

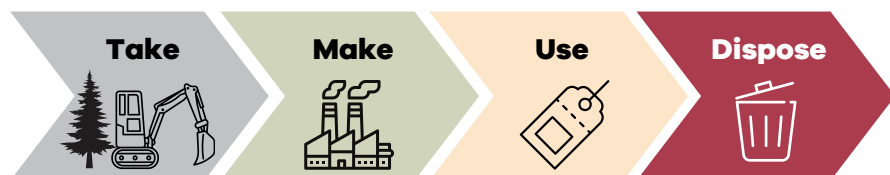


We are developing a **Circular Economy Strategy: Towards a zero waste Merri-bek**. It will guide how we manage waste and resources in Merri-bek over the next 5 years.

## What is a circular economy?

Our waste includes all the goods we buy, use and throw away. The current way we make and use goods is known as a 'linear economy'. In a linear economy we treat the resources we use to make products as though they are unlimited. But many resources that we rely on, such as metals and minerals, will run out if we do not conserve them.

In a linear economy, waste is generated at every stage of a product's lifecycle, with little to no consideration given to how this waste will be managed. This diagram shows how resources are used in a linear economy:

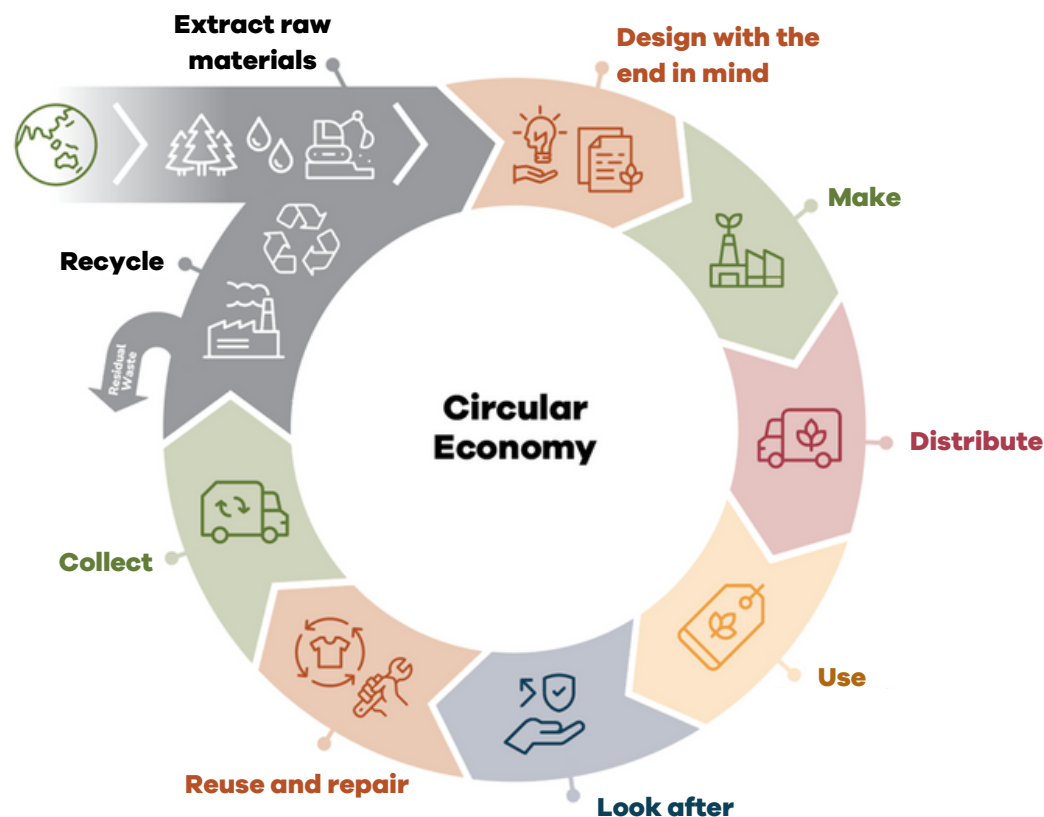


The difference in a circular economy is that products are designed with the end in mind. Waste is designed out of the process. Products are built to be long-lasting. They can also be repaired to extend their lifespan. When they can no longer be used or repaired, they are recycled. This maximises resource use and minimises waste.

A circular economy aims to transform how we make and use products. It challenges us to think about how we can use things again and again.

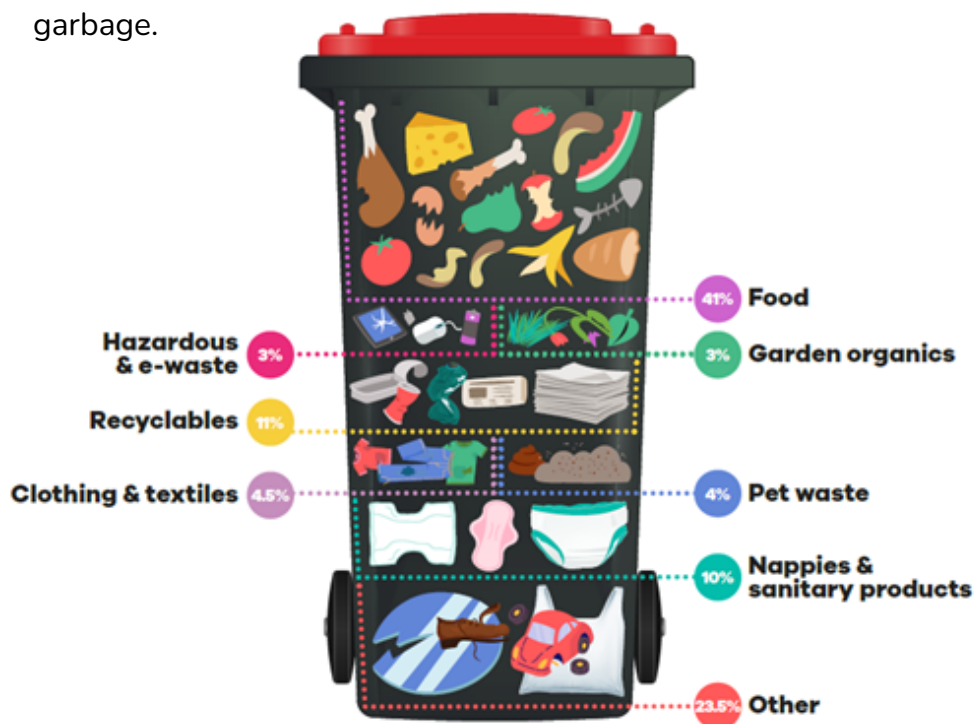
**The 3 fundamental principles of circular economy are:**

- Design out waste and pollution.
- Keep products and materials in use for as long as possible.
- Regenerate natural systems.



## What are the Merri-bek community throwing away

More than half the items in the average garbage bin can be recycled or composted, instead of sent to landfill. The image below shows the contents of the average garbage bin in Merri-bek (data from 2021). Many households and businesses still put their food waste in the garbage.



**To achieve our zero waste to landfill by 2030 target, we will need everyone to sort their waste correctly.**

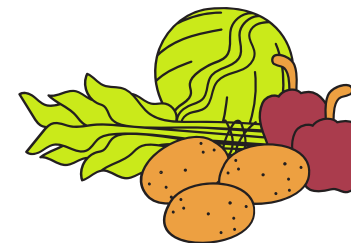
We also need solutions for products and materials that are hard to recycle, on a large scale. These include disposable nappies, soiled paper and soft plastics.

In 2023, Council commissioned research into waste generation and resource use in Merri-bek. This research helped us understand the materials used in Merri-bek. It also identified some opportunities for Council to promote effective circular economy practices.

## Materials that need action now

The research identified priority items for action. These materials include:

- food and garden organics
- paper and cardboard
- plastics
- textiles
- construction and demolition waste



Council currently provides a kerbside waste collection service. Food and garden organics, paper and cardboard and some rigid plastics can be recycled through our 4 kerbside bins. Textile waste is generally managed through the second-hand market or charity sector. Opportunities for reducing textile waste include reuse, mending, second-hand sales and swap events. Construction and demolition waste is mostly managed by private waste and recycling companies.

More of these materials could be reused, repurposed or recycled.

## Maybe you're already involved in the circular economy

Many people already make choices to reduce their consumption of new goods and repair what they own. They choose to buy second-hand items and borrow, swap or share with others. They also reuse, repurpose, and recycle goods. They may also grow their own food and use their organics bin or compost any leftover food waste.

Increasing community understanding on how to recycle right has the potential to our reduce waste to landfill. The amount we talk about how much goes to landfill and options to reduce, recycle and reuse can also play a role in reducing waste. Workshops, education and information for community about how to reduce waste and programs that enable waste reduction activities can also play a part.

## Programs currently offered and supported by Council

Council offers various programs and services that encourage a circular economy:


- Our **weekly food and garden organics bin collection** reduces food waste going to landfill. Instead it creates compost from household food scraps and garden waste.
- The **Garage Sale Trail** is an annual event that promotes reuse nationally. We encourage people to buy and sell second-hand goods.
- Council provides **subsidies to make reusable cloth nappies and period products** more affordable. We also support community initiatives to **repair, share and reuse items**.
- Residents can drop off a range of household items into our **yellow recycling stations** for free at our Customer Service Centres for safe recycling.

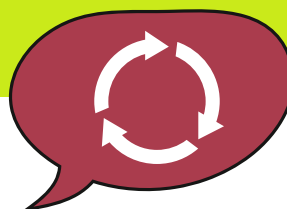
## How can we be more circular?

Help shape our Circular Economy Strategy.

 [conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/circular-economy](https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/circular-economy)

 [wasteprojects@merri-bek.vic.gov.au](mailto:wasteprojects@merri-bek.vic.gov.au)

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Beyond Merri-bek, significant change is needed in how goods are designed, manufactured and distributed. For example, customers should be able to return goods for easy repair or remanufacture. Together with others, Council calls on state and federal government to do more to foster a circular economy.

**We want to know what other programs or services you think we should prioritise to reduce our waste to landfill and encourage a more circular economy.**

## What would you like to see more of?

- Promotion and information available on circular economy services, programs and initiatives.
- Promotion of good practices/ role models.
- Practical tips to support households reduce waste e.g. workshops, resources.
- Education on making positive change e.g. waste reduction themed events.

Council aims to be a 'role model' by changing how we operate, for example:

- Re-think how we buy goods and service.
- Ask for repair, durability, reuse and recyclability in our tenders.
- Invest in trials of innovative recycled or repurposed materials in our building and infrastructure projects.
- Reduce waste at our events and within our operations and service delivery.

