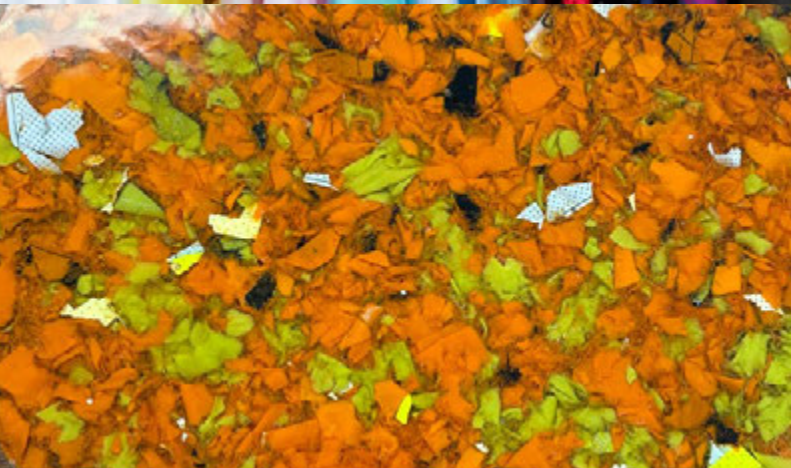


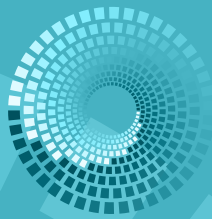


**Product
Stewardship
Centre of
Excellence**

2024 Annual Impact Report







**Product
Stewardship
Centre of
Excellence**

Annual Impact Report 2024

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The Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence is an independent, not for profit charity, that seeks to reduce waste generation and create positive environmental and social outcomes through sustainable design, resource conservation, reuse, repair, and recycling. The Centre helps businesses, industries, and product stewardship organisations to adopt a strong lifecycle approach to deliver their ESG and circular economy objectives. We also provide independent advice on product stewardship priorities to National, State and Territory governments.

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- Textile Recyclers Australia
- Australian Product Stewardship Forum featuring Sasha Titchkosky, Koskela
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Inside cover photography courtesy of:

- The Reconnect Project
- ReSource
- Australian Product Stewardship Forum featuring David Woolcott, CEO King Living and The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for the Environment and Water
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Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and acknowledge them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Foreword



The NSW Environmental Protection Authority and the NSW Government more broadly are committed to transitioning NSW to the circular economy.

When it comes to using materials efficiently, Australia has plenty of room for improvement. Our economic output per kilogram of materials consumed is less than half that of the OECD benchmark.¹

Creating waste has been a central plank of many business models. Planned obsolescence – designing a product with a purposely limited life – entered business in 1924, when car maker General Motors began changing its models annually to stimulate consumer demand. It became the norm for consumer goods to rapidly become unusable or unfashionable, creating vast amounts of unnecessary waste.

But moves are under way to counter this. ‘Product as a service’, a subscription-based business model, has been adopted for products from cars to baby gear and medical equipment. **When the service provider owns the product, it favours durability.**

Regulation too can help promote product longevity. The European Union’s Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, which came into force in July 2024, enables

the setting of performance and information conditions – known as ‘ecodesign requirements’ – for most categories of physical goods, to make products more durable, reusable, upgradable and repairable, and more sustainable in other ways.² This legislation is a model that could be followed elsewhere.

Here in NSW, the NSW Government is laying the groundwork for the transition to a circular economy by developing markets for recycled materials through regulation and purchasing power. The NSW Government is currently developing a Protection of the Environment Policy (PEP) for public infrastructure projects. This will require prioritising the use of recycled and remanufactured materials where possible.

Another notable success in ‘closing the loop’ is the NSW container deposit scheme, *Return and Earn*. In effect

¹ <https://minister.dccew.gov.au/plibersek/media-releases/joint-media-release-productivity-commission-inquiry-explore-circular-economy-benefits>

² https://commission.europa.eu/energy-climate-change-environment/standards-tools-and-labels/products-labelling-rules-and-requirements/ecodesign-sustainable-products-regulation_en

“We have commissioned the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to help us design a best-in-class approach for end-of-life batteries.”

this has a built-in market. To date, over 12.3 billion drink containers have been returned through the *Return and Earn* network. This has created a clean and valuable material stream for recovery and recycling, with more than a million tonnes of materials recycled to date.

Such steps are valuable, but we need to do more. For example, in NSW the waste levy is designed to be an economic incentive to divert waste from landfill. It can only work if we have enough waste transport, processing, disposal and recycling infrastructure in place. To make sure this happens, NSW is developing a comprehensive waste infrastructure plan.

As part of considering the whole ‘waste system’, we are also turning our minds to how product stewardship arrangements can help us tackle wastes that are hazardous to human health and the environment, such as flammable waste solvents and end-of-life batteries.

Batteries play an important role as we transition to a decarbonised society. But as their use has grown, so has the number of battery-related fires. Existing product stewardship schemes to manage end-of-life batteries, such as B-Cycle, have done important work to enable

the safe collection and recycling of batteries. We have recently commissioned the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to prepare assessment criteria that will help us design a best-in-class product stewardship approach for managing the risks posed by end-of-life batteries. This work will draw on the extensive expertise and experience of the Centre’s team, and that of others across the battery supply chain. With batteries, at present we focus on end-of-life solutions. However, the Centre itself has noted the need to “reach back up the supply chain ... to prevent and minimise waste.”³

I would like to acknowledge the important work the Product Stewardship Centre for Excellence has done toward advancing product stewardship in NSW, and I look forward to working together in the future on our shared goals to create positive environmental and social outcomes and drive towards a circular economy.

Tony Chappel

Chief Executive Officer, NSW EPA

Message from the Directors

Achieving a positive impact on the environment and society by educating, improving and accelerating producer responsibility across the entire product lifecycle is the Centre's mission. Over the past 12 months our team has worked hard to do just that and make a meaningful contribution.

Our inaugural Forum in May brought together business, government, academia and international experts to report on, and discuss where, why and how product stewardship can result in improved outcomes across industries, sectors and communities.

The Forum featured a Q and A session and dialogue with Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, discussing opportunities to “shift the dial” on circularity.

We have also provided practical advice, information, resources, webinars and online training to increase and improve the required knowledge to operationalise product stewardship objectives and approaches.

Engagement and collaboration with diverse stakeholders has also been a priority and includes direct input and advice to policymakers, producer responsibility organisations, brands, retailers, national and state government agencies, local government, and environment and consumer NGOs, to inform, establish, improve and implement product stewardship actions.

The Centre has now been operating for just over 18 months as an independent not-for-profit registered charity and over this time we have evolved our business model to be financially self-sustaining. This includes:

- Establishing our Partnership Program, where to date eleven like-minded organisations have signed up to transforming product value chains and creating a sustainable future.
- Launching our online training program for product stewardship professionals and other stakeholders eager to continue their professional development.
- Introducing a paywall to cover costs to produce and publish our white papers, practice notes and webinars.

Major outcomes for 2024 include:

- Working with clothing brands to establish an independent not for profit product stewardship organisation and governance arrangements for Seamless, Australia's new clothing product stewardship scheme.
- Hosting the inaugural Australian Product Stewardship Forum that focused on the theme of Producer Responsibility and Product Sustainability Across the Lifecycle.
- Convening the inaugural meeting of the Scheme CEOs Forum.
- Publishing two new white papers – *Global scan of packaging stewardship schemes: Lessons for Australia and Sustainability and the Waste Hierarchy*.



Centre of Excellence directors (L-R): Louise McGrath, John Gertsakis, Nick Florin, Tim Powell, Rose Read.

- Publishing four new practice notes – *Data and Reporting Guidelines for Product Stewardship Schemes*; *The Circular Economy and Product Stewardship*; *Strategic Design and Product Stewardship*; and a *Checklist for Pilot Projects*.
- Publishing seven new case studies to recognise product stewardship achievements, featuring progress and business excellence in the stewardship of mobile phones, clothing, e-bikes, bedding, furniture and bulk containers.
- Updating product stewardship scheme and business initiatives annual performance data in the Product Stewardship Gateway (*go to the State of Play section of this report for an update on product stewardship activity in Australia*).

In our advisory role this year the Centre has worked with state container deposit schemes and the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures on opportunities for harmonisation, increasing redemption rates, and social returns on investment methodologies. We also worked closely with the NSW EPA to prepare assessment

criteria to help design a best-in-class product stewardship approach for managing the risks posed by end-of-life batteries.

The Centre provided advice and support to the Treated Timber Product Stewardship Working Group, which included the preparation of a prospectus seeking industry and government investment to develop a Treater Timber Stewardship Scheme. This has been successful in securing government support.

The Centre has also contributed to federal and state policy making through measures including:

- A submission and presentation to the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government's Waste Reduction and Recycling Policies.
- A submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Opportunities in the Circular Economy.
- Submissions to the Federal Environment Minister's Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group.

“As the Centre submitted the Senate inquiry, its key recommendation to federal and state governments is to fast-track and better resource regulatory reform efforts that are underway for key products and materials.”

- A 2024-25 pre-budget submission to Treasury.
- A submission to the Western Australian government’s National Project on Options for End-of-life Tyres.
- A submission to the South Australian EPA Review of the *Environment Protection (Waste to Resources) Policy 2010*.
- A submission to Western Australia’s Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030.

A common message in all these submissions is the urgent need for federal, state and territory governments to introduce well-designed, nationally-aligned producer responsibility regulations for photovoltaic systems, batteries, electronic and electrical equipment, packaging, tyres, bedding, clothing, furniture, and treated timber. Copies of the submissions can be downloaded from the Centre’s [website](#).

For product stewardship to be effective across the entire product lifecycle, well-designed producer responsibility regulatory measures are needed that:

1. Ensure a high level of participation and investment by producers, brands, importers and retailers.
2. Clearly define objectives, outcomes and performance targets.
3. Establish a robust governance structure that clearly defines the responsibilities and roles of all stakeholders and ensures transparency on investment and outcomes, including public and credible reporting.
4. Provide financial incentives that drive business and consumers behaviour changes – business as usual will not deliver the products and services required to achieve a circular economy.
5. Incorporate effective marketing and communication to ensure businesses and consumers actively participate in creating positive changes, new patterns of consumption and a sustainable future.



John Gertsakis and The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP Minister for the Environment and Water.

There has been important progress in recent times. For example, the Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group (CEMAG), which advises Minister for Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek suggested in its interim report that the government consider new Extended Producer Responsibility regulatory frameworks that include product design mandates.

However, major challenges remain. As the Centre told the Senate inquiry into waste and recycling, key barriers in Australia to designing and implementing more effective product stewardship initiatives include the low rates of business participation and adequate investment in existing and emerging industry-led voluntary schemes.

These schemes are often characterised by an over-emphasis on end-of-life interventions, rather than preventative interventions to design out waste and pollution.

As the Centre submitted the Senate inquiry, its key recommendation to federal and state governments is to fast-track and better resource regulatory reform efforts that are underway for key products and materials.

Effective and efficient product stewardship depends on outcome-focused collaboration and structural reform, and we look forward to what 2025 will bring in partnership with many other proactive organisations that are seeking to reduce the environmental and human health impacts of products. We trust this Annual Impact Report provides a useful summary of the Centre's positive impacts, achievements and activities during 2024.

**John Gertsakis, Rose Read, Dr Nick Florin,
Louise McGrath, Tim Powell, Steve Baty**
Centre Directors

Partnership Program

The Centre's Partnership Program aims to take product stewardship to another level through practice, policy and positive impact across the product lifecycle. By working with proactive producers, brands, associations, product stewardship organisations (PSOs) and not for profit organisations, we are tackling the challenges head-on, while harnessing the opportunities to achieve real-world circular economy outcomes.

Read more about what our partners say regarding the relevance and significance of product stewardship to their organisations and their initiatives.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Meat & Livestock Australia

**Alicia Waddington, Market Access
& Supply Chain Innovations**

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) Red Meat Packaging Stewardship fosters a collaborative approach to innovation and circularity ensuring a more sustainable future for Australian red meat production and packaging. The Australian red meat industry relies on the functionality of packaging design to deliver its product to consumers both domestically and internationally. Packaging plays an important functional role in the food safety, product integrity, and shelf-life. Product Stewardship helps the industry to remain informed of potential market access barriers and to address the need for increased awareness and education as new packaging alternatives emerge that align with both environmental objectives and industry standards. With the commencement of MLA's Red Meat Packaging Stewardship in 2023, supported by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence Partnership Program, the packaging supply chain and red meat industry now have a multi-stakeholder forum to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing among producers, manufacturers, packaging suppliers, retailers, and industry associations to uphold the reputable quality of Australian red meat.

Telstra

**Audrey Chinn, Senior Climate and
Environment Specialist**

Telstra is committed to embedding circular economy principles in how we design, develop, manage and operate our networks – as well as the products we put out to market. We further developed our eco-design standards, stepped up our environmental ambition to reduce waste and recycle devices and expanded our modern refurbishment program. To take tangible action on circular economy we have focused on both the resources we use, and the waste generated by our operations, as well as the waste we generate from the manufacturing, distribution and use of our products. By improving our use of natural resources across our organisation, we can also help our customers, suppliers, contractors and partners do the same. In recognition of this leadership, we were awarded highly commended status in the category 'Best stewardship outcomes – individual business or brand (large company)' at the Product Stewardship Awards. In FY24, we started a program to embed sustainability across our planning, procurement and product design processes, including a focus on eco-design.

Tyre Stewardship Australia

Lina Goodman, Chief Executive Officer

For over a decade, **Tyre Stewardship Australia (TSA)** has led the Tyre Product Stewardship Scheme that supports the recovery and productive use of end-of-life tyres in Australia. TSA is all about achieving best practice product stewardship and championing Australia's circular economy for tyres. TSA is a 'strategic partner' supporter of the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to help accelerate and strengthen product stewardship action across Australia. Tyres are a case study of the barriers and half-measures that are holding Australia back on material circularity, and the opportunities on offer if government resolves to strengthen results through regulation. The work of the PSCOE is essential to inform government and align the strategic direction of product stewardship schemes in Australia in pursuit of excellence.

Australian Bedding Stewardship Council

Kylie Roberts-Frost, Chief Executive Officer

At the **Australian Bedding Stewardship Council (ABSC)**, we believe that product stewardship extends beyond end-of-life management to encompass responsible design, manufacturing, and consumption. Through our involvement with the Centre of Excellence, we work with our members to adopt sustainable sourcing, smarter product design, re-use and refurbishment practices. Our team participates in workshops, webinars, and access the Centre's resources, to integrate best practices into our strategies, accelerating the adoption of circular economy principles in the bedding industry. In partnership with the Centre, we are making stewardship a core part of innovation, driving sustainable outcomes for both our members and the environment.

PREMIUM PARTNER

Solar Bollard Lighting

Mike Arieni, Managing Director and Founder

Solar Bollard Lighting® has been at the forefront of renewable energy powered lighting design and innovation since commercialising the world's first integrated all-in-one solar light over two decades ago. Ingrained in our DNA is to push technological boundaries whilst achieving a sustainable balance between business, society and the environment. Through guidance and knowledge sharing from the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence we have accelerated our circular position by designing out waste and increasing operational longevity in our current product upgrade cycle to complement development of strategic guidelines for our own Product Stewardship Program implementation for end-of-life cycle product recovery.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS



PREMIUM PARTNER





Solar panel recycling output samples. Photo credit: PV Industries.

SUPPORTERS

Battery Stewardship Council

Libby Chaplin, Chief Executive Officer

The **Battery Stewardship Council**, a proud member of the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence, is committed to building a circular economy for batteries. Through the B-cycle Scheme, we advocate for strong standards in safe product design, collaborate with governments on regulatory reform, and work to divert all used batteries from landfill. For us, battery stewardship is an inclusive and all-encompassing approach to creating a circular economy. It ensures that all Australians have access to safe battery products and accessible avenues to recycle batteries at end-of-life.

B&C Plastics

Royston Kent, Chief Executive Officer

I believe that Product Stewardship with good governance is a crucial pathway to fostering a Circular Procurement mindset, and at **B&C Plastics**, we are proud to actively accelerate its adoption in Australia. Through our involvement in the Centre's Partnership Program, we are committed to designing and manufacturing products with circular intent—prioritising recycled and remanufactured materials.

We believe that recycling is not fully realised until the recycled content has been remanufactured into new products. By embracing product stewardship, we look to ensure the entire lifecycle of our products has been considered, from responsible sourcing to recycling and remanufacturing.

This proactive approach aligns with our GOAL of driving Circular Procurement, reducing plastic waste, and achieving sustainable outcomes for business, industry, and the broader economy.

The Reconnect Project

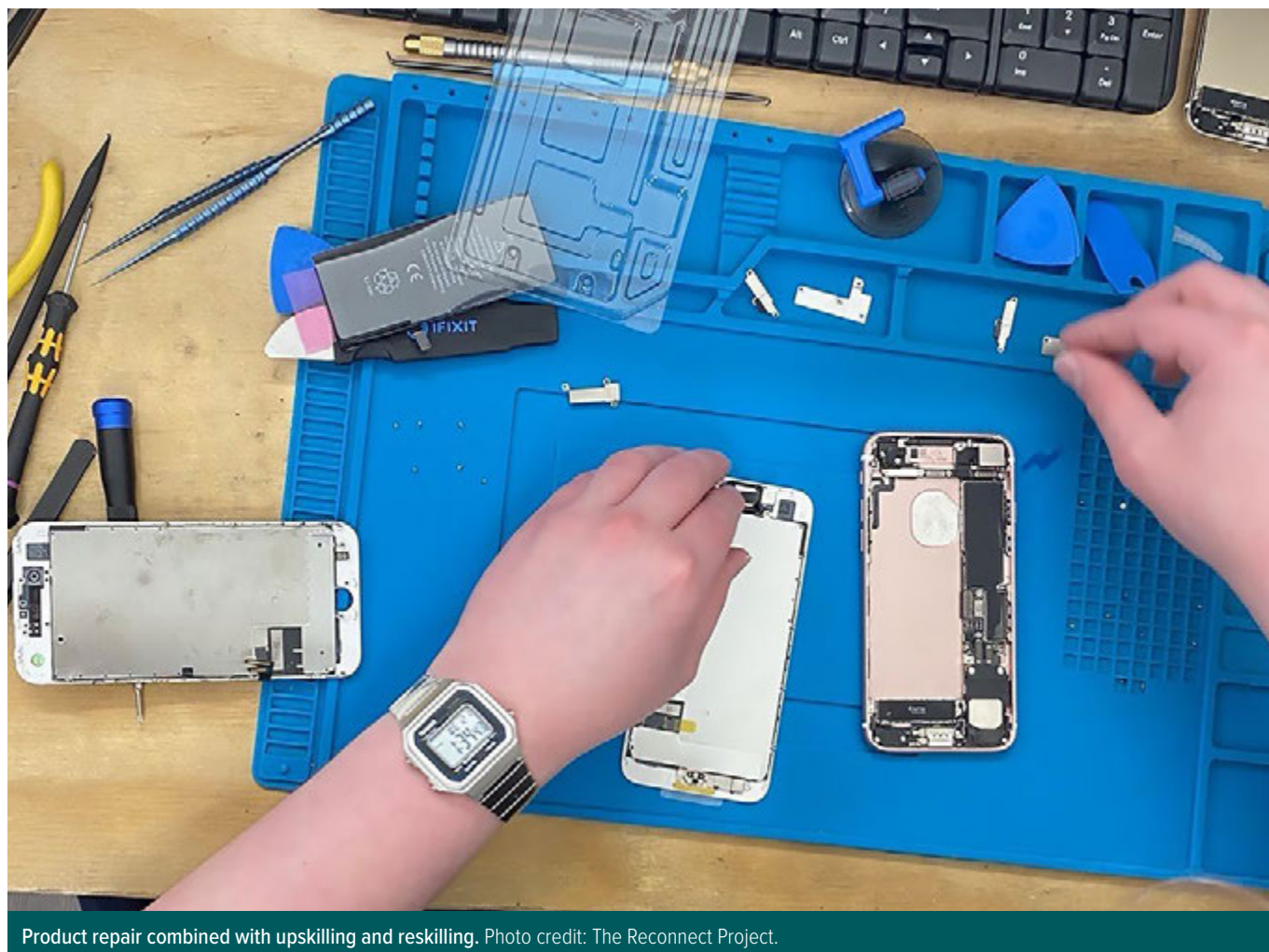
Annette Brodie, Founder and Chief Executive Officer

The provision of repair services is essential for a fully functioning circular economy – yet it is consistently overshadowed (or overlooked) in favour of recycling. As the 2024 winner of the National Banksia Sustainability Award for Circular Economy, The Reconnect Project is championing the importance of repair in the circular economy. We are an independent, non-profit entity that does not manufacture goods. The provision of affordable, quality repair services for mobile devices and electronics is the 'why' for our association with the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence.

Where does the responsibility lie for repair in the circular economy? Genuine product stewardship programs need to include access to repair services. In the absence of this, there is opportunity for independent, micro-business or social enterprise operators to flourish.

The Reconnect Project is committed to extending the life of already existing pieces of technology through repair and refurbishment. We provide training and employment in micro-electronic repairs for neurodivergent young adults. We see ourselves as stewards of the technology donated to us or brought to our workshop by a customer.

Our technicians take pride in their work, and as a social enterprise we take pride in our social and environmental impact, and our impact on inclusivity.



Product repair combined with upskilling and reskilling. Photo credit: The Reconnect Project.

Arcadis Australia Pacific

**Lloyd Parker, Principal Environmental Consultant,
Circular Economy and Waste Advisory**
Richard Collins, Associate Technical Director

At **ARCADIS**, we believe product stewardship is key to advancing Australia's circular economy, transforming how industries and consumers collaborate to keep products and materials in circulation. Our partnership with the PSCoE demonstrates our commitment to supporting real change by providing advisory services that integrate a whole-of-system view with targeted analysis around the critical leverage points. Our highly experienced Circular Economy team has delivered supply chain reviews, feasibility studies, recycling trials and advice on scheme design and activation, with a common goal to empower government, businesses, peak bodies, PSOs and the recovery sector. We work to provide the evidence base required to integrate product stewardship as a cornerstone of a thriving circular economy.

GS1 Australia

**Dharshi Hasthanayake, Manager –
Sustainability and Circularity**

Product stewardship is pivotal to advancing the circular economy. It unites supply chain partners by fostering collaboration and shared responsibility and is a real-world operational pathway for implementation. **GS1 Australia** is proud to collaborate with the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to drive change. The standards that enable the identification, capture and sharing of accurate product information across supply chains, across hundreds of countries and billions of products, can support the transparency and traceability required to close the loop and drive effective product stewardship. This partnership highlights our commitment to supporting Australian businesses in their transition to circularity through the power of global standards.

State of Play

2024 ACTIVITY

- 85 collective schemes and individual business initiatives currently operating (see **Table 1** for breakdown of number and type)
- 15 collective schemes in development
- 27 product or material classes covered by operating schemes and initiatives
- One industry-led voluntary initiative accredited by the Australian Government
- Proposed national government regulated product stewardship schemes for solar panels delayed and small household electronics stalled
- New national packaging stewardship regulations in development
- Greater focus at all levels of government on improving battery stewardship, due to increasing fires caused by batteries
- Australian Government initiates review of Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020
- 2023-24 Minister's Priority List unchanged due to review of the Act
- Australian Circular Economy Framework released
- Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group final report "Circular Advantage" presented to Australian Minister

The 2024 Product Stewardship State of Play is based on published annual performance data for FY22 and FY23. It was collated by the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures from late 2023 to April 2024 and uploaded to the Gateway in May 2024. It includes both collective schemes and individual business initiatives that operate in Australia.

The schemes and initiatives included are variously led by producers, brands, importers or retailers placing product into the Australian market. All of them entail specific product stewardship activities that address environmental and human health issues at one or more stages of the product lifecycle from design through to post-consumption.

They all publicly disclose quantitative and qualitative data to support an assessment of their effectiveness against stated objectives.

Information about all initiatives considered in this review, including annual data on their environmental, social and economic outcomes, is available on the Product Stewardship Gateway (<https://gateway.stewardshipexcellence.com.au>), a joint initiative between the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence and UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures.

Number and type of product stewardship initiatives

Since 2022 there has been minimal change in the number and type of product stewardship schemes and initiatives. Currently there are 85 operational schemes and initiatives. Of these, 14 are regulated by national, state or territory governments. Another eight are accredited under the *Commonwealth Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020*.

A further 15 schemes are in development (including two new proposed national regulated schemes – one for Photovoltaic Systems, and another for Small Electronic and Electrical Equipment).

In August 2024 the Environment Minister announced the accreditation of the *National Environmental Sustainability Agreement – newspapers and magazines product stewardship arrangement*. The scheme is administered by ThinkNewsBrands, a consortium of Australia's major national news publishing media companies including Nine, News Corp Australia and Seven West Media. Under the scheme, news

publishing media companies commit to using sustainable fibres and non-hazardous inks to support safe recycling, and to recycle unsold products.

Of the 24 initiatives that received funding from the Australian Government to help design, develop, and implement schemes, 11 have been successful in establishing a new scheme, or gaining

sufficient engagement and financial support from industry to continue further work on design and future establishment. Another five projects are slowly making progress in establishing schemes. Seven have stalled after concluding that regulatory intervention is required to establish their scheme, and one was not completed. Refer to **Table 1** for a breakdown of the number and type of initiatives.

Table 1. Number and type of product stewardship collective schemes and individual business initiatives

	Total Stewardship initiatives	Collective Schemes	Individual business initiatives	Voluntary	Regulated
Operational	85	37	48	71	14
Planning/In development	15	15	0	13	2
No longer operational	7	6	1	5	2
Total number of initiatives	107*	58	49	89	18**
Government Accredited	8***	5	2	7	1
Initiatives supported by the NPSIF****	24	24	–	24	–

* The total count includes seven schemes and initiatives that are no longer operating, comprising six collective schemes and one individual business initiative. Five are voluntary initiatives and two are co-regulated arrangements that previously operated under the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme (NTCRS).

** Includes ten Commonwealth Government regulated initiatives i.e., Oil, Refrigerant Reclaim Australia, NEPM Used Packaging and seven individual approved arrangements under the NTCRS, as well as eight state and territory government regulated container deposit initiatives.

*** There are eight initiatives accredited under the Commonwealth Product Stewardship Act. They include B-cycle, Big Bag Recover, Fairview EcoLoop, MobileMuster, Tyre Stewardship Australia and Dulux Plastic Paint Pails. ThinkNewsBrands. The other accredited scheme is the NEPM-APCO packaging scheme, which is a co-regulatory initiative.

**** The National Product Stewardship Investment Fund.

Activity by product and material class

As shown in **Figure 1** the current scope of activity is now spread across 27 product classes. Just over half of all operational schemes and initiatives are addressing issues associated with four product/material classes – packaging (21), electrical/electronic (15), clothing textiles (7), and furniture (5). Photovoltaic systems continue to be a notable gap, with the Australian Government still in the process of establishing a regulated scheme. Most activity on packaging and plastics is focused on end of life collection and recycling run by collective schemes. Whereas activity on clothing textiles, furniture and building materials is more often led by individual businesses and focuses on design, use/reuse, and end of life.

Figure 1. Number of operational schemes and initiatives for each product or material



Electronic waste processing. Photo credit: ReSource.

Minister's Priority List Update

In 2023-24 the Minister listed five products: clothing textiles, tyres, plastics in health care products in hospital, mattresses, and child car seats. By being listed the government identified a series of product stewardship actions for manufacturers, importers, distributors, and retailers to complete by November 2024 (see <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/product-stewardship/ministers-priority-list-23-24>). Progress against these actions has been moderate at best in some products classes and poor if non-existent in other product classes.

By the end of 2024 Seamless, Australia's **clothing** stewardship scheme established its Board, appointed a CEO and commenced operations on 1 July 2024. Since then over 300 organisations have either joined as members (around 70) or registered as supporters (i.e. state and local government, research institutes, recyclers, service providers, environmental and community NGOs). They had convened the first Seamless Government Roundtable with state and territories to enable coordination on policy, programs and investment; released new clothing benchmark data and launched the Seamless Re-Think program on circularity initiatives.

Tyre Stewardship Australia membership remains the same at around 50% of the market, ACCC authorisation was granted for another three years to Sept 2027 and the WA state government led a national project on end of life options for **tyres** and an investigation into off-the-road tyres and conveyor belts and rubber tracks. The final project report was provided to the Environment Minister's Meeting in December 2024.

The Australian Bedding Stewardship Council refined its financial model bringing on board more members and expanded its investment into activities to enhance **mattress** design, reuse and recycling.

We are not aware of any progress by manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers of **plastic healthcare** products or packaging in demonstrating measurable product stewardship action including design improvements. Nor has there been any reported progress in **child car seats** manufacturers implementing a proposed national stewardship arrangement.

With the government announcing the five year review of the Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020 in late 2024 the 2023-24 Minister's Priority List (see **Figure 2**) will remain unchanged while the Act is under review.

Figure 2. Minister's Priority Product Listings 2013-2024

2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Waste architectural and decorative paint										
End-of-life handheld batteries	End-of-life handheld batteries (less than 5kg in weight)	All batteries								
Packaging (and subsets of packaging such as consumer packaging and beverage packaging)										
End-of-life air conditioners with small gas charges										
End-of-life refrigerators with small gas charges										
			Plastic microbeads and products containing them							
			Photovoltaic systems							
			Electrical and electronic products							
			Oil containers							
							Child car seats			
							Clothing textiles			
							Problematic and unnecessary single use plastics			
							Mattresses			
							Plastics in healthcare products			
							End-of-life tyres			



Product durability and repairability a priority for some brands.

Lifecycle actions and stages

Figure 3 shows the distribution of scheme/initiative objectives by lifecycle stage and actions. A total 48 out of the 85 active schemes/initiatives have objectives that target all three stages of the lifecycle. Most initiatives focus their effort on post-consumption, i.e. providing take-back services and recovering materials.

In terms of collective versus individual business initiatives, the collective schemes have made less progress in addressing consumption-related actions within their objective design (e.g., consumer information, circular business models). Also, only a few of them are at this stage of encouraging action to address better production practices (e.g., responsible supply chain practices, and better material choice).

In contrast, many business initiatives are addressing actions at the design and production stage, such as making better material choices and developing better products or packaging to reduce environmental and human health impacts. Many are also taking consumption-related actions, by providing information to consumers on how to improve product performance and extend product life (**Figure 3**).

This highlights the important role that individual business initiatives play in driving innovation in product and packaging design and new business models to prevent and avoid waste. It also highlights the potential for collective schemes to expand their activities up the product lifecycle to reduce waste creation, and effectively communicate their members' upstream environmental interventions,

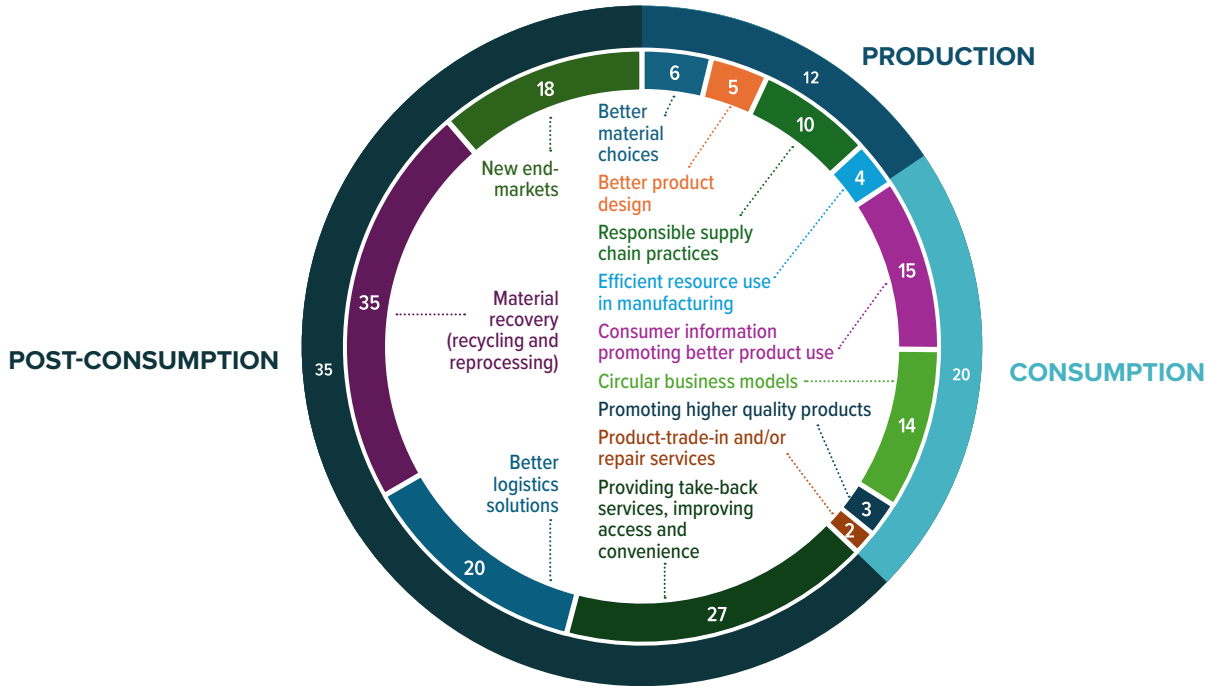
The findings also highlight gaps in activity across the lifecycle and product type where government investment, regulatory reforms and procurement activity can enable firmer action.



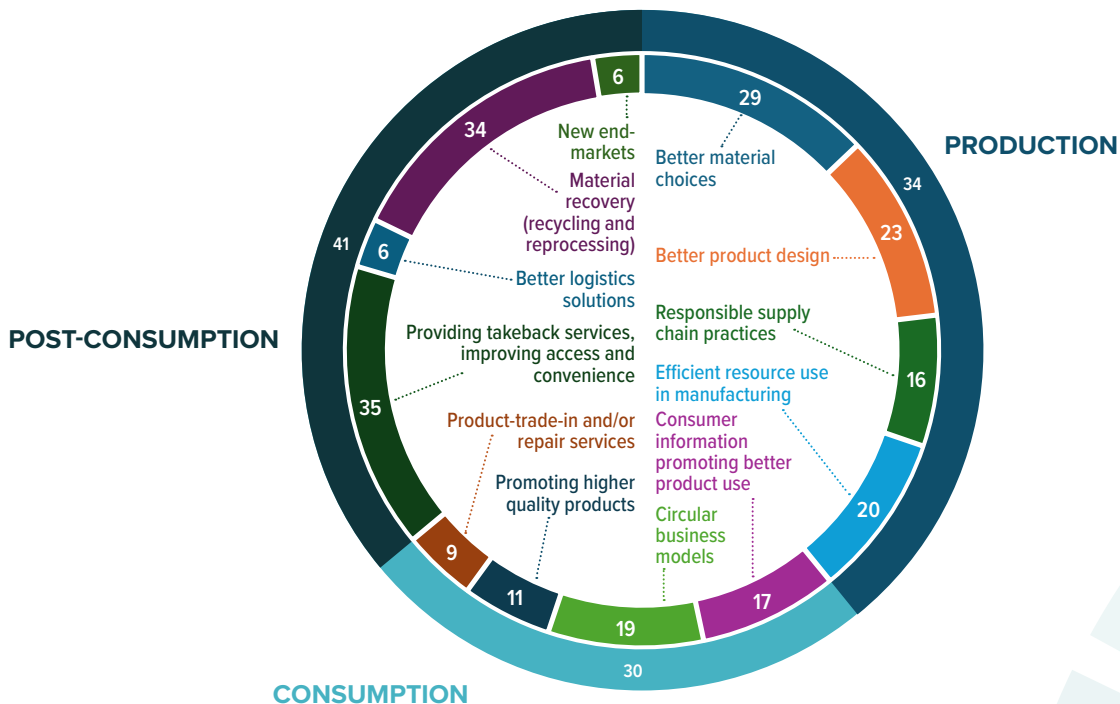
Figure 3. Collective scheme and individual business initiative objectives by lifecycle stage and action

Note: The inner circle represents the number of initiatives addressing lifecycle actions at each of the three stages – production, consumption, and post-consumption, whereas the outer circle represents the total number of initiatives at each lifecycle stage. Since initiatives target more than one lifecycle action and stage, the total counts are higher than the total number of collective schemes and business initiatives

Number of Collective Scheme Objectives by Lifecycle Stages and Actions



Number of Individual Business Initiative Objectives by Lifecycle Stages and Actions



Submissions

The Centre made submissions to the following inquiries and reviews:

- 2024-25 Pre-budget submission to Treasury (Australian Government)
- Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government Waste Reduction and Recycling Policies
- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Opportunities in the Circular Economy
- Federal Environment Minister's Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group
- Western Australia's National Project on Options for End-of-life Tyres
- South Australian EPA Review of the Environment Protection (Waste to Resources) Policy 2010
- Western Australia's Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030



Transcript from Senate Inquiry Hearing – 20th September 2024

Senator Bilyk – “We were talking about the different stewardship schemes. How would you suggest that the task of regulating such a large number of schemes works? Can you give me some ideas there?”

“Mr Gertsakis ... we need to think of a universal approach to product stewardship. We need to effectively arrive somewhere where every company and their products are stewardship ready as they come onto the market.

“This is ... where we can learn from ... the European Commission. For example, their new regulation, the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, can be applied to any type of product category in terms of manufactured goods and packaging...”⁴



Rose Read, presenting at Climate Action in the Public Realm, Parramatta, Nov 24, hosted by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Cumberland City Council and Street Furniture Australia. Photo credit: Street Furniture Australia.

4 <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=COMMITTEES;id=committees%2Fcommsen%2F28325%2F0001;query=id%3A%22committees%2Fcommsen%2F28325%2F0000%22>

E-Learning Program

On the 1 August the Centre launched its online training program for professionals to develop their knowledge and skills in product stewardship. The purpose of the program is to improve product stewardship knowledge, understanding and performance in Australia.

The initial phase of the Centre's eLearning program features three on-demand modules aimed at informing, educating, upskilling and activating action.

From introductory training modules on the role and value of product stewardship, through to more specific modules covering individual business product stewardship initiatives and collective schemes, our on-demand eLearning program will build your knowledge and credentials through our self-paced learning platform.

Our eLearning classroom will continue to grow as we add new modules covering diverse topics, and we are always interested in your suggestions for specific topics that you would find relevant and beneficial.



Australian Product Stewardship Forum

The welcome and opening of the Australian Product Stewardship Forum featured the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water – The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, and the European Commission (EC) Director for Circular Economy – Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea. Both shared their views and vision for how and why a circular economy is desirable and essential while also being challenging and complex.



There is a stark contrast between Europe and Australia. This is especially evident in acknowledging and resourcing a more comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses issues and impacts across the entire product lifecycle from design and production through to consumption and post-consumption. In short, the bold use of regulatory instruments to drive higher levels of producer responsibility across the lifecycle was more evident in the EU.

A Q and A between the Minister and Centre of Excellence Director, John Gertsakis highlighted several noteworthy issues, including how the National Reconstruction Fund Corporation has embedded circularity principles into decision-making and procurement for the \$15 billion it is investing. This has the potential to make a difference but must go beyond ‘best endeavours’ to ensure that system change is achieved, and cross-industry collaboration takes place in a timely manner.

The Minister was especially proud of the Government's new national Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy that uses government buying power to preference environmentally improved products, materials and services. The opportunity for such a policy to drive and demand increased product stewardship action has great potential, especially for textiles, ICT equipment, office furniture and related fixtures and fittings. She mentioned the challenges of achieving circularity and product stewardship, noting that the lack of alignment of state, local and federal government regulations is an ongoing obstacle. Nonetheless, the Minister also said regulatory intervention will be pursued where companies move slowly.

In short, the Minister highlighted the tools that will drive industry change – procurement and investment, regulation, and the threat of regulation. On the question of how to limit the import of poor quality, environmentally inferior products often destined for landfill, the Minister acknowledged that solutions are lacking. Australia is failing to address some of the environmental problems and impacts at source before they enter the local market. More explicit circular economy standards and requirements at the border are desirable, but require a strong commitment to import bans, innovative policies and mandated product stewardship regulations.

There was broad agreement that a review of the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act* in 2025 would likely see a greater focus on the top half of the waste management hierarchy – where waste prevention comes to the fore through good design, durability, reuse, reparability and responsible consumption patterns. In other words, solutions must go well beyond managing the symptoms of over-production and over-consumption. Australia requires a Circular Economy Act complete with the required powers to make this happen.

The EC's Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea clearly highlighted the importance of a strong lifecycle approach and the role of Extended Producer Responsibility, including the regulation of design and specific product categories through the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR). This is an obvious contrast to



Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea Director for Circular Economy at European Commission

Australia's focus on end-of-life responses and recycling solutions to date. Europe emphasises circularity and structural reform, as opposed to waste reduction alone.

Another of Aurel's noteworthy comments was how the EC uses a five to 10-year outlook to approach policy formulation, regulatory development and its implementation across member states. This longer-term lens enables a forward strategy that acknowledges complexity, global factors and Europe's use of such measures to build global competitiveness. Also evident was the EC's unapologetic view of the merits of regulation to deliver environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The key takeaway from the forum's opening session is that while Australia can boast many examples of voluntary product stewardship initiatives, their effectiveness is heavily constrained by free riders and the general lack of policy certainly. The obvious and increasing need remains for timely government regulation that is adequately resourced to accelerate the creation and implementation of industry-funded schemes and individual business initiatives, through the products they design, import and place on the market.

Centre Activities

The Centre conducted a wealth of activities over 2024.

These have occurred across the following categories and are noted in the timeline below:



Engagement
and Networking

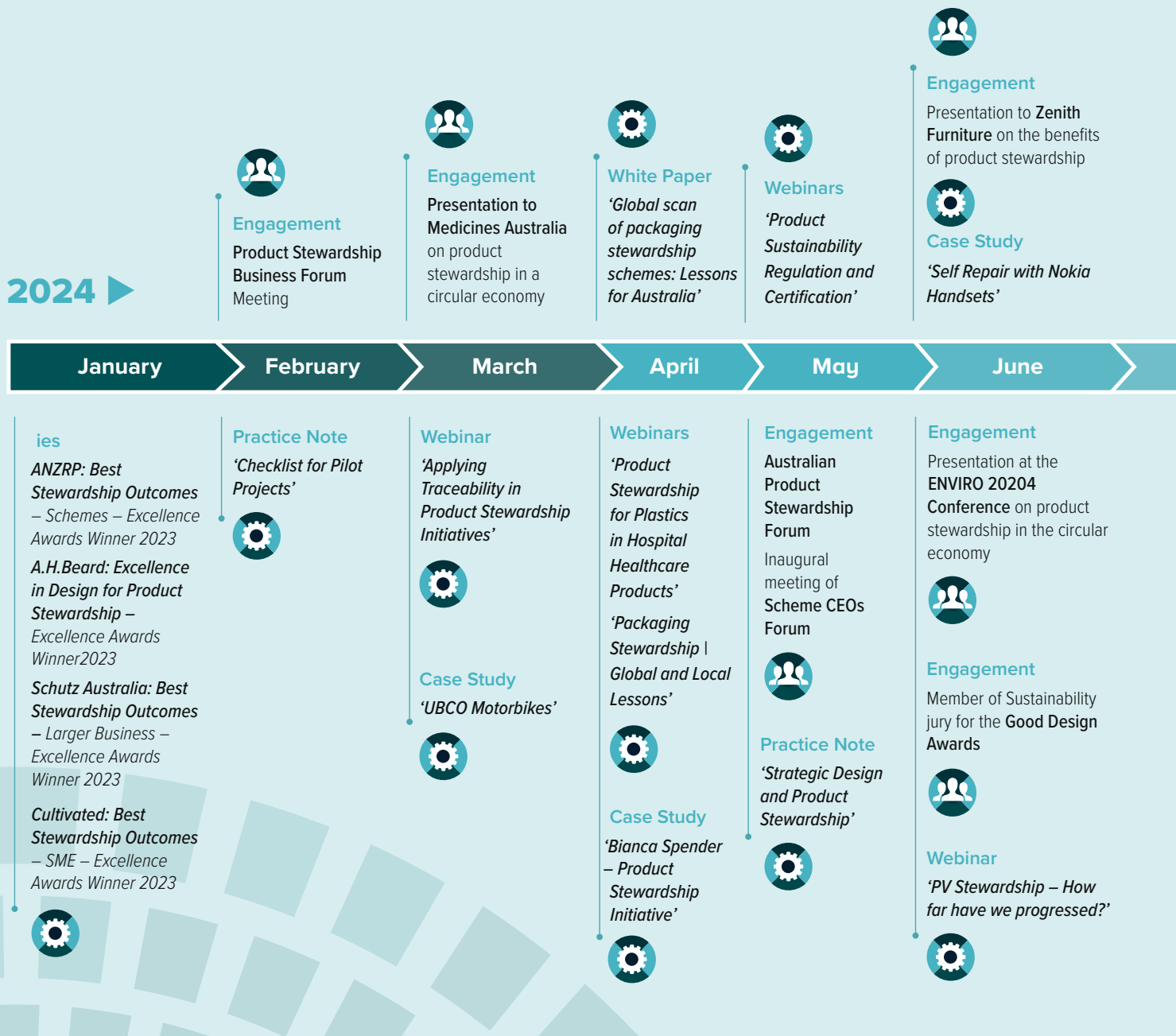


Training



Resources

2024 ▶





Practice Notes

'Data and Reporting Guidelines for Product Stewardship Schemes'
'The Circular Economy and Product Stewardship'



Engagement

Scheme CEOs Forum



Webinar

'Lifecycle Thinking & Assessment and Product Stewardship'



Engagement

Presentation to the **National Senate Inquiry** on Waste Reduction and Recycling Policies



Podcast

'How to Solve the Problem of Waste', via 2SER Sydney



Engagement

Member of the jury for the **Clean Up Australia Awards**

July

August

September

October

November

White Paper

'Sustainability and the Waste Hierarchy'



Engagement

Member of the sustainability jury for the **Victorian Premier's Design Awards**



Training

Launched Online E-Learning



Engagement

Presentation to the **State Waste Chairs and CEOs Forum** on producer responsibility across the product lifecycle

Presentation to the **WA Waste and Resource Recovery Conference** on producer responsibility across the product lifecycle



Engagement

Presentation to the **Charitable Reuse Australia Conference** on the circular economy



Engagement

Presentation to **Climate Action in the Public Realm**



Investing in Intelligent Regulation

The economic benefits to government of regulated product stewardship

White Paper

Team

Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence Limited Board

John Gertsakis

Rose Read

Dr Nick Florin (alternative Director Prof Damien Giurco)

Tim Powell

Louise McGrath

Steve Baty (Casual)

Centre Team

John Gertsakis

Rose Read

Spyro Kalos (Left Aug 2024)

Glenn Brown

Vincent Mason (started Oct 2024)

UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures

Professor Damien Giurco

Dr Nick Florin

Dr Taylor Brydges

Dr Rachael Wakefield-Rann

Dr Simran Talwar

Australian Industry Group

Louise McGrath

Molly Knox

Dentsu Creative

Tim Powell

Specialist Advisers

Advisers were drawn from the following organisations on an as-needs basis:

Clean Up Australia

Good Design Australia

King & Wood Mallesons

Monash University Design / Blue Sky Creative

RPS Consulting

WSP Digital

Elise Motalli

Resources available online at

www.stewardshipexcellence.com.au

Product Stewardship Gateway

Webinar presentations and recordings

White papers

Practice notes

Case studies

Forum presentations

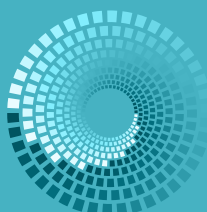
eLearning modules

Photography on the following page from the Australian Product Stewardship Forum held at the University of Technology Sydney, May 2024.



www.stewardshipexcellence.com.au

 Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence



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