

17 September 2026

Position statement

Leaders debate- Gas capture in landfills is a missed energy supply opportunity

Last night at the GasNZ Leaders Forum, a Cabinet Minister and an MP both defended sending organic waste to landfill, on the grounds that landfills capture 95% of the gas they produce.

The Bioenergy Association says that “gas capture in landfills is an outdated view on energy supply. At a time when diminishing supplies of natural gas are increasing energy costs to businesses then we should be encouraging organic waste to be recycled into biogas and biomethane using the most efficient technology - anaerobic digestion. Anaerobic digestion of organics addresses four community needs – extracting value from waste, producing energy and biofertiliser, reducing the need for landfills, optimising greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Disposing organic waste into landfills should only be used for organic material which can’t be recycled.”

The Bioenergy Association Executive Officer, Brian Cox, says that “supporting landfills is misguided and a Minister should know the facts better.”

“A leaky bucket”: landfills cannot capture 95%. A well-run landfill, in the best case, gets to somewhere around 85%. This is because a lot of the emissions escape before the landfill is properly sealed. The 95% gets quoted because of a flawed emissions accounting system, not because our landfills are exceptional.”

“The Methane Myth”: The remaining 15% isn't a rounding error. Methane is 28 times more potent than CO₂ as a warming gas, so that "small" leak carries an outsized punch. This is why we need to send organic waste to recycling facilities designed to capture >99% of the methane generated from organic waste. If we want more renewable gas in the system, the fastest way to get it is to stop losing it in the first place. Source separation of the feedstocks, such as food waste, is an essential part of it.”

Disposal of organic material to landfill misses the opportunities for producing valuable energy and biofertiliser, both of which are expensive to produce in other ways.

“New Zealand isn't being asked to lead here, we're being asked to catch up. The EU made separate collection of organic waste mandatory for every member state from 2024. Sweden and South Korea banned landfilling food waste outright back in 2005, South Korea now diverts over 90% of it.”

Mr Cox says that “We keep hearing landfill lobbying win the argument in rooms like this. It's time the actual facts, and what the rest of the developed world is already doing, were part of the conversation.”

Ends

Additional information

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Recycling organic material to produce energy and biofertiliser.

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1. Recycling of organic material through anaerobic digestion results in the production of biogas and biofertiliser.
2. The biogas can be upgraded to biomethane which is a drop-in replacement for natural gas.
3. The organic material can be derived from; food processing residual waste streams that can not otherwise be sustainably reused or recycled; kerbside organic waste collection; and the byproducts of agricultural crops, therefore diverting organic material which would otherwise be disposed of to landfill.
4. Use of residual waste streams to produce energy forms part of the circular economy.
5. New Zealand can achieve zero waste to landfill by 2040 if we start seeing residual waste as an opportunity and not a problem.
6. An ideal opportunity exists to co-locate organics recycling facilities processing organic liquid and solid waste residual waste streams, with industrial heat users to displace the use of fossil fuel for the generation of heat and electricity.
7. An ideal opportunity exists to combine bio-processing waste with the upgrade of waste water treatment plants. These upgraded plants have the ability to generate revenue to offset operating costs for local government bodies and could progressively be developed to the point of zero residual chemical discharge to water or sludge to land.
8. Diversion of waste from landfills to waste to energy facilities reduces CO₂ and methane emissions improving air quality, enhances the economic resilience of communities through reduction in waste water treatment facility usage, reduction in landfill reliance whilst providing new offtake business opportunities through the production of electricity, heat and bio processing opportunities.

9. The technology for Bio-processing waste and waste water is well developed and the footprint is smaller than for existing sewerage processing systems employed, particularly those disposing to land.
10. Technology for treatment of both liquid and solid residual waste streams is well developed and accepted internationally and able to be utilised in New Zealand with minimal (if any) changes therefore mitigating technology risk.