

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT WASTE POLICY MANIFESTO

AN AGENDA FOR  
2026 AND BEYOND

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THE TERRITORIAL AUTHORITIES'  
OFFICERS (TAO) FORUM OF THE  
WASTE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE  
NEW ZEALAND

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## ABOUT WASTEMINZ

WasteMINZ is the largest representative body of Aotearoa New Zealand's waste, resource recovery and contaminated land sectors. We are the authoritative voice on waste, resource recovery and contaminated land management with over 315 member organisations from small and large waste operators, materials recovery facilities, community groups, researchers, food rescue groups, major supermarkets, tech companies, packaging producers, contaminated land specialists, territorial authorities, consultants, and many others who are united in this shared mission to build a more sustainable New Zealand.

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## ABOUT THE TAO FORUM

The Territorial Authorities' Officers (TAO) Forum is a Sector Group of WasteMINZ. The TAO Forum was established to create consistency and efficiency of service amongst territorial authorities through sharing knowledge and best practice.

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## WHY THIS MANIFESTO - AND WHY NOW

Councils are on the frontline of New Zealand's waste system. We plan, fund, procure and deliver essential waste management and minimisation services and infrastructure that keep communities clean and safe, support local economies, and reduce harm to the environment.

“ We're the face of waste and recycling in New Zealand... if anything fails in the system, communities come straight to us.

Central government and communities frequently turn to councils when things go wrong, even when key drivers sit upstream in product design, global markets, or national policy.

The waste system is being reshaped by new waste and litter legislation, changes to levy use and distribution, major planning and infrastructure reforms, and continued financial pressure on councils. At the same time, communities still expect effective recycling and waste services that protect public health, safety and our natural environment, even in a tight economic environment.

These shifts create both risk and opportunity. Without clear and supportive national policy settings, councils face higher costs and responsibilities without the tools to manage them; pressure to scale back services; increased illegal dumping and environmental harm; and growing tension between affordability and the need to invest in resilient infrastructure.

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**This Manifesto sets out the local government policy agenda for waste.**

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This Manifesto provides a clear, actionable platform for Government, supports advocacy at a local level, and focuses attention on a small number of realistic shifts that will deliver better value for money, reduce harm from waste, and protect community wellbeing by promoting local resilience.

## Our vision and principles

Local government wants a waste system that:

- **Shifts cost and liability to where they belong** – away from households and ratepayers, and onto producers for the products they place on the market and to the consumers who buy them.
- **Protects people and the environment** – reducing waste and associated emissions, and reducing harm from mismanaged waste, including contamination, litter and illegal dumping.
- **Delivers affordable, reliable services** – so households and businesses can do the right thing to minimise waste and increase recovery of resources without facing unaffordable costs.
- **Respects and supports local government's role** – by recognising the diversity of rural, metropolitan and high-visitor contexts, acknowledging existing regional waste groupings, and treating councils as active partners in shaping policy, investment signals, and system design alongside industry and central government.

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Local government is the public-good advocate for this vision: with the expectation that central government sets the framework, and producers will bear more responsibility for their products across their life-cycle.

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## Priority outcome areas

The Manifesto focuses on four defined priority outcomes where councils are strongly aligned and where meaningful progress is achievable in the next parliamentary term:

1. **Shift responsibility and liability for problematic products and materials** – through stronger, extended producer responsibility settings, with a focus on products with potential to cause significant harm and high end-of-life management and disposal costs. The majority of costs and liabilities should sit with producers and consumers, not councils and ratepayers.
2. **A dependable levy allocation supporting local investment** – protecting the integrity and local government share of the levy to support its originally intended purpose of investment in waste minimisation activities. Any further amendment must consider distribution principles and scope of use that reflect affordability and resilience needs for councils and ratepayers.
3. **Resilient infrastructure planning and investment** – recognise waste infrastructure is critical, and strategically using 30-year and spatial planning, plus funding tools (e.g. levy and product stewardship) to unlock more public and private investment in modern, onshore solutions.
4. **Fit-for-purpose data, compliance and enforcement** – modern tools, smart use of existing data, clear and funded compliance duties so councils can target mismanaged waste and plan with confidence.

## PRIORITY 1: SHIFT LIABILITY FOR PROBLEM PRODUCTS UPSTREAM

### The challenge

Councils face significant challenges when consumer goods, such as electronics, batteries, treated timber, mattresses, textiles, hazardous chemicals, or when hard-to-recycle packaging, e.g. soft plastics, reach their end of life and are discarded. These products and wastes can contaminate rubbish and recycling systems, drive illegal dumping, and generate high costs for communities.

These issues arise from both the nature of the materials in these products and the limited, unclear or unfunded disposal and recovery options available for them. If safe and accessible pathways don't exist, people often have no practical alternatives for disposal, and the consequences and public expectation for a solution almost always fall to councils.

**As the public face of recycling and waste services**, councils are blamed when national systems are slow, unclear or incomplete, even though we have little influence over what is placed on the market and ends up in the bin.

Mismanaged e-waste and batteries create serious and costly safety risks, such as battery fires in trucks, depots and landfills, while hazardous and bulky materials are costly and often dangerous to handle when disposed of incorrectly. Rural communities face particular challenges where accessible, safe drop-off options are limited or costly. Illegal dumping, rural burning or burying of waste creates significant environmental risk for local government, and damages New Zealand's 'clean, green' export reputation.

In a constrained rating environment, councils' ability to promote and deliver efficient and effective waste management and minimisation outcomes will increasingly depend on producer responsibility.

**“** When a mattress gets dumped on the side of the road, or when a battery starts a fire, no one rings the manufacturer; they ring the council.

### The opportunity

We applaud Government's implementation of NZ's first regulated product stewardship scheme, Tyrewise, and for the soon to be regulated Rural Recycling Scheme for farm plastics and agrichemicals.

Well-designed, enforceable extended producer responsibility (EPR) and container return schemes (CRS) can:

- Shift cost and legal liability for collection, processing and infrastructure onto producers and consumers, reducing pressure on council rates and levy funding.
- Create clear financial incentives to return materials, unlocking economic value for households, businesses and collectors while improving capture rates and material quality.
- Reduce contamination and illegal dumping by providing clear, accessible recovery pathways and price signals for high-harm, costly-to-manage products.

- Promote product design for durability, repairability, reuse, and promote clearer labelling, making it easier for households, visitors and businesses to do the right thing.

Schemes like Tyrewise demonstrate the potential for regulated stewardship to channel targeted funding into the system, better supporting collection, processing and enabling infrastructure over the product life-cycle, reducing reliance on the waste levy and councils.

## What we want

We want to see EPR policy **accelerated**, and call on Government for the following practical shifts:

**1. Move faster to introduce mandatory schemes for high-harm, priority products:**

Prioritise products such as batteries, e-waste, problematic packaging, textiles and other products that are driving contamination, creating harm, increasing emissions and/or fire risk, and have high management and disposal costs.

**2. Commit to the introduction of a national container return scheme (CRS):**

Commit to the rapid implementation of a nationally-consistent CRS as a core mechanism to: reduce litter and contamination; improve capture and material quality for containers; create direct economic incentives for households, industry and collectors to return high-value materials, and shift costs from councils and ratepayers to producers and consumers. A national CRS should complement, not undermine, existing council services and regional systems.

**3. Design schemes that support, not burden, council services:**

Co-design schemes with local government from the start and keep it simple for people to participate. Schemes should explore a range of options for product return, not assume that council kerbside collections or facilities are the default collection channel.

**4. Embed clear producer liability with accountability safeguards:**

Make the producers and importers legally responsible for end-of-life management – not ratepayers; supported by governance and oversight arrangements that prevent producer dominance, manage conflicts of interest, and ensure schemes meet Government-mandated outcomes.

**5. Align stewardship schemes with infrastructure and data:**

Ensure schemes directly support required infrastructure, integrate with data systems, and prevent residual or unfunded materials falling back on councils.

**“** Schemes like Tyrewise remove costs from councils' books more effectively than rates caps by preventing those costs to councils from arising in the first place.

## PRIORITY 2 – A DEPENDABLE LEVY SUPPORTING LOCAL INVESTMENT

### The challenge

The original purpose of the Waste Disposal Levy under the WMA 2008 was to reduce waste to landfill in two ways: by sending a price signal to disincentivise waste creation, and to provide funding for waste minimisation services and infrastructure. Councils are increasingly concerned that:

- The levy's core waste minimisation purpose was diluted by WMA amendments in 2024, and proposed legislative changes may dilute it further, resulting in even poorer waste outcomes.
- Proposals for broader levy use, towards purposes other than waste minimisation, could erode the local government share and result in levy funding being completely absorbed by even a single emergency event.
- Rising costs for recycling and waste management, combined with rates caps, mean many councils will increasingly rely on levy funding to maintain the essential public good waste and recycling services. This includes services and access to facilities and local programmes communities need and expect, but which aren't provided for by the market alone.

Small, rural and visitor economy-based councils face significant additional pressures, due to limited revenue bases and high per-household service costs. In high tourism, low population areas, where waste generation far exceeds resident numbers, systems must operate at highly elevated scale for parts of the year but are funded by only a small set of ratepayers. Without stable levy settings, investment in fundamental services such as recycling, waste infrastructure, and community programmes risk becoming unaffordable, increasing the potential for illegal dumping and environmental harm. These challenges also heighten reputational and environmental risks if the waste system fails.

“ Every time the levy is stretched to solve unrelated problems, it weakens our ability to deliver the waste minimisation and management basics.

### The opportunity

With the right guidance and predictable settings, the levy can:

- Continue to support essential local services that reduce waste to landfill to ensure councils can deliver their waste management and minimisation plans, and fill gaps where market incentives are weak or uneven.
- Enable funding for compliance, planning for managing emergency waste, vulnerable landfills and resilience work, but only where polluter-pays and central government funding are also in place.
- Ensure a fair distribution model that accounts for small-council viability, tourism and seasonal population pressures, and unitary authority complexity.
- Maintain a strong, consistent signal across all disposal options that avoids market distortions, including waste-to-energy for mixed municipal waste.

## What we want

Local government calls on central government to focus on these policies:

**1. Protect the purpose of the levy to be focused on waste:**

Councils are overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining **waste minimisation and reducing harm from waste** as the primary purpose of the levy<sup>1</sup>. We do not support broadening its use in ways that undermine waste levy legitimacy or dilutes the funding impact. As rates caps and affordability pressures grow, the levy will become even more important in maintaining basic waste and recycling services.

**2. Maintain predictable levy settings to support waste investment:**

Keep the 50 per cent levy share for councils with stable settings (providing clarity of the levy over the longer term), so councils can plan and invest in core services, waste minimisation and infrastructure through their Waste Management and Minimisation Plans (WMMPs) with confidence. Ensure central government levy expenditure is primarily directed toward waste minimisation and harm prevention outcomes that support communities and businesses.

**3. Support modest scope expansion for councils with clear guidance:**

Acceptable areas for targeted levy use include: emergency waste planning; compliance and enforcement for illegal dumping and mismanaged waste; and vulnerable landfill remediation planning, where these link to waste minimisation and reducing harm from waste. The local levy shouldn't be expected to replace central government funding for these functions.

**4. Develop an equitable levy distribution model:**

We support progress on a revised levy formula, developed through a technical, council-involved refinement process. The formula should consider small-council viability, visitor loadings and tourism pressures, as well as unitary authority complexity. Councils would like to be included in the discussions as part of this process to ensure a workable solution is achieved.

**“** Councils use levy funding to keep essential waste and recycling services going where the market alone won't deliver consistent coverage, access or outcomes.

<sup>1</sup>Based on detailed assessment of 58 council submissions to Government in 2025 on waste legislation proposals.

## PRIORITY 3: RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING & INVESTMENT

### The challenge

New Zealand lacks coherent planning at local and regional levels undermining opportunities to develop systems and infrastructure to address waste. At the same time, we face significant gaps in areas such as onshore processing of various recoverable materials (e.g. packaging, e-waste, construction & demolition (C&D) waste). Our waste and resource recovery infrastructure is fragmented and, in many cases, outdated and not fit for purpose for today's waste types and quantities.

These gaps link to a lack of accessible and enduring end markets for recoverable materials. Instability continues following changes in global recycling policy, quality standards and loss of onshore markets.

Weather events and emergencies also expose how essential transfer stations, resource recovery parks and landfills are during recovery and in helping communities return to normalcy after major events.

Small, visitor-intensive and rural regions face disproportionate challenges: higher transport costs, lack of scale, and difficulty securing viable private investment for low-tonnage regions. In high-tourism regions, infrastructure must be built to meet peak demand but is funded by resident populations, making investment models additionally challenging without national co-investment.

The Waste Minimisation Fund was to reach around \$100M per year from 2023, but funding was reduced to just \$30M a year, following a decision to use levy funding for non-waste minimisation activities. This leaves a small fund with restrictive investment signals excluding most resource recovery infrastructure.

Without clearer national direction, settings and comprehensive data, investment by councils, the community, and private sector remains piecemeal, slow, and results in an under-invested and inequitable infrastructure network.

Waste facilities are essential but often generate community sensitivity issues, are poorly recognised in spatial planning, and compete with housing, tourism and environmental overlays. Without explicit recognition in planning frameworks, waste and recovery facilities risk becoming harder to consent and more exposed to reverse-sensitivity pressures, undermining resilience objectives.

“ It costs the same (or more) to build modern, safe and effective facilities in a small town as it does in a city, but we don't have the ratepayer base or levy monies to fund it.

### The opportunity

Recognising waste and resource recovery as 'critical' infrastructure would:

- Elevate waste and recovery facilities within national infrastructure and planning frameworks, enabling better long-term planning.
- Strengthen resilience to climate, natural hazard and emergency events.

- Provide a platform for targeted central government levy investment that unlocks public good *and* private co-investment, alongside new infrastructure financing options e.g. by adding waste to the Infrastructure Funding & Finance Amendment Bill.
- Enable the development of reliable sorting, processing and markets for recovered materials reducing exposure to market volatility.

## What we want

With the right settings, levy and stewardship tools we can work together to build a modern, resilient and adaptable network that reduces harm from waste, and supports local economic development.

Local government calls on central government for five practical shifts:

**1. Recognise waste and resource recovery as 'critical' and 'essential' infrastructure**

Explicitly recognise waste facilities in national and regional infrastructure planning frameworks & Bills (Planning Bill - 2025); and include waste in emergency and resilience planning.

**2. Use the central government funding and levy share to unlock system investment**

Target national levy funding through the Waste Minimisation Fund to catalyse public, private and community investment, and support the filling of infrastructure gaps beyond just organics. Investment priorities and signals should be developed with advice from industry including the Waste Advisory Board, and from local government, drawing on real-world delivery and sector experience.

**3. Increase funding to close critical infrastructure gaps for priority material streams, supported by system settings to make them successful**

Combine stronger system incentives with targeted funding to close critical infrastructure gaps. Use policy levers that support recovery and diversion alongside increased investment through a widened Waste Minimisation Fund criteria to cover problematic materials (e.g. C&D, fibre, plastics, glass, e-waste and batteries). Focus where markets are fragile or non-existent, or where better collection, sorting and processing systems and infrastructure is needed to protect people and the environment from harm.

**4. Align stewardship, levy investment and infrastructure planning**

Ensure extended producer responsibility schemes avoid leaving councils with residual materials or unfunded services and facilities; and use national data sets to support regional planning and infrastructure investment.

**5. Coordinate and fund nationwide campaigns, paired with enabling policy settings**

Support campaigns to galvanise communities to take action on waste. This includes promoting safe disposal of harmful wastes, product stewardship, standardised recycling and reducing contamination. This will result in reduced costs to ratepayers and private industry. Coordinate nationwide & recycling

campaigns with councils and relevant stakeholders. Link campaigns to improved system settings that incentivise resource recovery.

“ *The sector’s transfer stations and recovery parks weren’t built for today’s waste volumes and materials. We’re trying to run a modern system on outdated, aging infrastructure.* ”

## PRIORITY 4: FIT-FOR-PURPOSE DATA, COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT

### The challenge

Local government can't plan, enforce or invest effectively in public good without clear, reliable data on waste types, flows, and disposal practices. Current systems are fragmented and incomplete.

Councils lack visibility of several types of wastes, such as commercial and industrial wastes, including soils and construction materials moving between Class 1-5 facilities, as well as wastes created on farms. Although better national data may exist, such as through the Online Waste Levy System, or through the Waste Minimisation (Information Requirements) Regulations reporting, the data regulations don't capture enough of the private market and the data that is gathered isn't accessible or usable at local or regional levels for planning or compliance purposes.

To fill these gaps, some councils have developed local bylaws and licensing schemes, which can duplicate national requirements and add cost and resourcing burden for councils and industry.

It is unclear how proposed changes to the Waste Minimisation and Litter Acts will expand council responsibilities for compliance, monitoring and enforcement. Without clarity, the cost of resourcing these additional requirements will be challenging for councils, particularly for small and rural councils with limited capability.

Illegal dumping and mismanaged waste continues to impose environmental, financial and reputational costs on councils and communities, tarnishing our 'clean, green' New Zealand image.

“ The data exists – councils just can't access it in a way that's useful on the ground or for planning.

### The opportunity

Local government supports the overall direction of recent proposals to strengthen compliance, monitoring and enforcement.

Sharing and strengthening data systems and modernising compliance tools, without adding unnecessary burden, would allow councils to:

- Plan infrastructure and services based on accurate, timely information.
- Apply proportionate compliance that works for small and large councils alike, targeting illegal dumping and non-compliant operators.
- Reduce duplication by using and sharing existing national data systems with councils, rather than creating local systems
- Improve national and regional reporting, transparency and performance tracking, such as by expanding data regulations to include recovered materials in addition to waste.

- Support EPR schemes, levy investment and planning with more reliable evidence.

A waste and litter legislative amendment Bill offers a critical opportunity to ensure clear roles, funded responsibilities, and practical data and tools that support councils with planning and compliance.

## What we want

We now call on central government to make four practical shifts to ensure legislation reforms are workable and effective across all council contexts:

### 1. Modernise compliance tools in a practical, proportionate way

Update offences, evidential requirements, infringement pathways and penalties so councils can effectively target illegal dumping, high-risk operators and mismanaged waste, with tools that are usable across council sizes and contexts. These changes should build on the direction already consulted on.

### 2. Strengthen gathering and use of national waste data

Ensure timely access to data from existing national reporting and monitoring systems at a level of disaggregation councils can make use of for planning, compliance and service design. Expand data collected to include recovered materials in addition to waste. Better national data will reduce the burden on the waste industry in reporting to both central government and councils, but only if existing data reporting requirements are actively and consistently enforced across the whole system, including commercial recycling and processing operations.

### 3. Support councils to meet new costs and expectations

Stronger compliance requirements bring workload and capability demands, especially for small and rural councils. Ensure there is useful guidance, and that the waste levy continues to support local government's public-good function, so that new expectations do not create unfunded or unrealistic burdens.

### 4. Focus compliance and monitoring on the highest-risk materials, sites and behaviours

Prioritise effort at a national and at a local level where the environmental and public health risks are greatest, for example illegal dumping hotspots, hazardous and difficult-to-manage materials (such as batteries, asbestos etc). Couple this with improved central government audit and compliance oversight across disposal sites and landfill classes nationwide.

“ A lot of material is disappearing into places it shouldn't be, and all levels of government need to work together to fix that.

## OUR COMMITMENT & CALL TO ACTION

### Councils are committed to:

- **Demonstrating value** – by using levy and ratepayer funds responsibly to deliver long-term public benefits, while advocating for waste reduction and a waste system where costs and liability sit primarily with producers and consumers, not disproportionately with ratepayers.
- **Collaborating nationally and regionally** – through the TAO Forum and existing groupings, to share learning, coordinate advocacy, and support consistent implementation, with each other, and with central government agencies.
- **Innovating and leading** – piloting new models, services and partnerships that show what a modern, resource-recovery focused, low-harm waste system can look like across diverse communities.

“Ratepayers can't keep carrying the cost of other people's products. It's time to shift responsibility to where it belongs.”

We invite Ministers, MPs and officials from across all agencies to:

- **Engage with the TAO Forum** on the policy settings outlined here as the waste legislation amendment bill, levy regulations and related infrastructure and planning policies progress.
- **Work with local government** to co-design practical solutions for priority products and materials, ensuring that responsibilities and liabilities are fairly shared and fully funded.
- **Use this Manifesto** as a reference point when shaping party waste and resource efficiency platforms ahead of the next general election.

Together, we can build a waste system that delivers better value for money, reduces harm, and greater resilience, with councils operating as capable partners within a shared national framework, rather than carrying the consequences of system failures beyond our control.

“Communities rely on us every day. We're asking for the tools and investment to deliver the system they deserve.”