



Population and the environment



Population change and human behaviour are major drivers of environmental change and have widespread impacts.

Many issues facing the environment are caused or exacerbated by post-colonial human activities. How we extract and use resources, develop infrastructure and generate waste can all contribute to environmental impacts and affect our ability to produce food and access safe drinking water.

At a glance

How NSW is tracking

- By June 2023, of the 8.34 million people living in NSW, 5.1 million (61%) resided in Greater Sydney, 1.9 million (23%) in coastal areas and 1.3 million (16%) inland.
- Population growth is decoupling (separating) from some key environmental trends. While population is growing, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions are declining.
- Waste generation is outpacing population increase. Total waste generation rose from 18.7 million tonnes in 2015–16 to 22.4 million tonnes in 2022–23.
- The 'carrying capacity' for the NSW environment has not been estimated, so it is difficult to establish sustainable levels of consumption or output.

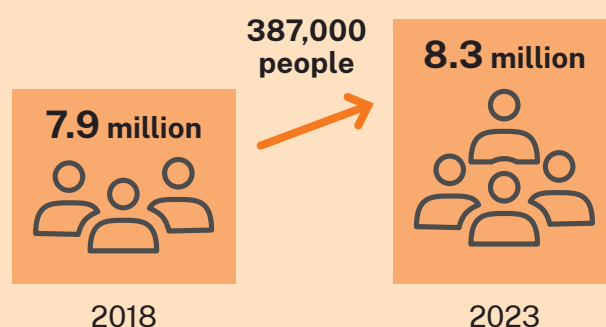
The big picture

Modern technologies enable more efficient use of resources such as water and energy, which helps to offset the environmental impacts of population change. However, these benefits are undermined if we continue to use more resources or generate more waste and emissions than nature can safely provide or absorb.

Population growth to 2023

The NSW population **grew** by **387,000 people** from **2018** to **2023**.

This was an increase of **4.8%** – **7.9 million** people in 2018 / **8.3 million** people in 2023.



Population growth – projected

NSW's population is expected to reach **10.1 million people** by **2041**.

