

# Addressing the Barriers: A needs assessment of product stewardship in Australia



**Product  
Stewardship  
Centre of  
Excellence**

WHITE  
PAPER

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## SUMMARY

This white paper presents insights from a survey conducted by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to gain a better understanding of the needs of the many organisations involved in product stewardship in Australia. We are grateful to have received valuable insights and ideas from existing and emerging schemes, individual businesses, governments, industry and community organisations.

The responses have helped to identify key areas for the Centre to develop resources and guidance, with a particular focus on scheme design, governance, business case development, logistics, free-riders, accreditation, performance indicator, marketing and communications.

We look forward to working with schemes, companies and other organisations to evolve and enable an ambitious and best practice approach to successful stewardship in Australia.

The Centre's approach places great emphasis on identifying the opportunities that can result from doing product stewardship, and this necessarily requires attention to addressing the barriers that inhibit adoption and implementation.

## INTRODUCTION

As product stewardship grows and matures in Australia, the needs of stakeholders are varied relative to the nature and type of stewardship approach and product class or material stream.

This White Paper presents the results of a survey carried out by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence to help characterise the needs of businesses, government agencies at all levels, existing and emerging stewardship organisations, industry organisations and other interested parties. The findings from this survey will help inform the activities of the Centre and support its mission in mentoring, educating and activating a diverse group of stakeholders across product and material supply chains to progress the wide-scale adoption of effective product stewardship activities and principles into business models.

The Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence was established in December 2020 by a consortium of the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney, the Australian Industry Group and Cox Inall Communications in partnership with the Australian Government through the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The mission, vision and key challenge the Centre aims to tackle are:

MISSION	VISION	CHALLENGE
To accelerate the uptake of product stewardship in Australia by mentoring, educating and activating stakeholders across product and material supply chains.	To see the wide-scale adoption of product and material stewardship principles into business models that reduce waste generation and create positive environmental and social outcomes via good design, improved resource productivity and sustainable reuse.	To assist businesses and government achieve the National Waste Policy Action 2030 Targets.

### *What is product stewardship?*

Product stewardship is a concept and set of approaches based on the idea that those involved in designing, manufacturing and selling products should accept responsibility for ensuring they do not have adverse impacts on the health of humans and environments. This includes impacts across the lifecycle of the products, from the extraction of materials, the way products are used, and how they are managed at End of Life (EoL).

Based on this imperative, product stewardship and extended producer responsibility activities aim to drive environmentally beneficial outcomes through good design and clean manufacturing, including the use of components and materials that are easier to recover, reuse and recycle.

Best practice product stewardship aligns with 'circular economy' principles and stewardship activities can help drive the implementation of a circular economy by ensuring products and materials are managed in a way that avoids adverse environmental and social impacts and encourages beneficial outcomes. According to the Ellen McArthur Foundation these principles are: 1) Design out waste and pollution, 2) Keep products and materials in use, and 3) Regenerate natural systems.

Importantly, these principles suggest the highest order product stewardship options should be pursued, which means implementing systems that, for example, prioritise reuse and repair options where possible. However, it is important to note that best practice and the application of circular economy principles are not simple to define and vary significantly between different product categories.



### *The Australian landscape and emerging needs*

There is a depth of experience in product stewardship in Australia with greater than 60 active product stewardship initiatives ranging from industry schemes and programs, industry and supply chain standards, initiatives championed by industry or community organisations, as well as many more individual business initiatives. These activities span a wide range of product groups, including e-waste, soft plastics, packaging, mattresses, textiles and steel. Some initiatives, like the South Australian Container Deposit Scheme have been operating for more than forty years. Other important activities are emerging such as the Battery Stewardship Scheme.

While product stewardship has a long history in Australia and existing schemes have already resulted in the effective recovery of resources, product stewardship has the potential to further expand its scope and remit to support the transition to a more circular economy. The Centre endeavours to draw on the experience and learnings from the product stewardship community and accelerate the uptake of product stewardship throughout the Australian economy through the creation of resources, networks, guidance and other forms of support to stakeholders.

To understand the specific needs of different existing and emerging schemes, businesses, non-government organisations, government and other stakeholders, the needs analysis survey asked what types of support are needed, by who, and how.

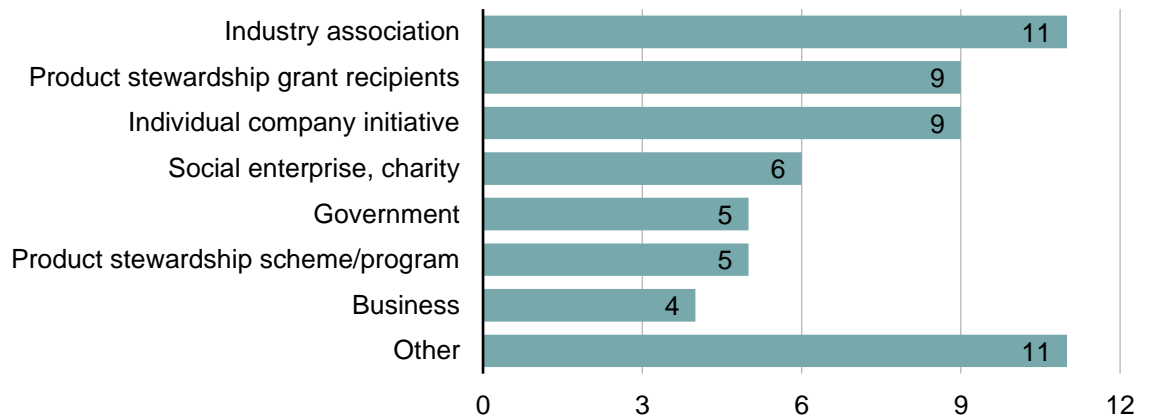
## **SURVEY FINDINGS**

### *Who responded?*

The survey attracted a total of 60 full responses. This was divided into:

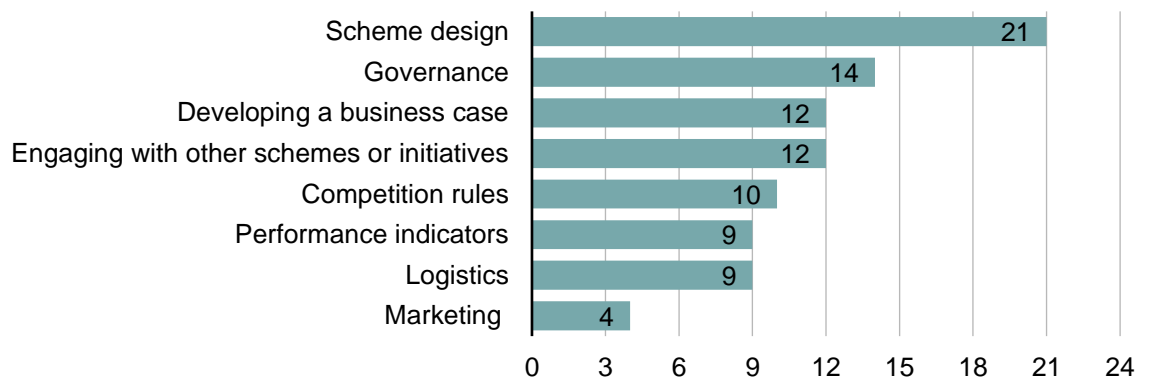
1. Existing product stewardship schemes and programs (5)
2. Industry associations (11)
3. Product stewardship grant recipients (9)
4. Businesses (including those involved with batteries, child car seats, electrical and electronic products, plastic oil containers, plastic microbeads, photovoltaic systems) (4)
5. Government (5)
6. Companies with individual product stewardship initiatives (9)
7. Social enterprises (6)
8. Other (11)

Respondents in the 'Other' category included representatives from universities, recyclers, not for profit waste industry, unincorporated not for profits, consultancies, scheme experts and the CSIRO.



### What are the main areas of interest in product stewardship?

Overall, scheme design, governance and developing a business case were the main areas of interest. Social enterprises, businesses and industry associations consistently indicated that scheme or activity design was their primary interest in terms of their further development. For social enterprises and industry associations, developing a business case and performance indicators, governance and marketing were also identified as critical areas of importance.



Government respondents (from state and local levels) identified 1) supporting current and emerging schemes, 2) expanding their scope and 3) improving policy alignment as priorities.

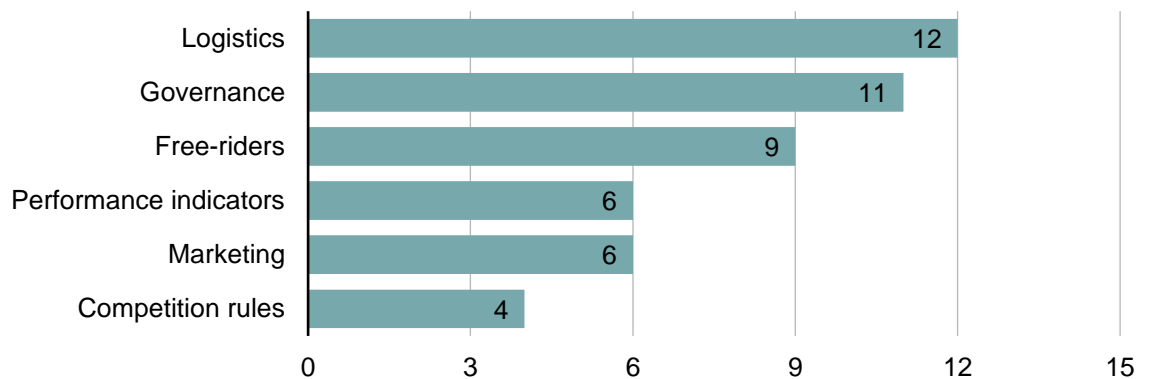
Given the strong consistency in the interests of stakeholders across the board, providing support and guidance regarding scheme and activity design will be a focal priority of the Centre. The options, benefits and drawbacks of different design approaches is important knowledge for those actively developing or managing existing schemes or initiatives and there are significant insights that can be shared from the product stewardship community.

### Actions

- The Centre is working on a range of case studies illustrating how schemes at different scales and across product categories are currently operating.
- The Centre will also provide case studies of businesses that are effectively implementing product stewardship – showcasing different models of operation across diverse products and materials, including clothing and textiles, furniture, shoes, photographic equipment, electronics, electric vehicles, take back businesses, and lighting. The aim is to help other businesses understand some of the key challenges, and inspire new solutions for overcoming them, and how to intergrade stewardship into their business models while remaining profitable.

### What are the key challenges?

Among all respondents, logistics, governance and free-riders were consistently identified as the key challenges. Free-riders are business or organisations that may benefit from a product stewardship activity without contributing to the implementation or operation. For existing scheme or program operators, these concerns were followed by performance indicators, marketing and competition rules. Individual companies undertaking product stewardship activities shared the key challenges, but indicated performance indicators, technical challenges and manufacturing capacity in Australia were also barriers for them at present.



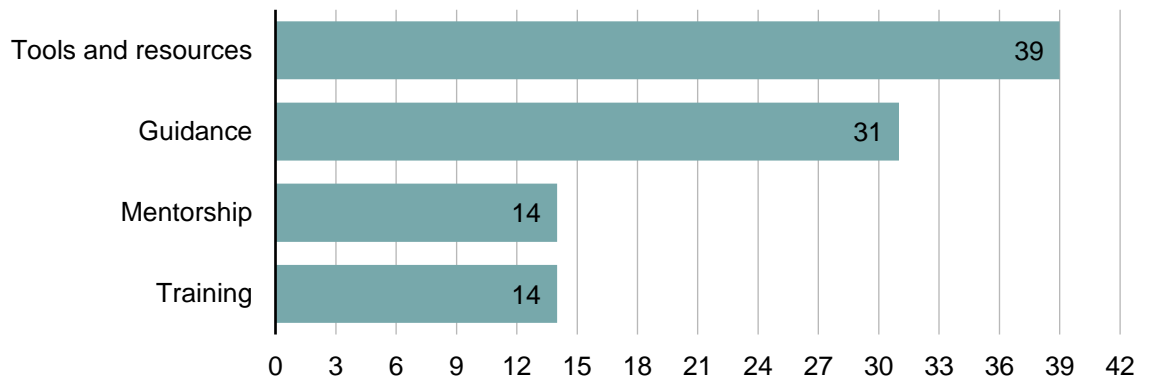
The Centre has oriented its activities to address a number of these challenges identified.

#### Actions

- Webinars addressing logistics, governance, free-riders, accreditation and ACCC authorisation (including competition rules) are being hosted by the Centre over 2021, featuring legal experts, scheme operators, logistics companies, government representatives and other experts. There will be opportunities within these sessions for stakeholders to ask specific questions of concern.
- The Centre will also be producing a range of 'practice notes' to help guide stakeholders on specific issues, some of which include how to initiate/design a scheme, model agreements for service providers, scheme operations (including IT), the role of design in product stewardship and some general Frequently Asked Questions.
- An assessment of the effectiveness of product stewardship activities across product classes will also be a key area of focus for the Centre, which will include information such as the key performance indicators used by different stakeholders, along with other important details.
- The Centre also provides a platform for stakeholders to engage with others who are on a similar stewardship trajectory, who are more advanced or who know about different aspects of the relevant systems. This will enable an exchange of ideas and support to help address these challenges, through avenues such as a curated LinkedIn channel and networking events (Virtual and face to face)

### What types of support are needed?

One of the key purposes of the Centre is to help provide organisations and businesses interested or engaged in product stewardship with mentoring and support to help progress their product stewardship journey and help integrate product stewardship activities as business-as-usual operations and objectives. There was consistency among all stakeholders regarding the type of support needed:



While tools and resources and guidance were clearly the main types of support stakeholders are seeking, industry associations, grant recipients and social enterprises in particular also indicated that mentorship would be beneficial.

#### Actions

- The Centre is developing a range of tools and resources to assist stakeholders from different industries and organisations at different levels of maturity. In addition to the webinars, practice notes and case studies mentioned, a range of resources including lists of relevant Labels and Certification, Standards (relating to processes and organisations), grant opportunities and research in materials and product stewardship features on our webpage and it is proposed to develop a Product stewardship health check tool for businesses and products.
- Mentorship, support and guidance to improve, develop and implement stewardship activities, will also be available through a panel of expert advisers. This support will include taking on requests from industry groups, businesses, product supply chains or government agencies to advise, guide or mentor their development.
- A key focus of the Centre will also be training and executive-level development. In addition to the webinars, executive leadership courses and master-classes for decision-makers, executives, sustainability managers, procurement and supply chain managers, product managers, business strategy planners and product stewardship practitioners will be delivered in partnership with Australian Industry Group.

## NEXT STEPS AND THANK YOU!

A very big thanks to those who participated in the survey. We are delighted to have received valuable input from existing and emerging schemes, individual businesses, industry and community organisations. The responses have helped us to clearly identify key areas for the Centre to develop resources and guidance including around scheme design, free riders, accreditation, logistics, governance, and marketing. Your participation in the survey underscores the important work currently underway across diverse industries, sectors and communities.

The Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence is excited by the opportunity to work with organisations planning and doing product stewardship to evolve an ambitious and world-leading approach to successful stewardship in Australia. This approach, underpinned by circular economy principles, can support waste avoidance and reduction, increase reuse and recycling, and promote the phase-out problematic and unnecessary materials and substances through good design and cleaner production.







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