

# **Publishers recommit to recycling objectives**

**The print publishing industry is resisting regulation on its recycling scheme in light of an Australian government review of the Product Stewardship Act, and instead has recommitted to its own recycling objectives.**

The publishing industry is committed to the National Environmental Sustainability Agreement (NESA), managed by NewsMediaWorks and Norske Skog. The agreement, signed by News Corp Australia, Fairfax Media, Seven West Media and Bauer Media, undertakes to maintain a recycling rate of 77 per cent of newspaper products.

State and Territory environment ministers have endorsed the agreement which covers the industry's interests until 2020.

The federal legislation, introduced in 2011, does not include the publishing industry. However, it does detail the framework for various levels of product stewardship regulation - voluntary accreditation, co-regulatory and mandatory.

If the industry were to be covered by the legislation, it would be categorised as voluntary. However, NewsMediaWorks environmental director Tony Wilkins said that legislative action was "not truly voluntary"

"Sustainable sourcing, economic recovery and reuse of newsprint must remain market based and enacted on a national basis", Mr Wilkins said.

"Overly restrictive requirements, 'red tape' or the implementation of state-by-state initiatives, will lead to confusion, contradictions, administrative problems and ultimately less desirable outcomes. Adequate economies of scale and

operating efficiencies are essential to a sustainable outcome.”

The list of potential products to be brought under the scheme include: plastic microbeads and products containing them, batteries, photovoltaic systems, electrical and electronic products, and plastic oil containers. The industry has yet to be formally requested to seek accreditation.

The legislation would allow the federal government to force industry to meet set requirements and undergo a “condition-setting process for accredited arrangements”. It would also allow a framework to be set for “cost recovery fees for accredited arrangements”.

MobileMuster and Fluorocycle are the only two agreements accredited by the Australian government.

Since the voluntary establishment of the Publishers National Environment Bureau in 1992, the industry has increased the national recycling rates of newsprint by almost 50 per cent through self-led initiatives. NESA commits publishers to maintaining this standard.

## **Australia less regulated than most**

Environmental leaders from around the world gathered in Sydney last week for the International Stewardship Forum, highlighting the various schemes in place around the world.

Most speakers espoused the need for regulations, however, Australian speakers who would most be affected questioned its necessity.

Much like NESA, Tyre Stewardship Australia’s product stewardship agreement is unique on the world stage.

As such, the Australia landscape requires its own approach, according to Liam O’Keefe, market development manager for Tyre Stewardship Australia (TSA).

“We can become fixated on what sort of scheme it is, but the scheme does not operate in isolation,” Mr O’Keefe said.

“The factors that determine what will be effective are those that work around it. All schemes are a product of the geography, market and political landscape and

as such they need to be harmoniously aligned to create a functioning system that deliver positive outcomes.”

The TSA’s agreement is a self-sustained voluntary scheme paid for by some of Australia’s largest tyre brands. A recent independent review into the scheme recommended it seek accreditation with the government.

Supervising Senior Environmental Scientist, EPR unit of CalRecycle (California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery), Cynthia Dunn, said that “formal regulatory process is key” but conceded that it might not be for everyone.

The review’s consultation period closes on Friday, June 29, with the final review expected to be provided to the Minister in the first quarter of 2018-19.