

Halving Food Waste

Australia's progress on SDG 12.3



MSDI and OzHarvest joint policy brief

MSDI and OzHarvest have collaborated to prepare this brief, outlining Australia's progress on SDG Target 12.3 — halving food waste by 2030. The Australian Government set and committed to this Target. With less than nine years remaining, urgent action is required to halve food waste by 2030.

Food waste is an issue for Australia

- Each year, 7.3 million tonnes¹ of food is wasted in Australia.
- Food waste in Australia is estimated to be 298 kg per capita per year².
- The food we waste is estimated to cost the Australian economy in excess of \$20 billion each year³, including an estimated \$2.8 billion cost to farmers and between \$2,200-\$3,800 per household per year⁴.
- 8-10% of global carbon emissions come from wasted food and 30% from food production⁵.
- Food rotting in landfill releases methane — a greenhouse gas 28 times stronger than carbon dioxide⁶.
- Wasting food wastes everything, including valuable natural resources — water, land, energy — and is responsible for a large part of Australia's carbon footprint.
- At the same time, over 5 million Australians⁷ experience food insecurity each year. This number drastically increased during 2020 following the impact of COVID19.

The Sustainable Development Goals — a blueprint for a better future — include a focus on tackling food waste

The Sustainable Development Goals (the SDGs) are a set of 17 interlinked goals, adopted in 2015 by all countries, including Australia. They are “the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” The SDGs provide a long-term vision for our future and are an integrated approach that places sustainability at the core of planning and decision-making processes. Use of the SDGs by governments, civil society and business to assist with tracking — and improving — performance on sustainability is increasing.

Tackling food waste is an integral part of efforts to engrain sustainable consumption and production patterns

Responsible consumption and production — the focus of SDG 12 — is about doing more and better with less. It is about decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, increasing resource efficiency and promoting sustainable lifestyles.

Tackling food waste is one of the 11 Targets set out under SDG 12. This is in recognition of the fact that fundamental changes are needed to the way we produce, consume and dispose of food in order to reduce the negative impact on our planet, feed more people in need and protect finite resources.



Image: Wasted food in bin.

¹ National Food Waste Baseline 2019

² <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/unep-food-waste-index-report-2021>

³ <https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste/publications/national-food-waste-strategy>

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia 2017, National food waste strategy: Halving Australia's food waste by 2030

⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018

⁶ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018

⁷ FoodBank Hunger Report 2019

SDG 12, Target 12.3

“By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.”



Image: Food waste costs Australia.

Two indicators measure progress against Target 12.3.

These are:

- a. the Food Loss Index; and
- b. the Food Waste Index.

The importance of focusing on SDG 12.3

Actively working towards achieving Target 12.3 is important for a number of reasons.

Achieving Target 12.3 will:

- reduce the impact on climate, water, land, and energy;
- improve the economics of countries, cities, businesses, and households; and
- contributes to achieving other international aspirations such as the Zero Hunger Challenge, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and more.

Australia has a national target on food waste

Australia has already set and committed to a national target to **halve food waste by 2030**. This commitment was made in 2016 following federal **bi-partisan agreement** in 2015 to halve food waste by 2025⁸, (influenced by OzHarvest’s advocacy efforts). This target is aligned word for word to SDG Target 12.3 — halving of food waste by 2030.

National strategies and policies to action the Target

In 2017, the Australian government released the **National Food Waste Strategy**, a framework to support collective action towards halving Australia’s food waste by 2030. The National Food Waste Strategy “sets the objective to halve food waste along the supply and consumption chain by 2030.” A specific action of the Strategy included the development of a **National Food Waste Baseline** to set a baseline to monitor and track progress towards the reduction goal⁹.

The National Food Waste Baseline report, the first “detailed quantification of food waste in Australia at the country scale and across the full food supply and consumption chain, from primary production through to consumption and disposal or recovery”¹⁰ was released in 2019 (results are below).

Reducing organic waste is also included in the 2018 National Waste Policy (NWP). Strategy 12 under NWP aims to: “Reduce organic waste, including garden and food waste, by avoiding their generation and supporting diversion away from landfill into soils and other uses, supported by appropriate infrastructure.”

The 2019 National Waste Policy Action Plan sets out the targets and actions to implement the 2018 National Waste Policy. Target 6 of the Action Plan is to “halve the amount of organic waste sent to landfill for disposal by 2030.”

In 2018 the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre (FFW CRC), funded by the federal government (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources), was established to work with research and industry partners to reduce food waste across the supply chain and to transform unavoidable waste into innovative products.

In 2020, Stop Food Waste Australia was established as a new entity to bring together business and industry partners committed to tackling food waste from farm to fork. With seed funding from the Australian Government, Stop Food Waste Australia will launch Australia’s voluntary commitment to support businesses halve their food waste.

⁸ <https://www.farmonline.com.au/story/3378040/halving-our-10b-food-waste-bill/>

⁹ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/4683826b-5d9f-4e65-9344-a900060915b1/files/national-food-waste-strategy.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/25e36a8c-3a9c-487c-a9cb-66ec15ba61d0/files/national-food-waste-baseline-executive-summary.pdf>

Reaching Australia's food waste target

The 2019 National Food Waste Baseline established the baseline as:

Total food waste generation of 298 kilograms per capita (7.3MT nationally)

This figure comprises the amount of food waste across the entire supply and consumption chain in 2016/17.

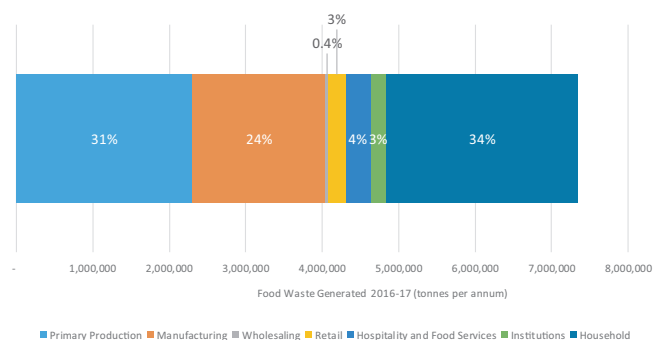


Figure 1: National food waste generation by sector, 2016/17 (Food waste from the transport sector is integrated into these quantities).

As this is the baseline then, if we are to halve food waste by 2030, we need to **reduce Australia's food waste to 3.65MT nationally** in the next 9 years.

What is our progress?

Progress against the baseline has not yet been measured, (it has been recommended to be conducted in 2022).

MSDI has contributed to national SDG reporting through its Transforming Australia (TA) SDG Progress Reports. Two reports have been produced so far. The initial report was released in 2018 and was produced in cooperation with the independent National Sustainable Development Council. A second progress update, measuring Australia's performance against 56 indicators linked to the SDGs, was released in 2020.

In its 2018 report, Transforming Australia reported on an alternative indicator: Total annual food waste generated per capita. TA assessed Australia's progress against this indicator as "Breakthrough needed".



12. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

TARGET 12.3

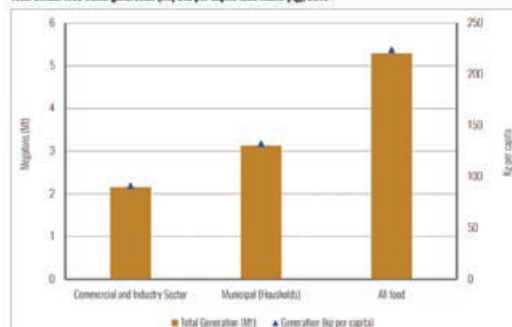
By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

INDICATOR 12.3.1ALT

Total annual food waste generated per capita



Total annual food waste generation (Mt) and per capita food waste (kg), 2015

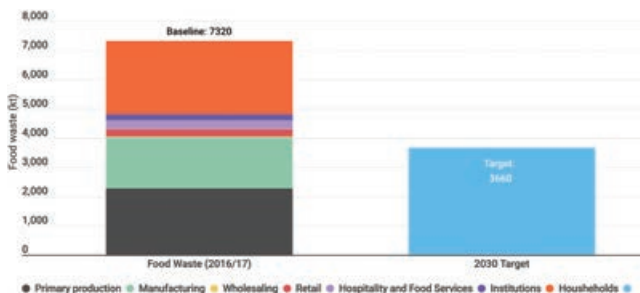


Data Source: National Waste Report 2016.

Target 12.3 was not included in the TA Report of 2020 however the below graph has since been created to demonstrate the current state of play.

12.3.1 Total food waste (kt)

Total food waste in Australia in 2016/17 amounted to 7.3 million tonnes (MT) from across the entire supply and consumption chain. Of this, 1.2 MT was recycled, 2.9 MT was recovered and 3.2 MT was disposed. The two largest sources of food waste nationally are household food waste to landfill and harvest-ready produce that is not harvested and/or ploughed in. Other significant streams include manufacturing waste disposed to land application or composting and food waste from the hospitality and institution sectors. The SDGs target 12.3 is to halve food waste by 2030.



Source: National Food Waste Baseline (Arcadis 2019).

As there is only one data point at this time (the first data collection is still a year away) it would be misleading to assess whether Australia is currently on track to achieve Target 12.3.

MSDI and OzHarvest believe that Australia has an opportunity to bring together the entire food production supply chain to create economic and environmental value from reducing food waste.

Recommendations

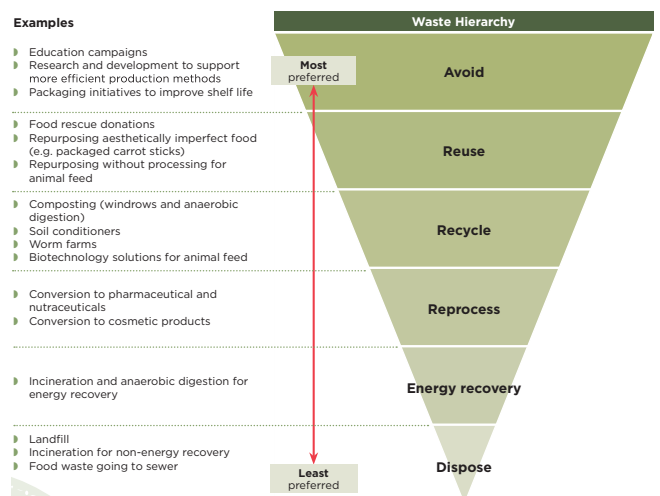
For this to become a reality, MSDI and OzHarvest make the following recommendations:

1. Build the benefits of reducing food waste and emissions saved into national climate policies such as the Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy, and future national and international climate policies.
2. Follow the 'Target.Measure.Act' approach as recommended by Champions 12.3. This three-step approach is a proven way to achieve results:

- **Target.** Sets ambition and motivation. Governments and companies should adopt food loss and waste reduction targets aligned with SDG Target 12.3
- **Measure.** The old saying “what gets measured gets managed” is true for food loss and waste. Governments and companies should measure their food loss and waste to identify the “hotspots” needing action, publish the results to inspire others, and monitor to track progress over time.
- **Act.** Based on information gathered from measurement, governments and companies should develop and implement strategies for tackling the identified hotspots.

3. Companies should include food waste reduction in their corporate greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies and other climate programs, starting with signing Australia’s Food Pact delivered by Stop Food Waste Australia to actively track their progress.
4. The Australian Government should fund and resource national targeted food waste reduction programs and initiatives in Australia across key sectors including food retailers, producers, households, workplaces and schools.

5. Australian States and Territories should proactively support businesses to take action on food waste through grant programs.
6. Scale up food rescue operations across Australia to ensure those in need have access to nutritious food.
7. Drive food waste and surplus food up the food recovery hierarchy to ensure edible food waste is avoided, reused or recycled.



Source: National Food Waste Strategy 2020.

8. Inspire consumer action to reduce and prevent household food waste. More than 2.5 million tonnes of food waste comes from Australian homes, this is where immediate action can be taken with the biggest impact.

Who we are



MSDI

MSDI is a world leading institute bringing about change all over the world through pioneering research, education and innovation. MSDI brings together the best thinkers and doers from across Monash, academia, industry, government and the community in transdisciplinary partnerships to help achieve the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. MSDI's success is driven by a passion and unwavering commitment to making the world a better place for all.

SDG Transforming Australia SDG 2020 Progress Report

Climate Works Australia

Food and land use transitions:
Reducing food loss and waste

Land use futures

Behaviour Works Australia

Food waste behaviours

Contacts

- **Julie Boulton,**
Strategy Advisor, (SDG implementation)
- **Mark Boulet,**
Research Fellow, BehaviourWorks Australia
(behaviour change and food waste)
- **Hayley Lambert,**
Project Manager, ClimateWorks Australia
- **Romy Zyngier,**
Senior Research Manager, ClimateWorks Australia

MSDI website, <https://www.monash.edu/msdi>

OzHarvest

OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation on a mission to 'Nourish Our Country' by stopping good food from going to waste. Every day, OzHarvest delivers surplus food to people in need, provides vital education programs and works to reconnect Australians to the value of food and drive change at all levels of society. OzHarvest has been spearheading action on food waste for the past 17 years and were instrumental in setting Australia's target to halve food waste by 2030 by influencing a Government tripartite agreement in 2015 and establishing a collaborative industry stakeholder group — The Zero Food Waste Forum. OzHarvest works closely with all levels of government to influence policy on reducing food waste and provide a voice for food insecure Australians.

OzHarvest's work delivers on UN SDGs 2, 4, 12, 13 and 17, with a particular focus on 12.3 'halving food waste by 2030'.

Contacts

- **Ronni Kahn AO,**
CEO and Founder
- **Annika Stott,**
Sustainability Strategist
- **Fiona Nearn,**
National Media and Communications Lead

OzHarvest website, <https://www.ozharvest.org>

Additional references

- UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2021
- A Roadmap for reducing Australia's food waste by half by 2030



Image: Computer generated image of Australia's annual food waste dumped in Sydney Harbour (source: Food Fighter Film 2018)

