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The 'New' Newspaper Paradigm

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At the beginning of 1990, only 28 per cent of newsprint used in Australia was recycled, almost entirely into cardboard. By the end of last year, 72.4 per cent was recovered for recycling.

Newspaper recycling is one of the great success stories of extended producer responsibility, which the Australian publishing industry initiated before the expression became popular with governments. And this is what I want to share with you today: how by working with the concept of extended producer responsibility, the publishing industry and the newsprint manufacturer are ensuring that the newspaper you read every day is a sustainable product.

Think about it: a newspaper has a shorter shelf life than milk. Milk can stay on the supermarket shelf for days – a newspaper only lasts hours. And, after the news has been extracted by the consumer, the paper can be completely recycled to create new newsprint to bring the next day's news back to the consumer. Nothing is wasted – if the old newspapers are recovered in good condition, they can be made into new newspapers again and again.

Of all the other materials collected in the kerbside recycling system, none has a higher recycling rate than newspaper.

The 2001 national rate for recovery for recycling of newsprint used in Australia of 72.4 per cent is, we believe, the highest in the world.

Key aspects of this recovery effort are the Local Government kerbside collections which research shows that 97 per cent of Australians take part in.

The draft waste strategies document just released by Resource New South Wales states that paper accounts for about two-thirds of kerbside materials collected by weight, glass around 28%, plastic 6%, steel 1% and aluminium cans less than 1%.

One of the success stories of Australian newspaper recycling has been the volumes of newsprint diverted from landfill. We calculate that in 2001 only 142,000 tonnes of old newspapers ended up in landfill, 221,000 tonnes less than the 1990 figure. Against the State target of 50% reduction in overall landfill by 2000 we actually achieved a 50.8% reduction, and by 2001 a 56.7% reduction for old newspapers.

At the heart of our success has been the willingness of Governments and industry—through the then Australian-New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) process—to write voluntary agreements for newspaper recycling, and the willingness of industry to incur considerable expenditure in ensuring that those commitments can be met.

The PNEB was formed in 1990 by major publishers of newspapers and magazines.

Key points in the establishment of the PNEB were:

To represent all the major publishers—newspaper and magazine—in Australia.

To reflect the growing community interest in the environment and in particular in recycling.

A desire to help Governments make viable decisions on recycling old newspapers and magazines.

To demonstrate a significant contribution to publication grade paper waste recovery and recycling.

The PNEB formed an industry liaison with the newsprint producers in Australia and New Zealand to form the Newsprint Producer/Publisher Group and this group negotiated a series of Industry Waste Reduction Agreements with the States and Commonwealth Governments under the then Australian New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council process.

The PNEB Members are: ACP magazine group; APN Newspapers; Fairfax Group; Marinya Media - IPMG and Rural Press; News Limited; Pacific Publications; PMP Limited and West Australian Newspapers.

In 1992, the Publisher/Producer Group's first voluntary Industry Waste Reduction Agreement started with a target of at least 40% newsprint recycling rate by 1995. This rate in 1995 actually achieved was 52.7%.

The IWRA principles are:

- A voluntary agreement between industry and governments.
- It is a National approach.
- No legislation is necessary.
- It is market driven, and there should be
- No co-mingling of newspapers and magazines with other recyclables.

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The last item is important, but we realize that with the steady move to wheelie bins, and larger bins, it is more economical for councils to put all recyclables in one bin and sort everything out in a Materials Recovery Facility.

Unfortunately it is also more economical to run MRFs faster rather than slower, particularly with recyclables piling up in the receiving bays, and the quality of the output declines. Of course, this reduces the value of the output and the value of recycling.

In 1996, the Second Industry Waste Reduction Agreement was signed with a target: at least 60% newsprint recycling rate by 2000. We actually achieved 69.8% in 1999.

The third and current Industry Waste Reduction Agreement began in 2001 with a target of at least 74% newsprint recycling rate by 2005. We achieved 72.4% in the first year (with 74.8% in New South Wales).

New South Wales has consistently grown faster than the national average over the last three years and as an average of the fast five years is higher than the national average and is surpassed only by Victoria.

Recovering old newspapers and magazines helps re-use a valuable resource.

In 2001 almost 500,000 tonnes of old newspapers were recovered., Of this, 96,000 tonnes were de-inked at Albury, NSW for new newsprint, plus 60,000 tonnes of old magazines in the special plant opened by newsprint manufacturer (then Australian Newsprint Mills, now Norske Skog) in 1993 at a cost of \$133million.

Also in 2001, 133,000 tonnes of old newspapers were exported; 234,000 tonnes were used in Australia for cardboard and 31,000 tonnes were put to other uses such as egg cartons, kitty litter and home insulation.

How does recycling newspapers and magazines help the Environment?

Producing pulp for paper making through de-inking creates less Greenhouse Gas because de-inking paper uses one-sixth of the energy of pulping wood.

It reduces pressure on landfill. As I said at the beginning, at the start of 1990, 72 per cent of newsprint used in Australia went to landfill, now 72 per cent is collected for recycling.

By the way, forget the old line about how many trees it takes to make a given newspaper or magazine or emotive offerings like how much rainforest is destroyed to produce a Saturday edition of your local paper.

Let me set the record straight: The material used in newsprint manufacture in Australia is a by-product from the production of timber. Plantation pine forests are thinned to allow the best trees to grow large enough to be turned into timber for housing and construction.

These thinnings lie rotting in the forest unless the newsprint manufacturer—the scavenger of the forests—collects them. Sawmill waste can be used for newsprint too.

No old growth eucalypt is used in newsprint manufacture.

Both Australian mills had a plentiful supply of pulp from the forest thinning operations, but the need to include a recycled component in Australian-made newsprint was environmentally sound.

Australia's publishers have underwritten the operations of the Albury de-inking plant by specifying levels of recycled content in their newsprint contracts and by signing long-term contracts for the paper.

In its part, the newsprint producer, Norske Skog, has in place contracts for Councils and collectors at a fixed price and guaranteed quantities.

To kick start the serious recycling of old newspapers and magazines in Australia, the PNEB set up a Interim Support Fund in 1991 to encourage newspaper and magazine recycling research, initiatives and infrastructure leading up to the commissioning of the recycling plant at Albury – and over next 10 years publishers distributed \$6 million to Local and State Governments and to private ventures endorsed by the State and Commonwealth Governments.

More than \$2million of this went to collection support schemes, and much of this went, both directly and indirectly, to Local Government.

The publishers' fund helped development of products to re-use old newspapers and magazines and some which made it to market include home insulation, kitty litter and worm-farm materials.

One that did not get off the ground, or rather under it, was a plan to make papier mache coffins...

In addition each year we provide \$1,000,000 in free advertising space in our publications throughout Australia for the Commonwealth and State Governments to promote newspaper and magazine recycling.

We also directly promote recycling through our educational materials - Fast Facts – an A4 colour leaflet, an A2 wall poster showing how newsprint is produced using recycled and raw fibre and a bright, entertaining, non-commercial video showing how newspaper recycling works.

We have just launched our National Schools Recycling Awareness Awards in conjunction with Planet Ark. We are asking Primary classes 4 to 6 (plus 7 in Western Australia) to produce a press advertisement promoting recycling of newspapers.

There are awards for each State and a national award. The winners will be announced in newspapers during Planet Ark's National Recycling Week in November.

Late last year we engaged Melbourne-based research company Nolan-ITU to determine what happens to the 28 per cent of newsprint that is not collected at kerbside or from pressrooms.

The study first asked households if newsprint was used for any of seven possible uses: wrapping food scraps or rubbish, animal cages and bedding, lighting fires, mulching gardens, drop sheets for painting and reference/archiving.

From their findings Nolan-ITU have estimated that, using an average weight of 250 grams, the total of this re-used newspaper was 49,564 tonnes a year or 6.8 per cent of total consumption (based on the year 2000 figures).

Quoting the report, "If this unavailable material is taken out of potential recovery, the [year 2000] recovery rate actually represents a recovery of 75 per cent of all available material."

If this is applied to the 2001 figure of 72.4 per cent, we have actually recovered a total of 78 per cent of the available old newspapers.

The researchers also carried out an audit to assess the amount of available—not contaminated or re-used—newspaper entering the domestic garbage stream that could potentially be recovered.

From this and other research, Nolan ITU concluded that there was a further 16 per cent of the total newsprint consumption with the potential for recovery for recycling.

However, to turn this potential into actual recovery required some paradigm shifts,

first, by local councils improving their kerbside collections by moving from bundles to paper crates or paper-only bins and by increasing collection frequency (and moving to smaller bins) and second by MRFs improving the quality of their sorting by reducing losses.

Education is one of the underpinnings of our Industry Waste Reduction Agreements.

As I have mentioned, we have produced a wall chart that explains how newsprint recycling works, an information sheet on how newspaper and magazine recycling improves our environment and a video “The Recycling Challenge” aimed at school children.

The video uses a popular TV kid show host and is loosely based on Mission Impossible – and it’s impossible not to like Ben Hewett, the young reporter on the Seven Network. The video was made with financial help from Norske Skog Australasia and PaperlinX.

Let me show you a snippet. . .

You can see that full video on the PNEB stand outside and if anyone wants a copy for their education officers to show, please let me know.

In conclusion, we know that most newspaper and magazine recovery is from kerbside and research shows us that 97 per cent of Australians take part in recycling at home, making our voluntary participation and recovery rate the highest in the world.

Looking ahead, we need to prevent the community becoming blase about recycling; we need Local Government support for robust kerbside collection systems plus maximum separation at source and we need handling and processing systems that respect the waste hierarchy.

Thank you for your attention.