

Dulux was recognised at the Stewardship Excellence awards 2022 for Best Stewardship Outcomes – Individual Business or Brand (Large companies 200 + employees) for their Project Earth initiative. Their initiative collects their used paint pails from commercial painters and recycles them into products Dulux then sells to those same painters.

In awarding Dulux for the initiative, the judges acknowledged the circular nature of Dulux’s application and the linking of the program to their core business was unique. They were also impressed with Dulux’s performance on social outcomes, creating jobs and manufacturing new products in Australia.

Dulux sells approximately 2 million 15 litre pails through their trade division each year, equating to 1,800 tonnes of plastic, most of which would end up in landfill due to it being considered hazardous waste. To deal with all that waste, Dulux engaged with industry partners to collect their Dulux paint pails in provided shipping containers which Dulux would then recycle into new products, not only minimises the waste sent to landfill, but also minimising disposal cost significantly.

When asked what the biggest challenges were in in the Project Earth journey, Mark Taylor the Commercial Sustainability Manager for Dulux, said, “for the first three years it was regulatory and compliance challenges due to the waste classification. We had to work closely with every EPA jurisdiction in each State & Territory, apart from NSW, where we had to either change the classification or we had to get a product stewardship exemption for a scheme.”

“The other challenge was the actual process. How do we bring those pails back, and what do we do with them when once we have collected them? IN the process we've partnered with a fantastic organisation, BNC Plastics. In the six years that I've known them, they've have never said no, they've been willing and compliant in everything that we've tried to do. They're able to shred paint pails inclusive of contaminants, which sees flecks of paint caught within the plastic granulate. This makes the products we manufacture quite unique in design. Painters can see the results of the collected and processed pails.”

In designing the range of Australian-made products Dulux produce with their recycled plastic, it has ensured that those new items themselves are recyclable. “What we've got is a hierarchy of products. We've got two roller trays, 1 paint pot, 4 litre paint pot and then a paint stir stick. The products slowly come down the chain of structural integrity until it reaches a stirring stick, which doesn't have to be as technically compliant.”

When asked what the win means to Dulux, Mr Taylor said, “I'll never forget the day when Damien called to let us know. It's been a positive experience for us. It's taken us a while to get this project up and running, so for us it was affirmation that we were on the right journey and doing the right thing.”

“Do it, and just keep asking the right people,” said Mr Taylor when asked what advice he’d give to others starting out in product stewardship. “Challenge the current situation. Technology is changing daily. There's a lot more benefit from stewardship than just the waste stream that you're going to deal with. There's real value in the engagement of our staff, to feel good about what we're doing. I would absolutely recommend anyone that's even thinking slightly about this to explore and to seek out advice. There's a circle of very knowledgeable people that are willing to talk and will advise and help you on the journey. “