

8 Roles and responsibilities

The following table summarises the roles of the key agencies responsible for developing, managing, regulating or providing policy, facilities or services related to solid waste management.

Agency	Roles in waste management
National Environment Service (NES)	Involved in policy development, education and awareness, monitoring and evaluation as well as enforcement. Under the Environment Act 2003, NES functions include preventing, correcting and controlling pollution; and ensuring the environmentally safe disposal of toxic chemicals and wastes.
Ministry of Health (MOH)	Involved in policy development and implementation in relation public health under the Public Health Act 2004 and the Ministry of Health Act 2013. Under the Ministry of Health Act 2013, the functions of the Ministry include implementing laws, requirements, programs and initiatives relating to public health issues affecting the health of the community and the environment. This includes waste management, and hazardous and harmful substances and practices. Part 6 of the Public Health Act seeks to ensure that waste is safely stored, collected, treated, removed, transported, disposed of, and otherwise dealt with.
Infrastructure Cook Islands	Responsible for the administration of the landfill and recycling centre and the collection of rubbish and recyclables on Rarotonga. Provides waste management advice to the Island Governments.

Agency	Roles in waste management
	The Water, Waste and Sanitation (WATSAN) Division sits under the auspices of ICI, with responsibility for policy aspects of waste management.
Island Governments	Responsible for waste management in Te Pa Enua on their respective islands.
Cook Islands General Transport Ltd	A land and sea transport business which practices recycling, particularly of scrap metal including steel and aluminium. Also exports plastic PET bottles and whiteware for recycling.
Cook Islands Trading Corporation	Retail and wholesale business which practises recycling and other waste reduction initiatives including reducing product packaging, accepting the return of traditional light bulbs, and selling reusable shopping bags.
T&M Heather Ltd	Current contractors for the Rarotonga roadside collection of municipal solid waste and recyclables.

There are also several local non-government organisations with an environmental focus (eg Te Ipukarea Society, and Titikaveka Growers Association) which play an important education and advocacy role in promoting composting, recycling and waste reduction.

9 Implementation arrangements

Implementation of the policy at the national level will be coordinated by the WATSAN Division of ICI. If a single agency is subsequently established to solid waste management in the Cook Islands, then it is anticipated that responsibility for implementation will be transferred to that agency.

10 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

WATSAN will also co-ordinate monitoring, evaluation and reporting on this policy.

As noted in section 5.3 of this policy, two indicators being measured as part of the NSDP 2016-2020 requirements are relevant to the management of solid waste. Indicator 3.1 tracks total waste recycled. Indicator 3.2 tracks the percentage of hazardous waste that is accounted for and managed.

Definitions

This section defines some key terms as used in this document.

Advanced Disposal Fee (ADF)	Means a fee added to the cost of a product when it enters a country to cover the costs of its safe disposal. It may include a container deposit charged to the consumer and refunded on return of the container.
Biowaste	Waste composed mainly of organic matter capable of decomposing under anaerobic or aerobic conditions.
Hazardous waste	Means discarded material that poses substantial or potential threats to human health or the environment. It includes heavy metals and toxic chemicals as well as infectious medical wastes. It includes substances identified as hazardous waste for the purposes of the Basel Convention ³ and the Waigani Convention ⁴ .
Solid waste	<p>Includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Garbage, refuse, or litterb. Hazardous waste including<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. medical wasteii. liquid or gaseous waste that contains persistent organic pollutants, ozone depleting substances or heavy metalsc. Used cooking oild. Biowaste (but not wastewater, sewage or sludge)e. Building and demolition wastef. Other discarded or superfluous things from industrial, commercial, mining, agricultural, community, or other activities. <p>It does not include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">g. Wastewater, sewage or sludgeh. Waste (other than hazardous waste as defined in (b) or (c) above) that is liquid or gaseous in its raw form.

³ Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. Adopted 1989.

⁴ Waigani Convention - The Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region, 1995.

References

Cook Islands Government (2013) *National Solid Waste Management Strategy 2013-2016*, Rarotonga

MFEM (March 2016) *Cook Islands Statistical Bulletin*, Cook Islands Government, Rarotonga

NES (2004) *Cook Islands National Waste Strategy*, prepared by Maunsell Ltd, Auckland, NZ

Waste Connections Ltd & CBEC Kaitaia (2012) *The Establishment of Long Term Financing for Solid Waste Management*

Appendix 1: Stakeholders consulted

A consultation draft of this policy was circulated to the following stakeholders for comment:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Cook Islands General Transport Ltd (Recycle Cook Islands)
- Cook Islands Investment Corporation
- Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
- Cook Islands Tourism Industry Council
- Cook Islands Trading Corporation
- Crown Law Office
- House of Ariki
- Island Governments - Aitutaki, Atiu, Mitiaro, Mauke, Mangaia, Manihiki, Palmerston, Penrhyn, Pukapuka/Nassau, Rakahanga
- John Wichman
- Koutu Nui
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Management - Development Coordination Division
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Health - Public Health Division
- Muri Environment Care
- National Council for Women
- National Environment Service
- Office of the Prime Minister
- Office of the Prime Minister - Central Policy and Planning Office
- Office of the Prime Minister - Climate Change Cook Islands
- Office of the Prime Minister - Pa Enea Division
- Office of the Public Services Commission
- Te Ipukarea Society
- T&M Heather Ltd.

The WATSAN Division of Infrastructure Cook Islands acknowledges the feedback received from the following groups to the consultation draft of this policy:

- Koutu Nui
- Te Ipukarea Society
- Crown Law Office
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Health - Public Health Division
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Office of the Prime Minister - Climate Change Cook Islands
- Office of the Prime Minister - Pa Enea Division.

Appendix 2: Conventions relevant to solid waste management

The Cook Islands has ratified, acceded to, or endorsed several international and regional treaties relating to waste management and pollution prevention. These are listed below.

International conventions

- Basel Convention on the Trans-boundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
- Rotterdam Convention 1998 on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade
- International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution From Ships
- Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol (on ozone depleting substances)
- MARPOL Convention - International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from ships (1973 as modified by the MARPOL protocol of 1978)
- United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea and its London Protocol on marine litter

Regional agreements and conventions

- Waigani Convention (To Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste within the South Pacific Region)
- Pacific Regional Waste and Pollution Management Strategy 2016-2025
- Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Programme Strategy 2015-2020

National implementation plans under various conventions

- National Implementation Plan for Persistent Organic Pollutants (2011) - relates to Stockholm Convention 2010-2011
- Cook Islands HCFC Phase-Out Management Plan (2010). Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) – relates to Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol