



SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme



PacWastePlus
PACIFIC WASTE MANAGEMENT

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TONGA

Waste Data Profile

June 2025



Tonga and PacWastePlus

Tonga is one of fifteen countries to participate in the SPREP implemented and European Union's Delegation to the Pacific funded PacWastePlus Programme. The PacWaste Plus Programme aimed to improve waste management activities across the islands and strengthen the capacity of governments, industries, and communities to manage waste and protect human health and the environment.

About Tonga

Tonga (officially the Kingdom of Tonga) is a Polynesian country spread across 360,000 km² of the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It consists of 171 islands, approximately 40 of which are permanently inhabited (TSD, 2019). There are five administrative island divisions: Tongatapu (population 74,611), Vava'u (13,738), Ha'apai (6,125), 'Eua (4,945), and Ongo Niua (1,232).

Government, Policies, Strategies, and Responsibilities

The *Waste Management Act 2005* is the primary law, granting the Waste Authority Ltd. (WAL) broad powers over service areas, contracting, fee collection, operating plans, and public awareness. The Waste Management (Plastic Levy) Regulations 2013 impose a 10% levy on certain plastic bag imports, supporting waste services and incentivising reduction. Ongoing policy development includes feasibility studies for Product Stewardship Schemes and sustainable financing, aiming to make recycling economically viable and to encourage community participation.

Tonga has also committed to various multilateral environmental agreements (MEA) including the Basel, Minamata, Stockholm, and Waigani Conventions.

Tonga's waste management system is primarily overseen by Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communication (MEIDECC) and implemented operationally by WAL. The Department of Environment (DoE) and WAL are responsible for the implementation of the DCMR framework specifically data collection and reporting through based on set 8 core and 10 supplementary key performance indicators (KPIs).

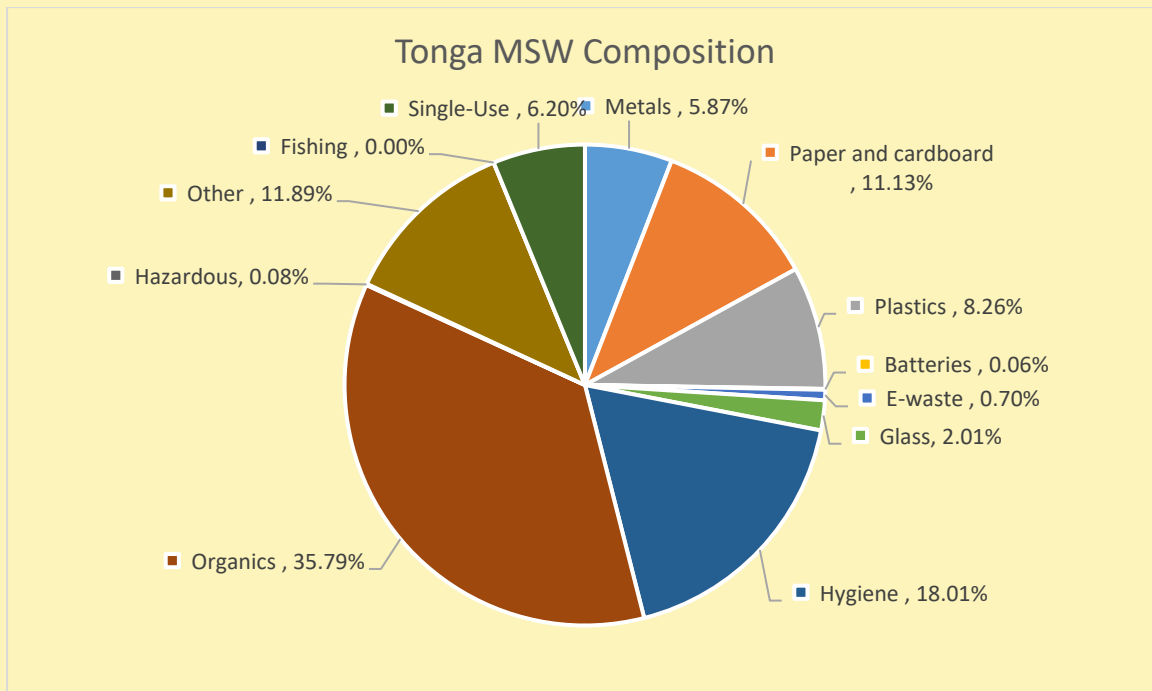
Waste Practices

Waste Authority Ltd. (WAL) manages collection and disposal on Tongatapu, the country's main island. WAL provides waste collection to approximately 65% of urban households in Nuku'alofa and 25% of rural households on Tongatapu, though service is sometimes disrupted due to equipment issues, leading to reliance on private collectors and persistent problems with burning and illegal dumping¹. WAL has expanded its operations to Vava'u, Ha'apai and 'Eua in collaboration with the JICA J-PRISM II. Collection and disposal services are now implemented in these islands.

Tonga has four officially designated waste disposal sites-one each on Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'apai, and 'Eua. Tapuhia landfill (Tongatapu) and Kalaka landfill (Vava'u) are modern, with leachate management and daily soil cover, while the sites on Ha'apai and 'Eua are unregulated open dumps lacking environmental controls and are at or near capacity. Recycling infrastructure includes about 170 community recycle cages across villages and Nuku'alofa, cleared by private recyclers, and a growing focus on PET and aluminum can collection through new initiatives.

Core KPIs	Result
1. Count / capacity of modern waste facilities	2 / unknown
2. Count / capacity of unregulated waste facilities	3 / Unknown
3. National recovery rate (%)	8%
4. Per capita waste generation rate (kg/capita/year)	Unknown capacity
5. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) composition (%)	Error! Reference source not found. Next Page
6. Household waste capture rate (%)	99%
7. Household collection service coverage (%)	98%
8. Fulfilment of MEA reporting requirements (%)	44%

Supplementary KPIs	Result
1. Cost of disposal to landfill (\$/t/tonne/annum)	\$12.81
2. Weight of waste disposed (tonnes per annum)	22,297
3. Weight of waste recovered (tonnes per annum)	1,590
4. Volume and type of stockpiled hazardous waste (m3)	Stockpiled hazardous wastes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asbestos: 32.5 m³ • E-waste: 272.0 m³ • Used oil: 223.2 m³ • Used tyres: 4.0 m³ • Chemicals: 1.0 m³
5. Marine plastic pollution potential (tonnes per annum)	5.85
6. Awareness and support of waste management services (%)	86%
7. Proportion of strategic waste management initiatives implemented (%)	81%
8. Commercial waste capture rate (%)	Insufficient data
9. Commercial collection service coverage (%)	100%
10. Total weight of disaster waste disposed (tonnes per annum)	No data



National Waste Analysis Snapshot

About the Data

The data used to inform the KPIs include the Tonga 2021 National Census, the APWC 2020/21 waste audits and surveys through World Bank, and Eunomia 2025 Waste Facility Register surveys. The APWC audits undertaken include a compositional waste audit of 250 household and 48 commercial samples and qualitative surveys involving 208 household and 49 commercial samples representing Ha'apai, Vava'u, and Tongatapu. The Waste Facility survey undertaken by Eunomia was undertaken in all disposal and recycling facilities in Tonga.

Data Collection Challenges

- Capacity to accept waste in all facilities is not known.
- Most dry recyclables remain stockpiled and unprocessed due to market volatility and as such cannot be considered a return to the economy. This likely overestimates the recovery rate with some of these stockpiled materials eventually ending up in landfills.
- Data requests from countries take a while to come back affecting project timelines.
- There is no record of incoming disaster waste. These materials may have been still dumped close to the affected areas.
- While hazardous waste stockpiles are obviously existing, there is limited data quantifying the volume estimates.
- The total number of businesses cannot be determined which is needed to calculate the total commercial waste generated to allow measurement of commercial capture rate.

Highlights

- The Waste Management (Plastic Levy) Regulations 2013 established a 10% levy on plastic bag import, providing a sustainable financing mechanism to support delivery of waste services and discouraged the use of SUP's.
- The calculated waste collection service coverage based on the survey is very high at 99%. Realistically, WAL maintains a 65% level of waste collection for urban households in Tongatapu.
- While the national recovery rate as calculated is still low, it is notable that approximately 170 community recycling cages have been deployed across villages in Nuku'alofa. This enables Tonga to have an extensive grassroots recycling infrastructure.
- The phase-out plan for single use plastic, reflects Tonga's commitment to circular economy practices and sustainable practices for a cleaner environment.
- The launch of a PET and aluminium can collection program, although still limited in coverage at schools and private companies, is a good practice initiative to increase landfill diversion and enhance community awareness.
- The Tapuhia (Tongatapu) and Kalaka (Vava'u) have been elevated to a modern landfill category with mainly functional leachate management systems and daily cover applied, among other criteria, to provide environmental controls.
- WAL has extended its services out to Vava'u, Ha'apai and 'Eua, enabling wider coverage to the rest of the country.

Emerging Issues

- There is still a gap in the data received from countries owing to the limited recording system available to monitor waste material flow. The facilities have either poorly maintained weighbridges or there is lack of standardised recording systems. Recently, the Kobo toolbox was introduced as an online recording platform although there is still some degree of resistance on its use due to lack of training and digital literacy.
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- Data requests from countries take a while to come back affecting project timelines.
- There is no record of incoming disaster waste. These materials may have been still dumped close to the affected areas.
- There is limited data quantifying the volume estimates of stockpiled hazardous wastes.
- The total number of businesses cannot be determined which is needed to calculate the total commercial waste generated to allow measurement of commercial capture rate.



Waste Management Practices and KPI Narrative

Waste Facilities and Waste Handled Each Year	In Tonga there are 2 modern facilities and 3 unregulated facilities with unknown annual processing capacity. On average, 22,297 tonnes of waste is disposed of, and 1,590 tonnes of waste is recovered each year. The cost spent on disposal to landfill is \$USD 12.81 per year. Tapuhia landfill is 50% full and the capacity of 15,000 tpa has been observed to double to 34,000 tpa with 2 out of 3 cells already full. Kalaka landfill is already full.	Hazardous Waste Stockpiles	Asbestos, e-waste, used oil, used tyres and obsolete chemicals are stockpiled in the waste facilities.
Household per Capita Waste Generation	As per recalculation of raw data from the 2021 audit, the per capita waste generation rate is 56.23 kilograms per person per year.	Disaster Waste	The last major disaster experienced in Tonga was the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption and tsunami. There were no quantities of disaster waste recorded during this event.
Household Waste Statistics	The awareness and support of waste management services is 87%. The top three waste categories identified in household municipal waste are organics, hygiene and other waste. The household waste capture rate is 99%, and the household collection service has a coverage of 99%.	Marine Waste	The marine plastic pollution potential was estimated as 5.85 tonnes per year.
Commercial Waste Statistics	The commercial waste capture rate cannot be determined due to insufficient data and the commercial collection service coverage is 100%.	Strategic Initiatives and MEA Reporting	<p>Tonga has committed to 3 Multilateral Environmental Agreements including Basel Convention, Minamata Convention and Stockholm Convention, they have fulfilled 44% of the requirements to the various MEAs.</p> <p>Tonga has 11 waste management initiatives planned and have implemented 9, the proportion of strategic waste management initiatives implemented is 82%</p>