



**NewsMediaWorks**

## **Publishers' Response to the "Review of the Product Stewardship Act 2011, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme" Consultation paper**

Delivered by email to: [wastepolicy@environment.gov.au](mailto:wastepolicy@environment.gov.au)

June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018

### **Executive Summary**

Publishers' support the Federal Government's proposal to develop a Product Impact Management Strategy to underpin a shared approach to product stewardship by the Australian, state, territory and local governments. Government working together at all levels in a co-ordinated fashion, in conjunction with industry, is seen as an effective way forward to advance recycling and encourage diversion of material from landfills.

Publishers support reinvigorating the scheme for accreditation of voluntary product stewardship arrangements. We do however recommend that the current ability of pro-active industries such as our own, with existing Product Stewardship agreements outside the Product Stewardship Act, be allowed to remain outside any legislated voluntary framework.

Australian newspaper and magazine Publishers, together with Australia's newsprint manufacturer Norske Skog, have had a voluntary Product Stewardship Agreement on waste and recycling in place since 1992. Known as the industry's "National Environmental Sustainability Agreement" (NESA), it has been endorsed by all State and Federal governments. Its success can be seen in the increase in Australia's newspaper recycling rate 75% currently, which is close to world's best. When success is demonstrated it is considered more efficient to minimise red tape and directly address issues through consultation between government and industry.

### **Background**

Recycling of newspapers is an Australian success story. We are among the best in the world at it with 75% of newspapers recycled in 2017. A massive improvement from the level of 28% at the end of the 1980s.

Australian Publishers long history of supporting and advancing newspaper and magazine recycling which began with the establishment of the industry's Product Stewardship Organisation "The Publishers National Environment Bureau" (PNEB). The PNEB formulated a five-year, voluntary Newsprint Producer/Publisher Group Plan for Publication Paper Recycling



together with the Australian domestic newsprint manufacturer, Norske Skog in 1991 (then know as Australian Newsprint Mills). This Agreement was endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territories environment ministers meeting as the Australian New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC) in 1992 and it has run continuously since then.

The current Agreement covers the period 2015-2020 and is known as the industry's National Environmental Sustainability Agreement (NESA). The Agreement is managed by NewsMediaWorks and Norske Skog. Members of NewsMediaWorks Environment Advisory Group include the following:

- News Corp Australia
- Fairfax Media
- Seven West Media
- Bauer Media

### Principles that underpin successful recycling

Publishers have supported the following sound principles that underpin their Plan to advance recycling, these are:

- 1) **National Scope:** Sustainable sourcing and economic recovery and reuse of newsprint must remain market based and enacted on a national basis. 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
- 2) **Market driven:** Newspaper and magazine recycling must be market driven to be sustainable. Inappropriate recycling legislation, targets or penalties result in economic distortions that lead to market failure and unsustainable outcomes

The combination of small communities and large distances, presents unique logistical challenges and the delivery of environmentally sound recycling outcomes must be considered in their economic and operational context to be justifiable and sustainable

- 3) **No legislation is required:** The industry is voluntarily endorsing and extending an agreement format that has delivered world class paper recycling for more than 27 years and makes mandated action unnecessary



- 4) **Recovery and re-use are paramount:** The Publishers and NSA remain wholly committed to the sustainable production, recovery and reuse of newspapers and magazines
- 5) **Optimum Source Separation:** To achieve the optimum quality and utilisation of recovered newspapers and magazines source separation is the preferred method of collection. It minimises contamination and improves value to Local Governments and processors.

These principles were embedded in the original 1992 Newsprint Producer/Publisher Group “National Environmental Sustainability Agreement”. The validity of these principles have become even more important as global recycling markets continue to re-align in response to the China import ban.

**Publishers’ response to the terms of reference (1, 2, 4 and 5) of the review is as follows:**

**1. The extent to which the objects of the Act are being met and whether they remain appropriate.**

Publishers support the primary object of the Act which is ultimately to reduce impacts of products on the environment.

Publishers have met this object through the reduction of harmful substances used in the manufacture of newspapers and magazines (a), the reduction in basis weight of the product which generates less waste at the end of its useful life (b), the recyclability of the products (c) and the healthy market for these recyclable products and subsequent reduction in their volume to landfill (d). Some of these steps include the following:

- a) Sustainably produced. Fibres used to make Australian newsprint come from regrown pine plantation and recycled fibre. No old growth forest is used and all forests are sustainably managed under FSA or equivalent certifications. Publishers have for two decades continued to reduce harmful substances used in the manufacture of newspapers and magazines. In letterpress and offset inks the use of lead as an additive was discontinued by the end of the 1970s and no heavy metals have been added to these inks (as defined by the AS for coatings on Childrens’ toys).
- b) Less newspaper waste goes to landfill than ever. Newspapers made up about 3% of waste going to metropolitan landfill in Australia in 1990 and now are less than 0.1%. A reduction in print versus digital newspapers, a reduction in newspaper page basis weight, and a cut in waste from publishing operations have all added to this



**NewsMediaWorks**

reduction.

- c) The recyclability of the products was enhanced at an early stage in Australia by a decision of the publishers not to use flexographic inks in newspapers and magazines as these inks cannot be easily deinked by floatation deinking technology. This means that Australian newspapers are highly sought after for recycling, unlike the situation in say the U.K. where some flexographic printed newspapers can contaminate loads of paper going to flotation deinking and result in the whole batch being wasted.
- d) The market for these recyclable products is healthy if the material is clean and not contaminated. Record pricing is currently in place for newspapers that meet quality specification.

It is also noted that an additional specific object of the Act includes “to contribute to reducing the amount of greenhouse gases emitted, energy used and water consumed in connection with products and waste from products”. Norske Skog, Australia’s newsprint manufacturer, has committed to a 25% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020, and the newsprint mill at Albury is at World’s best practice for water use. Similarly, publishers have been reducing energy and water use with News Corp Australia recording a 43% reduction in emission from 2006-2017.

## **2. The effectiveness of the accreditation of voluntary product stewardship schemes...**

For publishers, the accreditation of voluntary product stewardship schemes is seen as an option that may be advantageous to some industries but has no application or benefit to the newsprint/publishing industry. The reasons for this include that publishers do not have issues with free riders: more than 95% of newspapers and magazines publications are effectively covered by the industry’s National Environmental Sustainability Agreement. Nothing would be gained from an accreditation system as all major publishers are already engaged.

## **4. The interaction of the Act with other Commonwealth, state and territory and local government legislation, policy and programs.**

Australia has on the whole avoided legislated State by State approaches on product stewardship and this has generally allowed industry to put in place efficient, economic solutions to optimise resource reuse and recovery.

However, some State by State approaches on waste and recycling policies have demonstrated significant shortcomings. Some State policies such as the highly variable rate of waste levies have introduced market distortions diverting some 1,000,000 tonnes plus of



**NewsMediaWorks**

waste and recycles to other states. While the Product Stewardship Act is not responsible for these distorts, they make efficient calibration of recycling schemes problematic.

**5. International and domestic experience in the use of product stewardship to deliver enhanced environmental, social and economic outcomes through product design, dissemination of new technologies and research and development.**

Publishers, through NewsMediaWorks, were proud to be sponsors of the recent International Product Stewardship Forum held in Sydney. While both facilitating and participating in the Forum it became apparent the Australia has benefited from careful adoption of Product Stewardship initiatives that has put us at near best in environmental outcomes such as recycling rate and participation rates in recycling. Publishers have been leaders in achieving these outcomes for newspapers and magazines.

In contrast, elsewhere in the world publishers have damaged the industry by providing disparate responses to the environmental challenge. For example, 13 States in the U.S. have some form of legislation on recycled fibre content or recycling that affects newspaper publishers – but at one stage some publishers in Massachusetts and Connecticut decided it was cheaper to pay the State penalty than to meet the environmental legislation – a poor outcome for both environment and the community – and a stark contrast to the success achieved with voluntary commitments in Australia.

**Conclusion**

Publishers note the importance of the criteria originally agreed upon with government when the industry's National Environmental Sustainability Agreement was formulated and endorsed. These criteria were focused on solutions that were voluntarily committed to, national in scope, market driven and focused on the quality of materials collected and recycled. Over time, these elements have become even more important in meeting challenges such as the "China Sword".

Publishers see an ongoing place for voluntary agreements both inside the accreditation system and outside it as is the current case for our industry.

Please direct any questions regarding this submission to:

Dr Tony Wilkins



**NewsMediaWorks**

Executive Director Environment  
NewsMediaWorks  
[anthonywilkins@NewsMediaWorks.com.au](mailto:anthonywilkins@NewsMediaWorks.com.au)  
0413080789