

Final report

Meat Packaging Product Stewardship

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Prepared by: Rose Read
Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence Ltd

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Meat & Livestock Australia Limited
PO Box 1961
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Abstract

The purpose of the project was to support MLA in establishing a meat packaging supply chain stakeholder forum to share knowledge and collaborate on packaging stewardship initiatives to reduce the impact of red meat packaging on the environment without comprising product integrity. This involved identifying stakeholders and bringing them together through several roundtable discussions to explore and understand the current red meat packaging formats, proposed regulatory reforms and potential solutions and opportunities to improve the sustainability of red meat packaging. Through this process there is now much greater understanding of red meat packaging sustainability challenges, proposed regulatory reforms, potential solutions and pathways to increase packaging sustainability. Additionally, this project has supported greater collaboration across the supply chain to address the challenges in line with the MLA Red Meat Packaging Stewardship Framework.

Executive summary

Background

The purpose of the project is to engage stakeholders across the red meat packaging supply chain to establish a red meat packaging stewardship forum and to develop a framework that addresses the current packaging challenges and regulatory reforms facing the Australian red meat industry.

Objectives

To provide strategic advice and support to deliver the following:

1. Support facilitation of Round Table next steps workshop planned for Q3 2023/24
2. Support development of Meat Packaging Product Stewardship Terms of Reference
3. High level stakeholder engagement plan
4. Assist with the development of a collaborative plan to support outcomes of the next steps / future planning identified by the stakeholders and agreed by MLA.

Methodology

Undertake series of stakeholder interviews/workshops to collate key insights. Work with MLA to identify packaging supply chain stakeholders and develop engagement strategy and provide Terms of reference for stakeholder round table.

Facilitate stakeholder roundtable sessions to explore current packaging formats used and end of life pathways domestically and internationally, opportunities and challenges to increase packaging sustainability including packaging design and material changes and disposal pathways that will avoid and reduce packaging waste, increase recycling and resource recovery and/or increase recycled content while retaining product integrity and industry reputation.

Results/key findings

Establish a meat packaging supply chain stakeholder forum to share knowledge and collaborate on packaging stewardship initiatives.

Development of the Meat Packaging Stewardship Framework with the support of the red meat packaging supply chain stakeholders.

Benefits to industry

Improved understanding of current packaging challenges, opportunities, regulatory reforms and implications for industry. Greater collaboration across the entire red meat packaging supply chain on understanding and addressing packaging challenges, regulatory reforms and potential solutions. Identification of pathways to increase packaging sustainability

Future research and recommendations

Meat Packing Stewardship Framework with relevant government agencies and packaging stakeholders. Explore methods to modify packaging design to be more sustainable in line with the agreed Meat Packaging Stewardship Forum.

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1. Background

The purpose of the project is to engage stakeholders across the red meat packaging supply chain to establish a red meat packaging stewardship framework that addresses the current packaging challenges and regulatory reforms facing the Australian red meat industry.

The Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence has developed an Engagement Strategy for planned activity over a 12-month period to support the establishment of a Meat Packaging Product Stewardship Program.

The Centre provides independent advice and guidance on priority areas for stewardship action for industry-led voluntary initiatives that are seeking government accreditation under the Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020.

The Centre reports annually on product stewardship activity in Australia, including its benefits and effectiveness. These insights support policymakers, brands, manufacturers, and retailers in making informed decisions about product stewardship initiatives. A collaborative approach engaging key industry stakeholders is required to support the establishment phase of a stewardship programme. MLA has identified a need for Packaging roadmap that considers potential implications on productivity, consumer sentiment and possible market access technical non-tariff imposts.

2. Objectives

To provide strategic advice and support to deliver the following

1. Support facilitation of Round Table next steps workshop planned for Q3 2023/24
2. Support development of Meat Packaging Product Stewardship Terms of Reference
3. High level stakeholder engagement plan
4. Assist with the development of a collaborative plan to support outcomes of the next steps / future planning identified by the stakeholders and agreed by MLA.

3. Methodology

The project provided a \$30k investment in a Strategic Partnership Program to continue the ongoing support and development phase for an industry collaboration of a Meat Packaging Product Stewardship to:

- Work with MLA to identify packaging supply chain stakeholders and develop engagement strategy.
- Provide Terms of reference for stakeholder round table
- Facilitate stakeholder roundtable sessions to explore current packaging formats used and end of life pathways domestically and internationally, opportunities and challenges to increase packaging sustainability including packaging design and material changes and disposal pathways that will avoid and reduce packaging waste, increase recycling and resource recovery and/or increase recycled content while retaining product integrity and industry reputation.

As part of this investment, additional benefits and services were provided by Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence and made available to MLA such as:

2x One-on-one policy briefings - The Centre would be available to present to MLA on current policy updates of relevance to MLA.

Online training discounts available to MLA staff (from Feb 2024)

Complementary access to the centre's webinars

Discount on Centre networking events available to MLA staff including an Innovation Summit in early May 2024

Opportunity to participate in targeted policy forums, strategic working groups & research projects.

Centre case study showcasing best practice.

4x Collaboration / partnership mentions on appropriate social media platforms to be developed in association with MLA in line with the Stakeholder Engagement plan.

MLA logo recognition on Centre EDM material and website as appropriate

MLA logo recognition webinars

Access of Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence logo for use by MLA on website and other promotional materials as approved by the Centre

The Centre facilitated a round table for leaders in Australia's red meat packaging industry, including representatives from MLA, Sealed Air, the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC), Flexopack, the Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC), Vacupack, Pact Group and Amcor. The workshop aimed to understand the packaging challenges in the red meat sector, explore potential solutions, and foster collaboration between MLA, AMPC, and the packaging industry to address these issues and champion a way forward. These objectives were achieved through three targeted activities, guided by the following prompts:

1. *What are the most significant challenges facing the red meat sector?*
2. *Are there any identifiable solutions in both the domestic and international contexts?*
3. *How can the industry address the packaging challenges in the red meat sector domestically and internationally?*

Several key themes emerged across participants' responses to the above prompts, including:

- a need for increased education for industry leaders,
- more explicit platforms to facilitate stakeholder engagement,
- additional investment in research and development for packaging alternatives, and
- engagement with domestic and international initiatives including Circular Economy for Flexible Packaging initiative (CEFLEX), an industry-led European consortium that aims to enhance the sustainability of flexible packaging throughout its life cycle.

4. Results

Following the learnings that emerged from the collaborative research initiative and the industry workshop, MLA prepared a product stewardship framework to guide their members' participation in the development of sustainable red meat packaging solutions. Drawing on these learnings, the framework summarises the material, regulatory and supply chain challenges faced by red meat packaging producers and subsequently outlines additional industry specific knowledge and opportunities. The framework includes a comprehensive assessment of current red meat packaging formats, including thermoformed trays, soft plastics, packaging accessories and secondary components, detailing each format's environmental challenges and opportunities, and the existing benefits.

The initial development stage, the drafting process and the final publication of the framework was supported by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence. MLA welcome readers of this report to make contact with MLA on latest status via info@mla.com.au

5. Conclusion

The framework provides a comprehensive pathway to sustainability for the industry, incorporating core circular principles that will help the industry to avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle and recover problematic waste materials throughout their supply chain. This framework was presented to stakeholders in October 2024 and will continue to inform the industry's next steps towards sustainable red meat packaging. The framework establishes the foundations for a Red Meat Packaging Stewardship Forum, which seeks to facilitate the revision of packaging solutions through investment, education and collaboration. The forum will encourage participation from processors and wider packaging industry stakeholders who may benefit from and provide meaningful contributions to this transition.

The project objectives were delivered and contributed to the delivery of an improved understanding of current packaging challenges, opportunities, regulatory reforms and implications for industry. This understanding has been underpinned by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence guidance and support in the establishment of the Red Meat Packaging Stewardship program

Greater collaboration across the entire red meat packaging supply chain on understanding and addressing packaging challenges, regulatory reforms and potential solutions has enabled a shared approach to the identification of pathways to increase packaging sustainability.

6. Future research and recommendations

By championing a product stewardship approach, MLA and its members can drive a leadership position that fosters innovation, sustainability and circularity while navigating the changing regulations.

MLA's participation in product stewardship initiatives has involved extensive research, industry leading workshop participation and the development of a comprehensive framework to guide innovation throughout the red meat packaging supply chain network. Collaboratively, this approach will support the Australian red meat industry to continue to Explore methods to modify

packaging design to be more sustainable in line with the agreed Meat Packaging Stewardship Forum.