



Bermagui Public School

The school took an active role in addressing environmental concerns by participating in the Let's Get It Sorted Waste Education Program.

Background and context

Bermagui Public School took an active role in addressing environmental concerns through its participation in the Let's Get It Sorted Waste Education Program. This initiative is a collaborative effort between the Bournda Environmental Education Centre (BEEC) and the Bega Valley Shire Council (BVSC), developed to educate schools and their communities on effective waste management.

Prompted by the need to reduce the environmental impact of school-generated waste, the program focused on enhancing student knowledge and practices around waste sorting, particularly organic waste. Identifying food waste reduction as a priority, Bermagui Public School embraced the introduction of Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) bins and engaged students in various activities to raise awareness and promote sustainable waste behaviours.

Project goals

- Increase students' awareness and understanding of waste generation, disposal, and sustainability principles.
- Educate students about FOGO and the composting process, linking organic waste management to broader environmental benefits.
- Empower students to design and implement practical strategies for reducing organic waste sent to landfill.
- Foster a strong culture of environmental responsibility and active participation in waste minimisation within the school community.

Project implementation

Following an initial waste audit conducted by the student-led Bermagui Bin Busters team, several key challenges were identified: excessive food waste sent to landfill, bin contamination, and confusion about correct waste sorting procedures. In response, the team developed a comprehensive action plan. Supported by grant funding from the council, the school introduced new bins to facilitate improved sorting, established a Return and Earn program, installed clear signage around the school, and designated bin monitors equipped with resources to maintain proper waste separation.

Students also participated in an educational tour of the local Organics and Central Waste Facilities, gaining first-hand insights about composting processes and landfill management. This experience deepened student's understanding of the environmental impact of improper waste disposal.

To further embed learning within the school community, students produced engaging educational films around sorting waste, which were incorporated into the school's Positive Behaviours for Learning program. Classroom presentations and activities spread awareness and encouraged widespread participation among students and staff. The school continues to provide regular updates on FOGO guidelines, ensuring adaptability and sustained improvement in waste management practices.

Student Involvement

The program actively engaged students as leaders and contributors. The Bermagui Bin Busters conducted waste audits, created educational videos, presented to peers, took on bin monitoring roles, collected data for return-and-earn initiatives, and designed signage — all contributing to a vibrant culture of sustainability within the school.

Community Partnership

The partnership between the Bournda Environmental Education Centre and Bega Valley Shire Council is a cornerstone of the program's success. Through funding, resources, and expert support, the collaboration ensures schools receive comprehensive assistance in establishing and maintaining effective waste minimisation programs.

Advice for Other Schools

Forming partnerships with local councils and environmental education centres is highly recommended. Engaging students in hands-on, tailored action planning is essential to foster sustained commitment. Leadership dedication and flexibility in responding to changing waste management guidelines will help establish lasting environmental responsibility and effective waste reduction in schools.

During the project students participated in an educational tour of the local Organics and Central Waste Facilities, providing first-hand learning about composting processes and landfill management.



Project highlights

The “Let’s Get it Sorted” program is available to all schools in the Bega Valley Shire Council area, with extra grant funding offered by council to help implement waste minimisation initiatives.

Students gain valuable insights through tours of the local organics processing facility and the central waste management site. Each school develops tailored strategies to minimise landfill waste based on their unique school needs. This program nurtures student leadership and environmental stewardship, resulting in meaningful and lasting improvements in waste reduction. Highlights at Bermagui Public School included staff dedication and leadership, and the whole-school approach to implementation by staff and students.

Challenges

The biggest challenge for Bermagui PS was instituting all the processes for waste separation and collection across the school. There were also challenges around Return and Earn, in that the local return centre closed, requiring further travel to the next closest one.

“If you go to landfill, it’s just a big hole in the ground and you’ll be useless (...). If you go in the green bin, you could actually go and be compost and be useful.” (Student)

“The students were engaged from the very first activity and continued to be throughout the program. I hope this continues to spread throughout the school and be a lasting initiative to reduce our school waste.” (Staff)



An initial waste audit conducted by the student-led Bermagui Bin Busters team helped to identify key challenges and barriers to implementation.



Challenges included excessive food waste sent to landfill, bin contamination and confusion about correct waste sorting procedures.

Future plans

All schools in the Bega Valley Shire Council area have participated in the Let's Get it Sorted program, demonstrating strong community engagement.

The goal is to offer the program to Bermagui Public School every two years ensuring ongoing support and opportunities for new student groups to continue driving sustainable waste reduction initiatives in their school. Waste separation has been embedded in stage 2 learning programs.

Impact

The Let's Get It Sorted program has delivered measurable and meaningful outcomes at Bermagui Public School, including:

- A significant reduction in the amount of waste, including organic waste, sent to landfill through improved sorting and recycling
- Enhanced student leadership and active participation in sustainability initiatives school wide
- Broader understanding among students and staff of current waste systems and environmentally responsible behaviours
- An increased appreciation for environmental stewardship among the school community.

Project Video Link - [click here.](#)



A Return and Earn program was established for cans. Across NSW the Return and Earn scheme has contributed to a 73% reduction in the volume of drink container litter and over one million tonnes of materials recycled since it was implemented in 2017.

Supported by grant funding from the council, the school introduced new bins to facilitate improved sorting and designated bin monitors equipped with resources to maintain proper waste separation.

