

In my opinion

Broader producer responsibility



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These are interesting days for product stewardship. The days of strict extended producer responsibility (EPR) being forced by governments upon unsuspecting and entirely unwilling industries have waned. Recycling at end of life is no longer seen as the sole means of demonstrating product stewardship. Broader aspects of sustainability and their roles in reducing the life-cycle impacts of products across supply chains are recognised more than ever before.

Globally, the business case for product stewardship and EPR (broadly defined) is increasingly recognised and championed. Major multinationals are promoting and actively lobbying in favour of broad product stewardship and EPR approaches.

Why, and why now? Enough different approaches have been adopted in jurisdictions to create a patchwork of programs that can increase program costs. As they should, businesses seek to reduce their costs and create uniform solutions that are capable of crossing borders. In Australia, there's an estimated \$147 million net benefit to having nationally consistent product stewardship approaches.

Producer responsibility organisations are trying to recover an increasingly diverse range of products and having to reach more marginal or remote locations while providing value to producers. Approaches that are nationally or internationally harmonised are therefore quite appealing.

Industry leaders such as Nestlé Waters North America are now actively lobbying for EPR legislation not only to address 'free riders' but also due to long-term concerns about the availability and quality of feedstocks.

Similar concerns are causing electronics manufacturers to promote product stewardship internationally. Of even greater concern though, is the significant risk to brand reputations of electronics being dumped in places such as Ghana where citizens are being exposed to toxic fumes as part of recovering precious metals. These concerns are resulting in stronger uptake of internationally recognised recycling standards and certification schemes for electronics.

Building upon stakeholder consultations and a publicly released discussion paper, the Australian Government will be releasing in the near future a framework for accrediting voluntary product stewardship schemes under Australia's *Product Stewardship Act 2011* (the Act). Australia and New Zealand have been willing to give producers the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of voluntary approaches in demonstrating product stewardship before regulating. This approach is being watched closely by stakeholders in other countries, especially industry stakeholders.

Programs that give producers flexibility in delivering against agreed performance-based program outcomes, as exemplified by British Columbia, are being scrutinised by governments and industries keen to implement product stewardship while minimising regulatory interference. Such approaches are mutually beneficial, and therefore more likely to be implemented in the foreseeable future.

Prioritisation of products and schemes has been a key aspect of product stewardship for decades, and priorities have certainly evolved over time. Various countries, including Australia and New Zealand, will soon be taking a closer look at which products should be targeted for future product stewardship or EPR efforts. The Australian Government is currently making appointments to a Product Stewardship Advisory Group authorised under the Act to advise the Minister on products to be addressed.

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In the US, an estimated \$2 billion in savings to public programs would result from product stewardship for electronics, paint, batteries, medical sharps from home use, fluorescent lighting, mercury thermostats, pesticides and phone books. As public budgets get tighter and tighter, expect industries putting these products on the market to be asked to bear a much greater share of program costs.

The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Global Product Stewardship Council.

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