

Recycling the News – and It's All Good

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The NSW EPA says that Extended Producer Responsibility

“involves producers taking more responsibility for managing the environmental impact of their products throughout their life.”

The EPA's web site also quotes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defining EPR as:

“an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of the product's life cycle.”

The aim, the NSW EPA continues, is both to keep products and materials out of the waste stream and to reduce their environmental impact. It says:

“...manufacturers can play a role beyond the point of sale or warranty by, for example, designing products that produce less waste and using fewer resources and more recycled components.”

In the United States of America, their EPA uses, rather than Extended Producer Responsibility, the term Product Stewardship which it describes as:

“Product Stewardship challenges us to reduce the life-cycle environmental effects of products. In doing so, it taps the shared ingenuity and responsibility of businesses, consumers, governments, and others.”

I want to share with you how the Australian publishing industry has tapped the shared ingenuity and responsibility of businesses, consumers, governments, and others to achieve the NSW EPA's aims of producers taking more responsibility for managing the environmental impact of their products throughout their life-cycle.

First, some background to the Publishers National Environment Bureau.

In 1989 the Federal Government established a Commission of Enquiry into recycling in Australia. This was followed by a request for an interim report on paper recycling. The Commission heard submissions in all capital cities from February to December of 1990.

A big issue was whether or not there should be legislation to require paper made in Australia to contain a specified percentage of recycled fibre.

A major conclusion of the Commission of Enquiry was:

“The Commission considers that government interventions to mandate certain required levels of recycled fibre contents would run the risk of encouraging inefficient forms of recycling which would invoke economic loss to the community, inadequately conserve resources and inappropriately protect the environment”.

Newspapers operate at the cutting edge of public opinion. In addition companies like News Limited operate internationally and have a very good idea of what makes civilisations tick. Accordingly News Limited established an Environmental Secretariat in May 1990 and began building a database on newsprint consumption and waste disposal across Australia.

From this base News Limited was able to convince the other producers of newspapers and magazines that there was a need for a publisher funded environment body and the Publishers National Environment Bureau was formed in 1990 to represent the major publishers of newspapers and magazines.

The Members of the PNEB are:

ACP Publishing, APN Newspapers, Independent Print Media Group (the Hannan Group), John Fairfax, News Limited, Marinya Holdings (covering Rural Press), Pacific Publications, PMP Limited and West Australian Newspapers Limited.

So, how did the manufacturer of newsprint in Australia and the users of its product — the publishers — adopt the principles of Product Stewardship, utilising the shared ingenuity and responsibility of businesses, consumers, governments, and others?

It was necessary to create a market for old newspapers and old magazines in Australia that would encourage the growth of kerbside recovery for recycling. The next step was to underpin the commercial and environmental viability of newspaper recycling. This the then manufacturers, Australian Newsprint Mills and Tasman Pulp and Paper — now Norske Skog Australasia — and the publishers — represented by the PNEB — set out to do.

Before the PNEB began in 1990 there was little organised kerbside collection of old newspapers and magazines for recycling. At the beginning of the nineties 28 per cent of newsprint consumed in Australia was recovered and it mostly went into local cardboard manufacture.

The Publishers and the newsprint producers in Australia and New Zealand, formed an industry liaison – the Newsprint Producer/Publisher Group. The original members were Australian Newsprint Mills, Tasman Pulp & Paper and the PNEB.

News Limited owned 50 per cent of Australia Newsprint Mills and Tasman Pulp and Paper owned the other half.

In 1990 there was no newsprint recycled into new newsprint in Australia. There were, and still are, two mills producing newsprint, one at Boyer in Tasmania and one at Albury on the NSW/Victoria border.

The Boyer mill started operation in 1942 and while originally based on eucalyptus was by 1990 using mainly plantation grown radiata pine. Albury was based on radiata pine and started operations in 1981.

It is important to note that the material used in newsprint making in Australia is actually a by-product from the production of sawn timber.

Normal forestry husbandry is for the pine forest to be thinned to allow trees to grow large enough to be turned into timber for housing and construction.

These thinnings used to lie rotting in the forest before the newsprint mills began papermaking. When the mature plantation is harvested, the materials that cannot be used for veneer or saw logs go to the paper mill along with sawmill off-cuts.

There was no problem with this fibre supply to either of these mills, but the need to include a recycled component in Australian-made newsprint was politically correct and environmentally sound. Now the mills are owned by Norske Skog Australasia.

As water is on everyone's mind these days, let me show you the effective use of water in the making of newsprint.

One megalitre of water produces 24,500 dollars worth of newsprint compared to 189 dollars worth of rice and 612 dollars worth of cotton.

And, when you look at the jobs generated for each thousand megalitres of water, it ranges from one for grazing, 30 on farm jobs for horticulture and 333 direct and indirect jobs at the newsprint mill.

Back in 1990 no newsprint with recycled content was in use and the publishers were starting a concerted push into four colour work which demanded the best possible quality newsprint. About 28 per cent of Australian newsprint used then was recovered – mainly for cardboard manufacture.

They were heading into uncharted waters, but as part of their move into Product Stewardship, the publishers committed to using the yet unseen, untried paper with recycled fibre.

Australian Newsprint Mills committed to building a recycling and de-inking plant at the Albury newsprint mill. The recycling plant was commissioned in 1993 and expanded in 1995 at a total cost of one hundred and thirty five million dollars – a big commitment to a new technology and a new product.

However, this was only the start of the industry's Product Stewardship. Having guaranteed a market for recycled newsprint by agreeing to buy it for their newspapers, the publishers and the manufacturer worked to guarantee a supply of recovered paper for de-inking.

In the time from making the decision to build the de-inking plant and its actual commissioning, the publishers, through the PNEB, created an Interim Support Fund to which they contributed a total of six million dollars over three years to encourage and support the recovery and recycling of old newspapers.

The money was made available to government, private industry and research bodies on the recommendations of the State and Federal environment agencies, for projects which:

- kick-started local government kerbside collection schemes,
- underwrote recycling and handling facilities,
- gave export incentives,
- supported research into collection, handling and processing of old newspapers and
- funded development of new uses for old newspapers.

Two industries which had lasting benefit from this funding are those now producing home insulation and cat litter materials from old newspapers. One that did not get off the ground was a scheme to make papier mache coffins from old newspapers – which is probably taking the cradle to the grave concept to its logical conclusion.

Australian Newsprint Mills, apart from the one hundred and thirty five million dollars spent on the de-inking plant, set up a company, Kerbside Papers, to organise contracts with local government and paper traders to purchase the old newspapers and magazines collected at kerbside, and this helped stimulate kerbside collection of all recyclable materials by offering fixed price, long term contracts to councils and processors.

Each year since 1995, the Albury mill has de-inked 100,000 tonnes of old newspapers and about 60,000 tonnes of old magazines. The newsprint produced at Albury contains from 20 per cent to 55 per cent recycled fibre, making Australian newsprint one of the highest re-users of its recycled materials.

Another aspect of its stewardship of its product is the offer every year, by the publishers, through the PNEB, to the Federal and State governments of one million dollars worth of advertising space in their publications free to promote the recycling of newspapers and magazines. PNEB members add to this by running at their own cost, additional advertising to encourage recycling.

Another element is education. The PNEB produces education materials for teachers and local council education officers and distributes them free including the 12 minute film, The Recycling Challenge, which won the inaugural Australia Video Awards Gold Medal for education videos.

In 2002 and last year, the PNEB and the environment group Planet Ark ran an environment awareness competition for primary schools around the country. For this year we are working on a valuable collection of resources for schools made available free on CD. We also maintain our website with research information and education materials at www.pneb.com.au.

We sponsor research into better collection and handling systems, such as our support of the NSW Jurisdictional Recycling Group's recent study of the environmental, social and financial outcomes of various council collections systems, the subject of a paper at this conference.

Another step by the industry in its Product Stewardship was the earlier mentioned Newsprint Producer/Publisher Group negotiating a ground-breaking industry waste reduction agreement under the ANZECC process. ANZECC, the Australia New Zealand Environment & Conservation Council has been succeeded by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council..

Under the ANZECC process there have been a series of Industry Waste Reduction Agreements: the first from 1991 to 1995, then from 1996 to 2000 and currently from 2001 to 2005 which set out recycling targets and reporting mechanisms.

These are voluntary agreements between the industry and Federal and State governments — a national approach. Both sides to the compact agreed that no legislation is necessary and if the industry partners meet the objectives of the agreed plan then mandated solutions are unnecessary.

The parties also agree that kerbside recycling should be market driven and that subsidies are inappropriate.

This collaboration between industry and government has resulted in Australia having the highest newspaper recycling rate in the world. In 2002 we achieved 72.8 per cent recycling of all newsprint used in Australia and we have been consistently higher than the United States since 1997.

The target for our current five year agreement is 74 per cent by the end of 2005. Research shows that almost seven per cent of the total consumed is unrecoverable – it was used in lighting fires, garden mulch mats, paint drop sheets and masking and other household uses that destroy it or render it useless for recycling.

If we apply the 80/80 concept — eighty per cent of people recycling eighty per cent of their newspapers — we would get 64 per cent recycling. With the unrecoverable paper taken into account, we now have almost 90 per cent of the households recycling 90 per cent of their newspapers – an excellent outcome for the nation and the environment.

The publishing industry's Product Stewardship extends to the newsprint manufacturing and newspaper production areas, with all parts of the supply and production chain working constantly to produce and use raw materials as efficiently and as environmentally sensitively as possible.

The standard newsprint basis weight – in grams per square metre, has been reduced from the long-standing 48.8 grams to 45 and in some grades to 42 grams. The manufacturer, Norske Skog, has improved handling and transport of reels of newsprint — each weighing up to 1.5 tonnes — to reduce and almost eliminate damage between the mill and the press, and subsequent wastage of paper.

In the printing plants, newspaper and magazine printers wage a constant war against paper waste, consisting of white waste during press start-up and of printed waste in running enough copies to achieve quality colour.

Also, the publishing companies wage war against waste by constantly monitoring returns from newsagents to try to exactly match supply to demand.

None of the printing wastes or the newsagents returns are really wasted as this is top quality paper which brings the best prices on the used paper market.

In conclusion, the newsprint manufacturing industry and the publishing industry in Australia have embraced Product Stewardship by:

- Helping to create and maintain an atmosphere in which householders and communities see environmental and social benefits in recycling newspapers and magazines

- In underwriting kerbside collections by offering long term fixed price contracts to councils and processors.
- Making a considerable investment in plant and equipment to recycle and de-ink a significant percentage of recovered old newspapers and magazines
- By underpinning the viability of recycled fibre being used in new newsprint by stipulating this in supply contracts with the manufacturer
- Producing and distributing free to schools and councils education materials encouraging recycling.
- Making all information freely available on the PNEB web site
- Supporting Federal and State Governments' promotion of newspaper and magazine recycling through one million dollars worth of advertising space each year
- Constantly working to minimise printed spoils and newsagents returns and
- Sponsoring research into recycling and collection systems such as the recent NSW JRG council collection and processing study.

Where we go from here? We are currently producing a Mid-Term Review of our present 2001-2005 Industry Waste Reduction Agreement and with the publishers and the newsprint producer committed to Producer Responsibility, we are working towards negotiating a fourth five-year agreement during 2005.

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