



Sustainable Packaging Alliance Round Table Series

Round Table Number 12 Summary Report

Environmental Decision-Making in Practice

Friday, 23rd February 2007

Background

The strengthened Australian National Packaging Covenant has committed signatories to employ new business processes including application of the Environmental Code of Practice for Packaging (ECoPP) in order to reduce the environmental impact of packaging. ECoPP is intended to move packaging development in a more sustainable direction and help signatories achieve better environmental outcomes and NPC II goals. NPC signatories must now demonstrate ECoPP implementation in their annual reports.

In 2004 the Sustainable Packaging Alliance (SPA) identified the need for a tool to enable rapid assessments of the environmental impact of packaging. With support from five leading Australian food brand owners, Sustainability Victoria, Department of the Environment and Water Resources and Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, SPA developed the Packaging Impact Quick Evaluation Tool (PIQET) - a life cycle assessment (LCA) based tool that enables scientifically rigorous environmental decision making to be incorporated into packaging design and development processes.

The aims of this Round Table were to:

- Learn how signatories have successfully implemented the ECoPP;
- Demonstrate how environmental impact assessments can be undertaken quickly and efficiently by using PIQET;
- Through actual case studies learn how environmental impact data can inform key environmental packaging design debates; and
- Discuss the role of environmental decision making tools in helping to achieve environmental improvements and National Packaging Covenant success.

This report provides a summary of the presentations and discussions of the 12th SPA Round Table.

Implementing the ECoPP

Tim Grant (Centre of Design, RMIT) explained that the focus of ECoPP is on the design phase in manufacturing processes. The revised guidelines aim to minimise material use in, and impact of packaging through assisted decision-making. ECoPP recognises the important role packaging plays in product safety and integrity and promotes excellence in packaging. ECoPP remains an industry code of practice and is, therefore, not a regulation. It is, however, a KPI under the NPC and individual companies specify their own targets in their NPC action plans. The ECoPP Management Committee meets regularly to review the ECoPP terms of reference. The Management Committee promotes the effectiveness of the code and does so by encouraging both public and private sectors to update the code and their own plans in relation to it.

NPC Signatories present their ECoPP Experiences

Gerard Dubosq (Quality Manager – Sealed Air Australia) informed the group that Sealed Air is a manufacturer of protective, specialty packaging materials and packaging systems. As the company's comprehension of the implications of the NPC has increased, so has the company's response to its requirements. An ECoPP questionnaire is now undertaken as part of the product improvement/remodelling/development process. The system is currently being refined and compliance with requirements is expected in the near future. The introduction of ECoPP has resulted in further changes to practices such as light-weighting of bubble product, better machine utilisation and process improvement, and increase use of recycled content where applicable.

Susan Blacklow (Environmental Manager – National Foods Limited) advised that National Foods Limited (NFL) is one of the largest food manufacturers in the Australia/New Zealand region. Under NPC definitions, 87% of the packaging NFL uses is recyclable, however, surveys estimate that only 24% of this is recovered. ECoPP implementation commenced in 2004 using the 1997 industry Code of Practice and Packaging Environmental Assessment (PAE). In 2005, the revised Code of Practice was used as an opportunity to change in-house procedures and introduce improvements to practices utilising a whole chain /life cycle framework. NPC KPI reporting through the system commenced in early 2006. The consensus within company is that ECoPP provides a sound decision making process which demonstrates duty of care by the company.

Bryce Hedditch (Packaging Technologist – Masterfoods Snackfood) stated that Masterfoods is committed to following due diligence in order to make the best environmental decisions possible. Masterfoods uses a stage-gate process for business activities. The "Go ahead" gate for format or material changes incorporates a formal sign off for environmental impact. The sign-off feeds into business processes and the business then makes a decision as to whether to proceed with the change. To assist in the decision-making process a centralised data pool with a defined scope is necessary. The SPA Materials Selector provided a starting point upon which to base decisions. PIQET will go further to help clarify and standardise these measures. PIQET will provide standard data and standard methods for all to employ to make useful comparisons and gives credibility to environmental decisions.

Julia Seddon (Environment manager- Inghams Enterprises) provided the group with a brief overview of Inghams Enterprises, the largest poultry producer in Australia. Inghams developed an ECoPP checklist when they first became signatories to the NPC in 2001. NPC II has seen ECoPP more formally adopted as part of the product specification system. The ECoPP processes have increased awareness of the impact of packaging and of what different types of packaging can mean to the environment – especially when the consumer can recycle them. The lack of data available to help make informed environmental decisions has become apparent through the development of ECoPP reporting processes. This has raised the need to undertake dialogue with suppliers to explore packaging alternatives and their benefits. Inghams have become very focused on data collection to assist them in making environmentally responsible decisions.



Panel responding to questions

Sustainability Assessments – Introducing PIQET

Juin Majumdar (Sustainable Packaging Alliance) introduced the group to PIQET[®], the independent, scientifically based decision support tool for packaging developed by SPA. PIQET was developed to allow companies to make informed, proactive decisions to support the environment by providing information about the impacts of products. PIQET utilises input data such as material type, converting processes, recycle content, etc. It is designed as a business-ready, stand-alone, rapid, LCA-based tool. Analysis is undertaken looking at impacts of packaging systems using key indicators such as greenhouse gases, cumulative energy demand, photochemical oxidation, water use and solid waste. The reporting facilities and independent nature of PIQET allow credible reporting to a range of stakeholders to be undertaken. It is expected that the on-line version will be launched in mid-2007.

Jacky Nordsvan (Nestlé Australia) gave an overview of the use of PIQET within Nestlé Australia. As one of the sponsors of PIQET, Nestlé Australia is currently trialling PIQET. Nestlé is concerned about the environment and became involved with PIQET to help them better protect the environment and reduce their own environmental impact. PIQET facilitates a move to sustainable packaging through the improvement of current practices to reduce the impact of packaging. It can be used as an educational tool to simplify complex issues. PIQET is being implemented across Nestlé in new product development procedures, in communication programs, and in staff induction programs. Jacky feels the gaps between ECoPP and PIQET are not clearly understood and further work is necessary to clarify these. Environmental targets need to be measurable, relevant and easy to identify. Education of consumers, customers (retailers) and media is important to bring understanding as to why particular changes have been made. PIQET may be used to help validate these decisions in the eyes of the consumer.

Diana Gibson (Sustainability Victoria) stated that the goals of PIQET align with government policy and government's increased focus on the lifecycle impacts of products. Diane provided a number of examples of how the government uses its power to influence business practice change. These ranged from standards for government office accommodation with defined Greenstar and Australia Green House Building ratings, to the setting of efficiency ratings for appliances, to the tendering for computers covering the recovery of packaging materials by the supplier. Government has the potential to use PIQET in a number of ways including: as an evidencing tool for ECoPP; in government purchasing policies; to inform government policy; and to identify issues, weaknesses and impacts of specific packaging. The use of PIQET by the government would lead to more environmentally friendly decisions being made by both retailers and suppliers.

Robert Jordan (Sustainable Packaging Alliance) advised that PIQET would be available as an on-line tool from mid-2007. Organisations will be able to subscribe to PIQET to do their own assessments. Alternatively, organisations can outsource their assessments for SPA to complete for them. The service includes the interpretation of results and recommendations. SPA will offer a range of subscription packages each with varying levels of support.



Networking at morning tea

Outcomes and learnings

This Round Table gave participants an opportunity to share the ECoPP implementation experiences of various companies. While it is still early days for ECoPP, its implementation is well underway for some. There is difficulty in engaging marketing groups with the importance of ECoPP and environmental decision-making and it is not easy to get detailed data to help validate decisions. Measures are needed to assist in the communication process, both within companies and externally with consumers. PIQET may assist in providing credible information upon which to base environmental decisions. Further case studies are required to test PIQET beyond the scope under which it was originally developed and users need to be assured that the data PIQET draws upon is robust, current and transparent. However PIQET is proving to be a promising development and is already informing the packaging development process of one of Australia's largest food manufacturers.

Find out more

A full report including copies of the presentations and details of the round table discussion feedback, conclusions and learnings is available in PDF format at a cost of \$125 + 10% GST.

For further information or to order your copy of the full report please contact: Robert Jordan on (03) 9681 8199 or robert@sustainablepack.org