

Our new part in the waste war

I've just read yet another account of a Pacific Island so covered in washed-up plastic its coral sand has become partly artificial forever (if it actually remains an island, what with rising sea levels).

What worries me is the part I may have played in this tragedy, and continue to play despite our household's best efforts at recycling and responsible rubbish disposal.

The problem is my addiction to lime juice. It must warrant that description because I've been hooked for 70 years and there's little sign of my daily consumption dropping off, despite Lin's best efforts to get me to cut down on sweet stuff.

She's been pretty effective. After a lifetime of taking up to three teaspoons of sugar in tea and coffee, I'm down to an eighth of one now. And two jet planes and two bits of chocolate in front of telly.

The core of a lime juice and water mix I suck on from a couple of old plastic bike bottles has been gradually reduced to a mere splash of the sweet green extract. But it's running at a bottle of extract a week, now I've been told my kidneys are failing a bit faster than planned and I need to drink more water. Water and lime juice.

One of my grandmothers first hooked me (is that too unkind a word?) on the green stuff when I was two. In those days, the concentrate with which she prepared a perpetually full jug in her fridge came in glass bottles.

I don't know when the English maker switched to plastic, but there's a chance I have bought several thousand of them – and they don't have a recycling number. The label says they're recyclable, but not having a number means they're more likely to go to the dump.

This convoluted story is my way of introducing you to something important being sought by New Plymouth District Council - your views on its new waste management scheme. If you don't know what I'm talking about, you soon will when the council switches to a rubbish strategy involving no more pink plastic bags.

Instead, the council will provide residential properties with four bins, with some variation in size according to our needs.

There's a little 20-litre one for food waste (small enough to go in the kitchen sink cupboard), a 140L (roughly half-size) general waste wheelie bin, the existing 240L yellow-top recycling wheelie bin, and the existing blue glass bottle bin.

We can put out the food waste bin (okay for meat, fat and bones wrapped in paper) every week. The others go out fortnightly - the blue glass one and the general rubbish bin one week, the big recycling one the next, meaning one week we could have two bins out, the next three. Busy kerbsides.

The general waste bin won't be for green waste from the lawns and garden, an option the council ruled out in its 2018 debate because of the cost (an extra \$70 a year).

Under the current system, some people put green waste out in the pink bags, but that option goes, meaning you will have to take it to the transfer station (where you pay to tip it), hire a gardening service or a bin from someone like Waste Management, or put it in your own compost bin.

On that last point, I reckon the council ought to encourage composting by providing cheap plastic compost bins that come in a pair of halves, or at least subsidising them, and taking our compost away for their own use if we don't want it.

NPDC says its web page explanation of the proposed Solid Waste Management and Minimisation Bylaw covers a variety of elements, including the maximum weight of full bins, keeping food scraps out of the general waste bin, and encouraging neighbours at multi-unit sites to work together to reduce the number of bins.

It also wants to cut down on the wrong waste going into recycling bins, aiming to reduce recycling contamination to no more than 8-to-12 percent (currently as high as 27 percent).

The proposed bylaw is in line with the council's new waste management and minimisation plan drawn up in 2017, and works toward a "Zero Waste 2040" vision. Consultation on the bylaw is open now and closes on July 24. Go to: newplymouthnz.com/HaveYourSay.

The pink bag era finishes at the end of September, by which time two new bins will have been delivered.