

# We Care Eurobodalla

**COUNCIL NAME**

Eurobodalla Shire  
Council

**WEB ADDRESS**

[esc.nsw.gov.au/](http://esc.nsw.gov.au/)

**SIZE**

3,428 square  
kilometres

**POPULATION**

40,129

## Overview

Eurobodalla Shire Council (ESC) identified plastic litter in the Clyde River catchment as a significant environmental issue. To address this, Council launched the We Care engagement program - aimed at reducing the prevalence of single-use plastic and take-away container waste.

We Care has helped over 100 local businesses and community groups switch to more sustainable products and packaging. We Care resulted in a 50% reduction in litter at town centre hotspots after one year.

We Care is delivered by ESC Sustainability Project Officers and funded by the NSW Government Environmental Trust and ESC's Waste Team.

## Background

To protect its environment, ESC adopted the Estuary Management Plan for the Clyde River and the Open Coast Coastal Management Program. Both plans outline the need maintain the pristine nature of the Shire's estuaries, including reducing litter in the Clyde River catchment.

Research confirmed 96% of catchment litter originated from the Batemans Bay CBD. Of this, single-use takeaway packaging was overwhelmingly the most common type of litter. This included coffee cups, take-away containers, straws, cutlery and plastic bags. These findings were a result of work from ESC and the Eurobodalla Marine Debris Group, who together monitored 25 sites in the Clyde River catchment.

As a response, Council launched the We Care project to educate businesses in the Batemans Bay CBD. The program was designed to help businesses transition from single-use packaging to re-usable or more sustainable alternatives.

We Care identified the need to:

- Raise awareness with businesses in the Batemans Bay CBD that waste from their business was entering the nearby Clyde River estuary.
- Shift local business' thinking on single use plastics – in particular to increase their understanding and appreciation for alternatives.
- Extend the program to other key towns in the Shire.

We Care operated in tandem with important physical solutions to prevent catchment litter. For example, Council installed litter-catching baskets in storm water drains – known as 'drain buddies'.

## Implementation

Council project officers implemented We Care by identifying the 8 major town centres or clusters in ESC. Food, retail and accommodation businesses were targeted for face-to-face engagement.

Council officers took the following steps to implement the project:

1. Created a checklist to learn what businesses were doing to reduce single-use plastics and their intention (if any) to reduce or remove single-use plastics.
2. The checklist compared the price difference for alternative solutions. This helped challenge the common perception that sustainable alternatives were more expensive than single-use plastic. This was especially crucial as takeaway sales had increased due to Covid-19.
3. Where businesses were willing, project officers assisted businesses in procuring more sustainable packaging. This helped address the time and confusion associated with switching product lines. Additionally, project officers assisted businesses to:
  - Connect with local suppliers
  - Procure trial packs to test available products
  - Brainstorm other creative ways to reduce single-use and takeaway waste

The project is being delivered in partnership with Tangaroa Blue, local business chambers, and local packaging suppliers.

## Outcomes

As of 30 June 2022, 115 businesses, community groups and other organisations had signed onto the program. After one year, a Local Litter Check showed a 50% reduction in litter at hotspots in town centres. A recent litter survey of Batemans Bay found 0 plastic straws, compared with >100 in initial surveys.

Several local organisations now use the Australian Marine Debris Initiative (AMDI) database to report littering. These include Local Aboriginal Land Councils, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Batemans Marine Park, Local Land Services, Landcare and Nature Coast Marine Group. By using one central reporting platform, litter awareness, causes and solutions can be managed more effectively.

Collaborating with suppliers enabled ESC to engage with businesses that were difficult to reach through regular promotional activities. The program was integral in preparing businesses for the NSW Plastic Ban, in particular avoiding leftover single-use stock.

The delivery of the Your Business Is Food program coincided with We Care. This resulted in food businesses increasing their knowledge of waste streams and opportunities to increase diversion.

It is expected that the little penguin colony on Snapper Island will benefit long-term from the project. Plastics in the Clyde River estuary threaten the little penguin through ingestion and entanglement. Through continued monitoring, ESC hope to see a link between reduced plastic waste and penguin colony health.

## Key Learnings

Learnings from We Care will inform how Council engages, educates, and supports businesses in adhering to commitments outlined in the Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy (WASM).

The project found that establishing relationships with business owners, managers and staff is integral when implementing system change, and engaging closely with local businesses is highly effective and transferable to other waste issues.

Considering the success of the We Care program, ESC has decided to continue the program post-grant funding, and may be expanded to other industries and problem wastes. So far, the Drain Buddies program has been expanded to 12 drain buddies.

We Care was integrated into all relevant Council departments, including Procurement, Facilities Management, Community Development, and Tourism and Events teams. The ongoing collection of data through the AMDI database will inform and support other programs within the Sustainability, Waste and Natural Resource Management teams.

If Council were to start the project again, the need for businesses to complete and return the checklist would be removed. While useful to start conversations, the task was onerous for business owners. Rather, the program would focus more on face-to-face engagement. Further, project officers would work closer with Council's Communications Team. This would increase the recognition of businesses in the project's communications plan.

Social media is a powerful tool in promoting sustainable behaviours and can influence community norms, attitudes and behaviours.



## Contact

**Name:** Alex King  
**Position:** Sustainability Project Officer  
**Phone:** 02 4474 1000  
**Email:** alexandra.king@esc.nsw.gov.au

This project was the 2022 winner of the Behaviour Change in Waste Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards