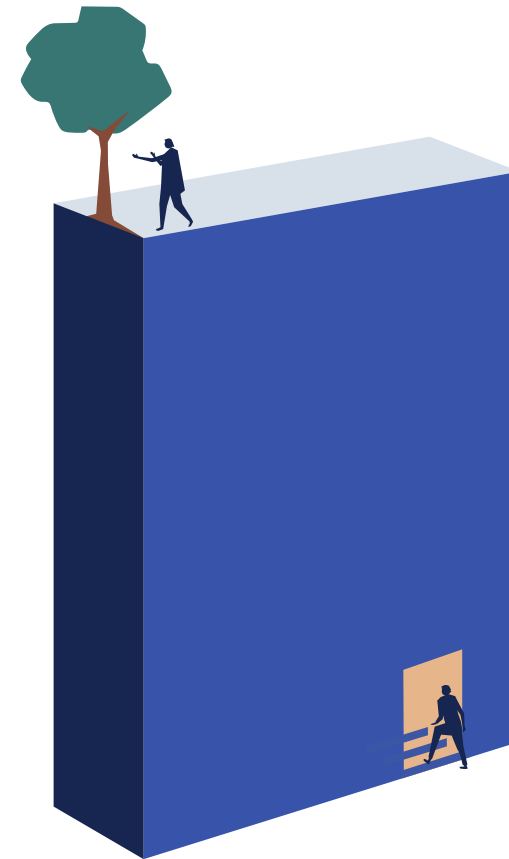


# Towards a *Sustainable* Bookselling Future.

What does sustainability look like in the book industry,  
and what can we do for the future?



## Foreword

# Why a *Sustainability* Paper?

The decision to produce a paper on sustainability in our industry was an easy one. I've worked in bookselling for the best part of thirty years and have always marvelled at the quantity of packaging and merchandising waste, and the resource intensity of the supply chain. Boxes of books passing to and fro on our highways seemed much like trade theory – I could understand the idea of it but not so much the application.

I have also struggled, as we all do, with the expense and difficulty of controlling climate in retail spaces where doors are either always open or frequently opened and closed. Recent energy issues across the globe have made the cost of heating and cooling far more acute, and environmental consciousness more aligned with business outcomes than ever before.

We provide this paper as a baseline for understanding our own complex ecosystem, the problems we face and the potential for solutions. Angela Meyer has done a wonderful job, and her work provides us with a starting point for serious enquiry into what we can do individually and collectively to improve the way we conduct our businesses.

Please let us know your thoughts on this paper, and most importantly what it is that you are doing to make your business more sustainable, and what you aspire to do. We will collate your experiences and ideas to build a model of best practice for Australian bookshops. All of us at BookPeople are incredibly passionate about this paper, and look forward to engaging with the industry in seeking better outcomes for us all.

**Robbie Egan**  
Chief Executive Officer  
BookPeople



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Sustainable Bookselling: efforts, initiatives, challenges</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Sustainable Bookselling: 23 a practical checklist</b>	
<b>Context</b>	<b>4</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>The product</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Packaging</p> </div> </div>		<b>Conclusion and recommendations</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Book Industry: measuring impact</b>	<b>8</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Damages</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Shipping</p> </div> </div>		<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>What is the Australian Book Industry doing?</b>	<b>9</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Running a sustainable business/ operations</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Proofs and marketing materials</p> </div> </div>		<b>Who we are</b>	<b>30</b>
		<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Sale or return (SOR) and stock control</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Setting and communicating green goals</p> </div> </div>			

## Acknowledgement of Country

BookPeople acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our offices are located and where we conduct our business, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.

## Introduction

# *A code red* for humanity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 6th Assessment Report from 2021 and 2022 signified a 'code red for humanity'. We're already nearing abrupt climate tipping points.<sup>1</sup> We have less than a decade to make massive reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions. And if we don't, we will likely see global heating above 1.5°C and higher well within our lifetimes.

This heating will cause an increased intensity and frequency of the extreme weather events we are already experiencing here in Australia, and the [2021 State of the Environment Report](#), a landmark five-yearly report released in July 2022, notes that 'the state and trend of the environment of Australia are poor and deteriorating as a result of increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction'.<sup>2</sup>

The report finds that environmental decline is harming human health, both directly and indirectly, and impacting our economy. Besides this, it shows a rise in the number of species listed as threatened, the poor condition of nearshore reefs, the pressure on inland water systems, increased habitat loss from clearing native vegetation, and that overall, while Australian ecosystems have generally rebounded from events such as bushfires, the compounding nature of recent events leaves little time for recovery.

**The Australian book industry has a responsibility, alongside and working with government and other industries, to urgently reduce emissions and help create a greener and safer future.**

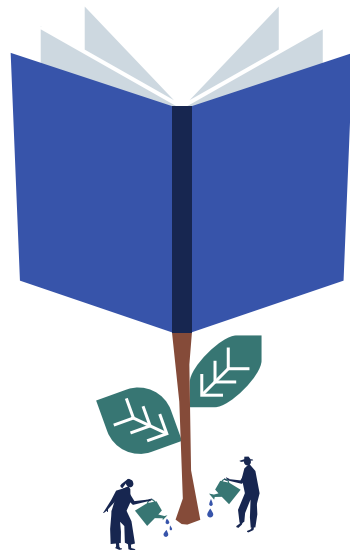
This *BookPeople Sustainability Paper* discusses the issue of environmental sustainability and bookselling, placing it within the context of the broader book industry. It's a snapshot of where we are currently, and provides practical and peer advice on what can be worked on immediately to improve the environmental footprint of bookselling. It is intended to contribute to a conversation about larger and more radical changes within the book industry.

The audience for this paper is, foremost, Australian booksellers, but it is also intended for publishers, industry bodies, policymakers, and anyone interested in the impact of books on the environment and possible solutions.



# This *paper*:

- › Gives a contemporary snapshot of booksellers' **best practice** along with the challenges they face in becoming more **environmentally conscious**
- › Delves into **publishing and the supply chain** and shows how choices upstream affect the environmental credentials of the product booksellers receive, and what some publishers and printers in Australia are doing to change their practices
- › Will help BookPeople and other industry bodies **set targets and measures** for emissions reduction and environmental sustainability
- › Gives **practical advice** to booksellers so they can implement change
- › Makes **recommendations for industry, research and government** based on what has been learned



**We in the industry often discuss the cultural value of books. Of course, we cannot imagine a world without them.**

**But we have come to a time where we can't let this ideology outweigh the acknowledgement of destructive environmental practices that exist in our industry, as they do in other industries.**

There are and will be new ways of making, distributing, selling and enjoying books that have a lesser – and hopefully at some stage zero – impact on the environment, and help ensure a better future for the readers of tomorrow.

**Angela Meyer**  
(author, editor and academic), on behalf of BookPeople

# What is *climate justice*?



Climate and environmental justice is a concept that acknowledges that not all people are equally affected by climate change. [Scientific American](#) reported that Black and Hispanic people in the US are exposed to more emissions than White people, despite consuming less from the industries responsible.<sup>3</sup> Globally, several of the world's least developed nations populate [the list](#) of ten countries hit hardest by climate-fuelled weather events from 1999 to 2018.<sup>4</sup>

In Australia, the organisation Environmental Justice Australia [acknowledges](#) that

**‘First Nations communities continue to defend Country, culture and the future, and resist the violence and destruction of colonisation. This is despite bearing the brunt of environmental harms and gross injustice they have long been fighting to correct.’<sup>5</sup>**

The [2021 State of the Environment Report](#) states that ‘Indigenous knowledge and connections to Country are vital for sustainability and healing Australia’ and that Indigenous people seek greater participation in Australia’s environmental management system.<sup>6</sup>

This Sustainability Paper acknowledges that climate action coexists with climate justice, and that as we work on aspects of environmental sustainability within our industry we must understand the unequal impact of climate events on various groups and see justice and equality as responsibilities of this work.

## Context

# The *Australian* climate.

In 2021 a book called *Firestorm* by Greg Mullins, former commissioner of Fire & Rescue NSW and founder of [Emergency Leaders for Climate Action](#), or ECLA, was released.<sup>7</sup> This is a firsthand account of an emergency leader who has tackled escalating emergencies in his lifetime, and has also travelled and discussed this issue with his counterparts and colleagues worldwide. His depictions of Black Summer in the book are harrowing.

He says:

‘Our escalating bushfires... have made them impossible to control on the worst fire weather days. In the previous century we had become adept at fighting bushfires in the high 30s and low 40s, then our worst fire days. Fires burning on days approaching 50°C are beyond anything that humans have previously experienced, and beyond the capacity of current firefighting arrangements and technologies.

‘Therefore it is imperative that we dial down the heat, by tackling emissions...

‘The Bushfires Royal Commission Report said that decades of warming is locked in because of what has already been emitted, and conditions will worsen as a result regardless of what we do. But, it warned, what happens in the future is entirely reliant on what worldwide governments, including ours, do about emissions reduction **now**.

‘If current inaction continues, fire seasons like Black Summer are likely to be common by the 2040s, and the new normal by 2060. The worst seasons will be worse than anything we can currently imagine, which is frightening to contemplate.’



*Firestorm* by Greg Mullins  
available now through  
Penguin Random House

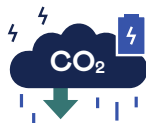
# A step forward...

Since Mullins' book was released, we have elected in a new federal government. This has helped Australia take a step forward in terms of climate action.

The government's strategies include updating the electricity grid and reducing the price of electric vehicles, but importantly they also [include](#):



**Supporting businesses and industries to innovate and adopt smarter practices and technologies**



**Encouraging businesses and consumers to reduce emissions**



**Regulating and reporting on greenhouse gas emissions<sup>8</sup>**

These three strategies should encourage businesses that they will be supported and that the tools will become more readily available to assist their move toward environmental sustainability. Government incentives have also been announced and there will hopefully be more over time.

These include:

- › The [Emissions Reduction Fund \(ERF\)](#), which aims to provide incentives for a range of organisations and individuals to adopt new practices and technologies to reduce their emissions and store carbon.
- › [Climate Active](#), which encourages Australian businesses to become carbon neutral by awarding Climate Active Carbon Neutral Standard certification.<sup>9</sup>



As an industry we need to get on the federal government's radar and ensure we are not overlooked as other industries become greener. Getting this Sustainability Paper into the hands of local MPs and having a conversation with them is one way to do this.

It is also worth businesses approaching the sustainability issue at a **state-by-state** level.



# Context

## Australian resources

The following websites will lead you to information, tools and templates, grants and programs, and workshops and mentoring specifically for businesses:



- VIC** **Business Victoria:** <https://business.vic.gov.au/business-information/sustainability>
- QLD** **Business Queensland:** <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/running-business/environment>
- NSW** **Sustainability Advantage:** <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/Sustainability-Advantage-NSW>
- WA** **Government:** <https://www.wa.gov.au/service/environment/business-and-community-assistance>
- ACT** **Government, Climate Choices:** <https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/businesses>
- SA** **Green Industries:** <https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/bsp-overview>
- NT** **Innovation Territory:** <https://innovation.nt.gov.au/actions>

## Local initiatives

Locally, booksellers will find that there are varying initiatives around climate action, environmental sustainability, energy use, waste management and more through local government. Use these search words, or a combination, on your council's website, or give them a call:



Emissions reduction

Business grants

Sustainability and business

Green business

Energy initiatives

Waste management

# Bookselling in the *retail context*



The Australian Retailers Association [reported](#) in December 2021 that ‘less than 5% of large retailers globally’ have made a commitment to address climate change.<sup>10</sup> The Association has made a 2050 Net Zero commitment, with aspirational targets to be achieved also by 2030 and 2040. It says,

**‘The retail sector is uniquely placed to make a meaningful contribution to Australia’s transition to the low-carbon economy of the future, while also supporting the shift towards more sustainable consumption and working with suppliers to improve environmental and social impacts along the supply chain.’**

You can find out more here:

<https://www.retail.org.au/sustainability>

The National Retail Association’s sustainability page features frameworks and targets; their 2025 packaging targets; action on bags, single-use plastics, recycling and food waste; and resources and submissions related to sustainability issues in retail:

<https://www.nra.net.au/policy-advocacy/sustainability/>

## The Book Industry

# Measuring *impact*.

Greenhouse gas emissions in the book industry are present at various points along the supply chain, including forestry, paper and pulp, printing and publishing processes, waste, and energy use in buildings and transport.<sup>11</sup>

The pulp and paper industry is the world's fourth-largest energy-consuming industry, accounting for about 5% of the world's total industrial energy consumption.<sup>12</sup>

In 2015–16 in Australia, there were 6,289 tonnes of Scope One CO<sub>2</sub>-e (that's carbon dioxide equivalent) produced from publishing, and emissions from pulp, paper and converted Paper Product Manufacturing sat at 1,150,816 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.<sup>13</sup>

### How is the industry measuring emissions?

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are measured by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol as Scope One (direct emissions from sources within your business's control); Scope Two (purchased electricity, heating, cooling, steam – used within the business) and Scope Three (indirect emissions that occur as a result of activities in your business but are outside: suppliers, transport, data centres, and so on).<sup>14</sup> Businesses, such as publishers, that are beginning to track their emissions are using this accounting tool to understand and account for their direct and indirect footprint. Scope Three emissions, such as from paper, freight and shipping, are around 94% of the US publishing industry's total emissions.<sup>15</sup>

### Other initiatives

#### Race to Zero Campaign

Race to Zero is the UN-backed global campaign where 'real economy' actors commit to halving emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest. Australian retailers IKEA, Officeworks and the Kmart group have all pledged their support for this.<sup>16</sup>

#### Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)

Science-based targets provide companies with a clearly defined path to reduce emissions in line with the Paris Agreement goals. One publisher on board with this is Hachette ANZ. As a subsidiary of Hachette UK, it will form part of their commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

#### United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.<sup>17</sup> At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some Australian publishers, such as UQP and Stormbird Press, use these SDGs as guidance for an ethical and sustainable business.



# What is the Australian Book Industry doing?

## A snapshot *of now*:

A number of Australian publishers, printers and distributors throughout 2022 are moving towards more environmentally sustainable practices. Here are some of the actions being taken:

- 

**Moving towards net zero or carbon-neutral operations by 2030 or 2050**  
Several publishers
- 

**Establishing a green or sustainability team or network in-house / hired a dedicated sustainability officer**  
A&U, PRH, UQP, Hachette & others
- 

**Implementing changes in packaging to minimise trucks on the road**  
UBD
- 

**Working with international initiatives and guidelines such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**  
UQP, Stormbird Press, PRH
- 

**Moving towards or operating at 100% renewable power**  
PRH, Hachette/ADS
- 

**Implementing changes in picking and packing such as full carton picks (same carton as from the printer) and stronger cartons to reduce damage and waste**  
ADS
- 

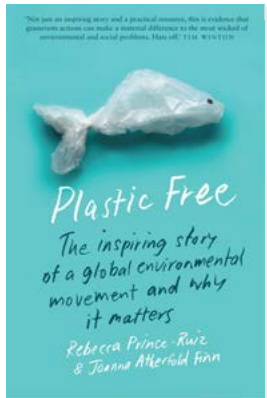
**Improving waste practices, finding ways to repurpose, reuse and recycle what would once have been sent to landfill**  
Several publishers

# What is the Australian Book Industry doing?



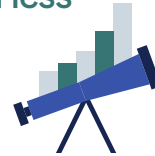
▶ **Offsetting every book published**  
Exploring Eden Media

▶ **Investigating plastic-free or plastic-minimised book production and distribution**  
UNSW Press/NewSouth



*Plastic Free* by Rebecca Prince-Ruiz and Joanna Atherfold Finn has a water-based varnish on the book instead of a laminate, along with several other books released by NewSouth.

▶ **Investment in automated forecasting in the long tail resulting in higher fulfilment of orders and less unsold stock**  
Hachette



▶ **Sending files overseas and locally printing buy-ins rather than lots of international shipping**

▶ **Printers are adhering to ISO Standards, recycling waste and reusing water, and improving energy use**



▶ **Public reporting**  
Penguin Random House Australia & New Zealand has [reported publicly](#) on its 2021 CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions.<sup>18</sup>

▶ **Establishing industry resources**  
The Australian Publishers Association (APA) re-established a sustainability working group in 2019. In 2022 they released their [Greener Publishing Guide](#), a sustainability resource for publishers which includes information about design, paper, materials and printing; in-house green business practices; and advice about a green supply chain. This resource can help publishers, their green teams or sustainability staff to make change and also communicate the changes needed to suppliers and customers.



Hachette reported that it may be the first publisher to market with a plastic-free box set for *Heartstopper*.

# What is the Australian Book Industry doing?

## Net zero versus carbon neutral

Some publishers are moving towards net zero or carbon neutral operations. The difference between these is about emissions reduction (net zero) versus offsetting.

**The strongest environmental goal is to reduce and finally remove GHG emissions, but offsetting while taking action to remove is also often the process.<sup>19</sup>**

## Where are the gaps?

As is clear from this snapshot, the work has begun. But some publishers who were active in this area said they'd hit a bit of a block. Several interviewees expressed that significant change could only come with strong government legislation and regulation. As well as more availability of sustainable materials.

However, as Elizabeth Weiss, Publisher at Allen & Unwin, said, 'We can't wait for this legislation because at some point, in order to export our product to those countries that have legislation, our product will have to adhere to their rules. The other driver of change in publishing practices will be increased sustainability requirements of our major customers.' Overall, 'there can be costs involved in moving to more sustainable practices, but this is minimised if the industry works in collaboration with suppliers and customers. It's difficult to address embedded

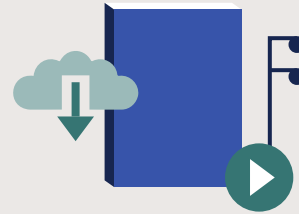
carbon emissions as an individual publisher as they are generated up and down the book supply chain. Similarly, meaningfully reducing plastic waste requires collaboration with distributors (for packaging) and book printers (for book lamination).'

Changes in publishing and printing are also stalled by what we may call cultural normalisation – the industry doing things the way they've always been done. Often it's because supply chain partners and the systems publishers work with are stuck in this business-as-usual mode, but it's also the financial impediments to change. For example, with recent paper crises, publishers may be paying 15–30% extra for the paper in their books. This may stop them from making more sustainable choices in other areas.

If enough publishers can successfully shift their culture toward more environmentally conscious publishing, and also work together and share best practice, the supply chain would have to adapt and greener choices would become more cost-effective.



# Audio *and* digital



## Is digital actually more sustainable?

The manufacturing of eReaders and other devices has a high environmental impact but eReading is [more sustainable at high usage rates](#)<sup>20</sup>. Kobo has released a more eco-conscious eReader (The Kobo Clara 2E), with a recycled plastic exterior. But, with digital products, there is also the storage of content.

A widely reported [2019 study](#) into the environmental impact of music streaming services showed that

**'the transition towards streaming recorded music from internet-connected devices has resulted in significantly higher carbon emissions than at any previous point in the history of music.'**<sup>21</sup>

This is due to storing and transmitting digital files. This is an area that deserves more attention if we are going to be bringing emissions down all across the publishing process and through all iterations of a product. We will also have to look at the emissions from storage in the data systems we use, such as ordering and POS systems.

As George Walkley said in [The Bookseller](#),

**'Rather than asking which (print or digital) is preferable, we should acknowledge that both have consequences for the environment. Harder as it may be to measure, there is a negative effect from digital publishing. As an industry we're not talking about it enough.'**<sup>22</sup>

# Efforts, initiatives, *challenges...*

Between January and October 2022 BookPeople communicated with a sample of Australian booksellers via email, phone, video conferencing and in person. The aim was to collect data on current environmental best practice and to understand what challenges booksellers face in becoming more sustainable businesses. We identified key areas of concern for booksellers, and while these areas are often interrelated, they can be addressed one by one. The purpose of highlighting them here is so booksellers can be inspired and guided by their peers, but these pages may also help create targeted conversations with the broader book industry and the supply chain, government, and industry bodies and organisations. Under each area of concern, we highlight:

- > **The issue**
- > **Initiatives and challenges**
- > **Further ideas**

The ideas are guided by Liu, Zhu and Feng's article 'The circular economy and green supply chain management' (2021) wherein they identify five 'dimensions' in the current literature around a circular economy: reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery and remanufacturing.<sup>23</sup> Liu, Zhu and Feng define the circular economy as a general concept that promotes 'restructuring of industrial processes along the lines of industrial ecosystems, whereby waste of one manufacturer becomes input of another, and the optimal solution... is to achieve the 'win-win' opportunity between achieving economic growth and alleviating crisis of resource depletion and environmental degradation.'<sup>24</sup>

Exploring further ideas via these dimensions also helps to align our industry with the Australian government's [plan](#) to deliberately transition to a circular waste economy.<sup>25</sup>

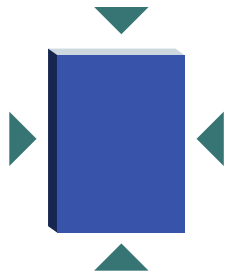
Liu, Zhu and Feng give the following definitions for the five dimensions. **Reduction** 'refers to reduced consumption of resources in pre-manufacturing, reduced use of energy and materials during manufacturing, and waste reduction during the use stage'. **Reuse** refers to components or whole products that can be repurposed in their original form. **Recycling** is about giving products secondary use through 'collecting, disassembling, separating and processing products or materials into secondary use'. **Recovery** is a practice integrated across a global supply chain. It is when product recovery processes, such as repair and remanufacturing, are 'integrated into supply chains', and includes the collection of end-of-life products. 'In a closed loop supply chain network,' say Liu, Zhu and Feng, 'distribution centres can act as collectors for a recovery system' (citing Wang and Hsu, 2010). With **remanufacturing**, products are rebuilt or reassembled, often with parts replaced, but as new. 'Use of remanufactured products and/or components can significantly reduce negative environmental impact' and if integrated into the design process for original products, remanufacturing can 'achieve both economic and environmental impacts'.

While ideas around these processes are drawn from each concern, most would take a whole-industry, and sometimes multi-industry, approach to be actioned.



# Sustainable Bookselling

## The product



### The issue

One of the biggest areas of concern for booksellers who wish to become more sustainable as a business is the embedded emissions in the product itself. There are several average estimates of the carbon cost of a book, but none of the studies are entirely comprehensive. A [2012 study](#) tracked the print run on a specific book and landed at 2.7 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e<sup>26</sup>. A [2021 study](#) analysed the footprint of four books received by a book reviewer in London and their conclusions ranged from 0.9 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e to 36.5 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e.<sup>27</sup>

For comparison, one tree absorbs about 25kg of Co<sub>2</sub> per year. So if we average out the carbon costs above, one tree barely covers two books.

Some publishers have made net zero commitments which means they will have to properly track these emissions. Penguin Random House Australia & New Zealand has released its first [report](#) detailing 2021 emissions in the business. It shows that the parts of the process that had the most emissions in that year were inbound transport and distribution (49.73%), paper mill/printer/printer materials (23.93%), outbound transport and distribution (14.03%) and imported electricity consumption (7.23%).<sup>28</sup>

It will be some time before all emissions across publishing and the supply chain are accounted for, so it is up to every business in the industry to take responsibility for emissions, including Scope Three indirect emissions. If booksellers wish to track their emissions, they must go beyond considering the lighting they use and their composting capabilities; if they are to be genuinely sustainable, they have to understand and account for the embedded emissions in the product they sell.

### Initiatives and challenges

Some booksellers are making conscious choices not to ship in books from overseas, and also to minimise product that uses an excess of non-recyclable materials in its design. But *most* books have a plastic laminate on the cover, and may be printed with inks and glues derived from petrochemicals. And while most books in Australia are printed on FSC-certified paper, made of responsibly sourced wood fibre, this is not always the case. Paper shortages are driving up the cost of printing, which may mean that some publishers utilise less transparent sources, such as offshore printers, to keep the costs of their books down. Even with books printed in Australia, there are the carbon costs of forestry, printing, and distribution.

The Chestnut Tree in Footscray, Victoria was set up to be sustainable from its inception. Owner Reem Sweid realised bookstores often discounted books. She said, 'I thought to myself that rather than discounting books – I could use that little margin to donate to planting trees.' She chose [One Tree Planted](#) for the store's offsetting, [an initiative that is committed to planting natives in bushfire-affected regions](#).

# Sustainable Bookselling

## Further ideas

Offsetting can be built into the business model for a bookstore, but it may also be something that is offered to customers at the counter or in the online checkout – would they like to offset the carbon cost of the book? An average could be worked out from the figures available.

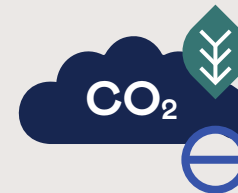
The ultimate goal is the **reduction** and elimination of emissions in the business, not offsetting. But offsetting can be used as a tool as industries get on track.

How are overall emissions in the business accounted for? There are many businesses and organisations that offer consultation on environmental strategy for retail, and carbon accounting tools. Once the initial setup is completed, this is a yearly or six-monthly process like doing tax or stocktake.

In Australia, at the time of writing, there are none specifically targeted to bookselling (unlike in the UK, where the Booksellers Association has developed a [Carbon Offset Calculator](#)), but there are consultants who work with businesses both large and small.<sup>29</sup> It is worth asking your local networks if there are specialists in your area who can help you set up a carbon accounting system.

In 2022 we did a workshop called ‘Cutting Carbon’ run by Sara Redmond-Neal, [Small Mighty CSR](#); Abbie Freestone, [Rewild Agency](#); and Hayley Morris, [Impact Sustainability](#). Each of these businesses provide some of these services and the workshop was approachable and informative. Small Mighty CSR also has a free [DIY Guide](#) for creating your own sustainability strategy.<sup>30</sup>

# Achieving *carbon neutrality*



Spa World teamed up with Greenfleet<sup>37</sup> to provide their carbon offsets, and used Ekos<sup>38</sup> in New Zealand to carry out a self-assessment of the carbon costs across the business. In 2020, Australian chain Spa World became the first carbon-neutral spa retailer in the world.

The catalyst, the company's website says, 'was the devastating Australian bushfires. We've always been into reusing, recycling and reducing waste but the bushfires were a wake-up call.'

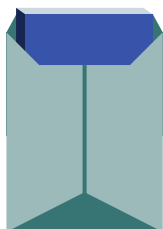
Booksellers can look to other retail businesses that have gone carbon-neutral or made net zero commitments for inspiration in their own journey.



Zero Carbon & Climate Positive Certification

# Sustainable Bookselling

## Packaging



### The issue

Books are distributed in all different kinds of packages: mostly cardboard, with various types of filler, large and small, sealed with tape or glue. What can't be reused is often waste. And there is embedded carbon in the process of creating packaging, and in packaging and distributing the product.

### Initiatives and challenges

Some publishers and distributors' packaging has changed in recent years. United Book Distributors' shift to the iPack Carton system has significantly reduced the transport of void and air, eliminating 120 truckloads from the road per year. However, many booksellers did not seem to know the reason for the packaging change, and on their end, found that the boxes weren't reusable, such as for returns. Sometimes they would even have to source new boxes. This is a dilemma, because on the one hand we have to reduce emissions and this system does actually do that. On the other hand, it seems suppliers would benefit from more thorough consultation processes with a range of bookstores, ensuring booksellers have agency over the green transition as well.

Avid Reader in Brisbane's solution to this was to purchase a perforator, so that the store can generate its own packaging material. 'This is where all the single-use UBD boxes will now go,' said Fiona Stager, co-owner.

In terms of other packaging – plastic pillows, while now often made from recycled and recyclable plastics, often need specialist waste services, which creates work for booksellers. Many booksellers do manage to reuse

and recycle some of the packaging. Rabble Books in WA passes on its bubble wrap and packaging to other businesses to be reused. Fullers in Tasmania and South Seas in South Australia have both developed strong relationships and communication with waste services and are able to recycle soft plastics and, in Fullers' case, polystyrene. Anna Low, owner and manager of Potts Point Bookshop in NSW is also working with local council to determine solutions for some of the 'trickier waste'. The starch beads that are found in some suppliers' boxes can be composted, with effort. Catherine Schulz, books manager at Fullers, said 'enough moisture and space (as on a garden bed) is the trick.' Phillipa Morris, from Wise Words Bookshop in Moree, composts all the packaging from the shop, because, she said, 'so much cardboard isn't really recycled and the environmental cost of shipping it to recycling centres is probably greater than the gain. Uses for cardboard include erosion control and slowing creeks.'

Several booksellers no longer buy greeting cards or other products that come plastic wrapped, and some of the suppliers of gift items are starting to get the message about minimising this material.

### Further ideas

Packaging for product coming into store has to protect the books from damages, from possible inclement weather, and must have a degree of **reusability** and **recyclability**. For publishers, it also has to be cost effective. As publishers seek to continue to improve their green credentials, they must continue to consult with booksellers and find packaging solutions that work on as many levels as possible, therefore **reducing** waste.

# Sustainable Bookselling

## Damages



### The issue

Besides inadequate packaging creating damaged product and therefore waste, there is also the practice of some publishers requiring damaged books to be returned. Sending back whole books is unsustainable. It requires more postage, more emissions, and the book will be destroyed anyway. Some publishers require the front and back of the book to be ripped off, which means, one bookseller told us, the book can't be given to charity.

### Initiatives and challenges

Some booksellers have made the conscious decision to not claim minor damages and to offer those books to customers at a slight discount. For example, Amplify Bookstore has a pre-loved section, which includes second-hand and damaged books.

### Further ideas

To enhance sustainability, publishers could require just the barcode to be returned for damages, and a digital image if more evidence is needed. These copies could then be read like proofs and passed around the staff, helping them hand-sell the book. This will **reduce** waste and emissions from postage.

## Shipping



### The issue

In a country like Australia, product travels long distances to its eventual outlet. Transport was [responsible](#) for 18% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions in 2020.<sup>31</sup> Until an electric transport network becomes a reality, the book industry must find ways to minimise the impact of all these trucks on the road. There is also the waste created by the materials used to ship books to the customer. The focus in this section is on bookstores shipping product to the customer.

### Initiatives and challenges

Some booksellers are using carbon-neutral shipping options, such as those provided by [Sendle](#), and reusable and compostable mailers, such as those made by [Hero](#). Amplify Bookstore uses both of these, and they use thermal-printed compostable shipping labels. The Chestnut Tree in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray uses

compostable and recyclable packaging from [Noissue](#). Many other bookstores reuse packaging for shipping. Dymocks' packaging and shopping bags are sustainably sourced.

### Further ideas

More booksellers could offer carbon-neutral shipping options in their checkout. Sixty-three per cent of consumers [recently surveyed](#)<sup>32</sup> stated they would pay extra for a delivery service that was more environmentally friendly. The end consumer's awareness of the impact of all these trucks on the road on the environment is growing. To give consumers the option to make greener choices can be a part of retailers' – particularly big retailers who ship huge volumes – plan to **reduce** emissions in their business. Also, mailers made by Hero are both compostable and **reusable**, which helps the end consumer participate in making the process of book-buying more sustainable. The more retailers that can use such packaging, the better.

# Sustainable Bookselling

## Running a sustainable business/ operations



### The issue

There is a carbon cost to the on-the-ground, day-to-day running of a bookstore, including energy use, waste, and emissions generated through systems used in the business. The federal government website [energy.gov.au](http://energy.gov.au) tells us that 'The retail sector is one of the more energy-intensive industries in Australia. It accounts for around 50% of energy use in the commercial property sector and 5% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.'<sup>33</sup>

### Initiatives and challenges

Bookstores are switching to green energy through the installation of solar and/or through 100% renewable energy providers. Readings moved forward with several sustainability initiatives a few years ago such as, said managing director Mark Rubbo, 'better waste management practices and a push to use renewable energy,' including solar panels on the Carlton shop. Businesses can reduce energy use also through converting their lighting to LEDs, as Beaufort St Books in WA has done. The website [energy.gov.au](http://energy.gov.au) has a [specific page for retail](#) that may be useful.<sup>34</sup>

The greatest challenge may be for bookstores that are inside shopping centres and complexes. These businesses may need to take the initiative to have conversations with centre management about plans for a shift toward greener power for the whole centre. They may band together with other concerned retailers, and help management understand (through the various statistics cited in this paper) that this would be a move that would also attract customers.

Besides the waste from packaging received in-store, there's also the waste produced by staff and sometimes in-store cafes. Having the ability to compost any relevant waste is the best solution.

Other products are used in day-to-day operations, such as paper and cleaning products. All single-use paper that the Chestnut Tree uses in-store is from [Who Gives a Crap](#), and all their cleaning products come from [Zeroco](#). Amplify Bookstore gets their postcards, bookmarks and ephemera printed sustainably.

Anna Low, owner and manager of Potts Point Bookshop, is planning a full audit of processes and products, so they may 'choose the best products and services that meet our objectives... Our current list of things to review include our paper bags, electricity supplier, packaging for posting out books, carbon-neutral delivery services.'

Beachside Bookshop in NSW stopped using price stickers four years ago and is phasing out bags altogether. They keep a supply of publisher totes for large purchases.

Booktopia has also announced in its 2022 [Annual Report](#) changes in its operations to improve sustainability.<sup>35</sup> The company has formed its first Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) committee. 'Reporting to the Board of Directors the focus has been on impact initiatives and driving more robust and accurate reporting.' Booktopia stated that it is at the beginning of its journey and 'we are confident we can continue to take positive steps and deliver transparent reporting on our performance'. One area among others that Booktopia focuses on in this space is 'the impact on natural resources in the production of paper books. This is why prolonging the lifespan of a physical book to keep it out of landfill is very important to us.' They do this by: donating product that cannot be sold, selling stock that is slightly damaged and not 'shelf ready' and recycling all books that cannot be donated or sold.

# Sustainable Bookselling

The systems used in store, for point of sale, stock ordering, searching for titles, etc. – how green is their business? Are their servers run off coal energy? If a bookstore begins tracking its emissions, they will need to know this, and hold every partner they work with accountable. We spoke to one supplier, Circlesoft. The company, based in Christchurch, NZ, has a green office in which staff recycle and compost, and also grow produce in the work garden. Some staff work from home and of those that commute, they all use bikes and electric vehicles. For their servers, they use the Sydney-based Google Cloud Platform (GCP), which has made the commitment to [decarbonise its energy consumption by 2030](#)<sup>36</sup> (as part of Google's overall commitment). Of other software suppliers they

use, one is carbon neutral (using offsets) and another has a target of using 100% renewable energy in its data centres (the business's largest energy consumption activity) by 2025. This is all on the right track. Several other systems companies did not get back to us, so this needs further investigation.

## Further ideas

Any bookstore can use their peers' best practice as guidance in **reducing** waste and emissions in the day-to-day running of the business. Undertaking an audit may be the best way to work out areas of improvement. You can conduct this yourself, or seek an expert's advice.

## Proofs and marketing materials



### The issue

Proof copies of books and other marketing materials are often sent unsolicited by publishers to bookstores, resulting in an overload that multiple booksellers explained to us they could not get through as many materials, therefore, ended up as waste. Booksellers expressed dismay at an excess of unsolicited marketing materials such as gifts with purchase, promotions aimed at children, badges, pens, bookmarks, gift-wrapped books, and one bookseller mentioned an individually mailed, printed, glossy flyer alerting the bookseller that a proof copy of a book was to follow. Fiona Stager of Avid Reader also said, 'All booksellers would be used to crumpled unusable marketing material (often unsolicited) being received.'

### Initiatives and challenges

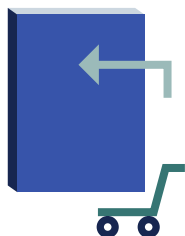
While booksellers understood it was difficult for publishers to be targeted with proof copies, some mentioned an 'opt-in' system might work, and that some staff and reviewers are fine with digital proofs. This is an area of the industry where it's hard to break the 'cultural normalisation' – proofs are sent out the way they always have been, and as we know it can be effective if they fall in the right hands. But there has to be a way to counter the excess and waste of this system.

### Further ideas

An opt-in or ordering system for proofs and advance copies could be a solution to this issue. This would result in a **reduction** of unsolicited material going out to bookstores. This would be most effective if it was via one portal (something like NetGalley, which is for digital proofs), so that booksellers didn't have to check each individual publisher's catalogue.

# Sustainable Bookselling

## Sale or return (SOR) and stock control



### The issue

Publishers and bookstores operate on a sale-or-return model, where unsold stock can be returned within a designated timeframe. The awareness of sale or return being an environmentally unsustainable model for publishing and bookselling is a difficult but necessary discussion. Besides the waste generated when unsold books are pulped, there are the emissions produced through shipping the books back and forth. Part of the issue, some booksellers also expressed plainly, is that there is simply a lot of ‘crap’ being published. Bookseller Natalie Latter from Rabble Books referred to ‘an unsustainable churn of books for certain holidays that people will read once and then throw away’. Anna Low at Potts Point Bookshop said, ‘I worry that we are in an industry that pumps out more and more books and that there is little time for a book to flourish before the pressure on that space in the market is taken up by a new title... To change this churn of books will take great bravery at every level of the industry.’ Philippa Morris from Wise Words said, ‘A cause of wastage is rubbish books; books that are junk. Industry reps and catalogues are sometimes guilty of trying to sell anything with pages.’

Libby Armstrong from Beachside Bookshop said the biggest shock she had coming back to bookselling after a 20-year break ‘was how generous SOR had become and how this has created a constant churn of returns. And the feeling that a lot of publishing decisions are made on filling the shelves at DDS.’

Several respondents mentioned the issue of how discount department stores (DDS) have undermined the value of the printed book. One said, ‘Wouldn’t it be amazing

if publishers collectively corrected their behaviour by publishing less DDS-inspired material and re-negotiating their terms with the DDS around discounts and SOR. It would sure save a lot of trees.’

### Initiatives and challenges

An overhaul to the system will be needed, with consideration of issues such as how to take a chance on unknown authors and more left-of-field books if they cannot be ‘triallyed’ and returned, and how to manage stock that doesn’t sell.

While this is being thought over, more rigor in publishing choices, buying and stock control (and better communication across the chain) will help reduce emissions and waste.

Matilda Dixon-Smith, formerly of The Chestnut Tree, shared with us the considerations of a buyer in an indie bookstore, ‘balancing out wanting to present a new work as being in demand versus being a concerned consumer and not wanting to over-order so books end up being sent back and forth’. What’s helpful, for a small bookstore, is how they get to know their customer base so area-specific curation can become more pronounced.

Data can also come into the picture and help publishers/ reps work with bookstores on curation. Jonathan Seifman said that with Booktopia Publishing Services he is ‘working on digitally recreating what the good sales reps do – using all the data we collect relevant to a bookshop – such as what are people buying online in that geographical area, married up with what that bookshop has previously bought, what sells well, and what authors are local.’



## Sustainable Bookselling

This kind of consideration can feed back up the chain. On the publishing side, Louise Stark, CEO of Hachette ANZ said, 'Publishers and retailers could work better together to share data on consumer demand to better meet that demand.' She said, 'Ultimately Hachette would like to be able to track not only sales but live SOH in stores to enable us to better anticipate consumer demand, printing only what is required to meet that demand.'

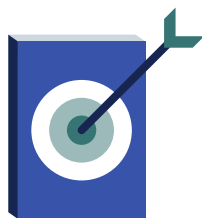
### Further ideas

Booksellers might try to increase the facilitation of pre-orders with their key customer base. More promotion of pre-orders through customer-direct emails, social media,

and in-store conversations may help with stock level management and the **reduction** of returns all the way up the chain.

And with these overall shifts toward sustainability that need to happen, a rethinking of the publishing, marketing and publicity model may need to occur. Sustainable publishing is not just about choices around inks and paper while still churning out hit-and-miss material, it's about creating different roles in teams, new conversations in-house, and better communication with the wider industry to foster title and author longevity rather than quick peaks and wide troughs.

## Setting and communicating green goals



### The issue

Booksellers need to communicate with customers and their communities that they are becoming more environmentally friendly.

### Initiatives and challenges

The first people bookstore owners and managers can communicate with is their staff. They can set some clear goals and make sure everyone is on the same page. Then they can talk to their suppliers and, importantly, communicate to customers. They may wish to be open with them about the fact that this is a journey. That they're aiming to lower emissions in store and generally help their

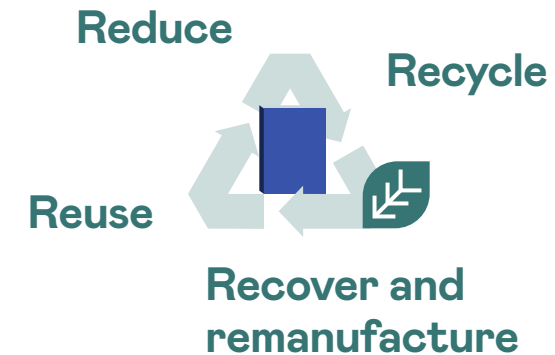
industry become more sustainable but that it's a step-by-step process. As more publishers set carbon neutral or net zero goals, they may also confidently set a date to be emissions-free. They might have some signs in-store or on their website, and encourage their staff to have face-to-face conversations with customers.

### Further ideas

Bookstores might create a permanent and prominent display of 'green' books, which may be by subject matter but, as time goes by, may expand if publishers make use of data fields that explain more about a book's green credentials.

# A *practical* checklist:

- › **Assess in-store operations and their carbon costs.**  
Reduce electricity use. Reduce waste going to landfill. Raise questions with your systems operators and suppliers and, over time, replace carbon-intensive operations with more environmentally conscious ones.
- › **Assess aspects of the building you have control over.**  
Can you change the lighting? The insulation? Can you install solar panels or move to a 100% renewable energy provider?
- › **Have conversations with publishing and distribution partners about their green goals** and let them know you wish to carry stock with a reduced environmental impact.
- › **Provide carbon-neutral shipping options** for customers and/or offset the carbon cost of a book at the checkout.
- › **Reduce the amount of stock being returned** through working with suppliers on more focused and targeted buying methods. Consider options other than returning stock such as discounting and donating.
- › **Reduce the amount of one-off marketing materials** coming through the store, including plastic items like balloons, banners, stickers and so on.
- › **Reduce plastic product and packaging** coming into the store.
- › **Reuse as much packaging as possible.** Talk to other businesses in your area and see if they can use any of the packaging you can't. Shred or repurpose boxes that aren't reusable and use that cardboard as filler.
- › **Recycle any packaging that can't be reused.** Talk to your local waste services and see what's possible.
- › **Reduce electronics and batteries** that can't be repurposed or reused. Local council sites and also retailers like Officeworks have e-waste facilities.
- › **Use a recycling service** for printer ink and toner cartridges.
- › Repurpose or remanufacture furniture, shelving, or other items of the store fit-out **to give them a longer life** (rather than outright replacing them).
- › Rebuild or remanufacture **electronics** (including computer systems), replacing only obsolete components.



## Conclusion and recommendations

# Towards a *circular economy*.

This paper has acknowledged the necessity of reducing the carbon cost of the book industry in Australia through the specific lens of the bookshop. BookPeople has established some of the main issues impacting sustainability in our industry, such as the carbon cost of the materials and processes of book production, energy use in buildings, packaging and shipping, excess marketing materials and the inability of different parts of the supply chain to work together productively on the issue.

The following considerations of the circular economy in relation to books and a look at what our overseas counterparts are doing, along with the information gathered firsthand from publishers and booksellers, inform the final recommendations.



### Can the book industry be part of a circular economy?

A circular economy, according to [CSIRO](#), is about

**'business models and practices that ensure sustainable materials management'.<sup>39</sup> A circular economy 'reduces primary material requirements, optimises processes and products for lower material and waste intensity. It therefore allows value adding to materials to occur multiple times across their life cycle.'**

Currently, books are predominantly made from virgin (though predominantly controlled) wood but the end of their lifecycle as a product varies greatly. It is difficult to determine the 'value' of a book when one book would become an heirloom, another would be recirculated through second-hand bookshops, and another would be pulped (this is one aspect the IPG's [Book Journeys Project](#) in the UK is investigating further). Theoretically, to introduce circularity to book production, pulp would be used to make new books. However, 'the pulp from already bound books is typically not reusable to make PCW [post-consumer waste] paper due to the glue and ink used, as well as the infrastructure capabilities of the press', a [2022 US study](#) determined.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

While this is an area that needs further investigation, it is our understanding that in Australia, printers' machines are most efficient with paper that comes in reels/web format and recycled paper does not come in this format (it is instead sheet fed), hence why FSC mix paper is most used.

**As the US study found, producing virgin paper 'requires four times the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> per ton and uses enough energy to run an average US home for two months, when compared to 100% PCW paper. This is the main area where change can be made, and waste can be reduced by using as much PCW as possible.'**

Besides the principles of reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery and remanufacturing as set out by Liu, Zhu and Feng implemented across all areas of the book industry,

**this shift in paper use could be crucial to reducing overall CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the product.**<sup>41</sup>

Further research is needed into the infrastructure required in Australia to make book-grade, format-appropriate PCW paper available to printers, therefore enhancing economic circularity.

### Overseas book industry models

The Independent Publishers' Guild (IPG) in the UK and Ireland has a Sustainability Action Group and a taskforce consisting of publishers, retailers, printers and distributors. The group conducted a project, the [Book Journeys Project](#), which tracked the journeys of six very different books to work out each of their footprint.<sup>42</sup> They used these findings to help them set [key targets for meaningful change](#).<sup>43</sup>

In June 2022, six of the UK's book trade associations joined together in a [Sustainability Industry Forum](#) so they could 'take practical steps to make the industry more sustainable, share best practice, reduce duplication of efforts and improve transparency and accountability'.<sup>44</sup> The forum will meet quarterly and ensure sustainability efforts are collaborative and that all sectors stay informed. They will build upon the IPG's Book Journeys Project and other sustainability research, and will work practically through various working groups on 'the supply chain, including transportation and use of plastics, end-of-life treatment of books, including returns and disposal, paper and printing and book finishes and raw materials'.<sup>45</sup>

In September 2022, the UK Booksellers Association (BA) launched a GBP 100k [sustainability grant fund](#). They also previously developed a carbon calculator for booksellers. BA members can apply for a grant to improve the sustainability of their business. These range from GBP 250 to 1000. The BA's [Sustainable Bookselling Manifesto](#) also 'outlines a number of steps that booksellers, the wider supply chain, and the BA itself can take to reduce their environmental impact, including utilising local suppliers where possible, eliminating single-use plastics and switching to a green energy supplier'.<sup>46</sup>

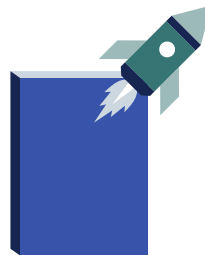
## Conclusion and recommendations

In May 2022 in the US, a Publishing Distribution Practices Report was researched and produced by Portland State University, the Independent Book Publishers Association, and PubWest. A [follow-up article](#) addressed recommendations for the industry. This included 'starting with paper and emissions assessment for more eco-friendly publishing; emphasising pre-orders, local and discounted delivery, trade organization membership, and POS systems for cost-effective delivery; limiting outsourcing to restrict supply chain disruptions; reducing print runs and promoting books more effectively to minimize returns; and utilizing print-on-demand for proof copies and gap runs'.<sup>47</sup>

In October 2022 a joint statement called the 'Publishing 2030 Accelerator' was issued by the International Publishers Association (IPA) and the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) as the steering group on behalf of 17 initial signatories. As [Publishing Perspectives](#) reports, 'its interest is in accelerating publishing's execution on sustainability, relative to the climate crisis'.<sup>48</sup>

**At the core of the accelerator is urgency, expressed through the five points of a manifesto:**

1. Take responsibility
2. Drive change
3. Accelerate action
4. Share our experience
5. Hold each other accountable



In Australia, we can learn from and take inspiration from our overseas counterparts, their research and subsequent actions. It would be beneficial for us also to conduct our own research into book journeys and how to effectively limit returns, to create forums and opportunities where different sectors of the industry can work together on 'green goals', and to investigate funding opportunities that would help booksellers, publishers and other book industry organisations achieve carbon neutral and net zero goals.

There is much work to be done for the Australian book industry to become more environmentally conscious, but the work has begun. Publishers are setting carbon-reduction goals and are communicating with each other on best practice. Booksellers are working hard to make change where they can, and are able to identify multiple areas where sustainability could be further improved with the help of their partners in the supply chain. This Sustainability Paper is intended to help empower booksellers to have those conversations and understand their power as the link between the product and the end customer. The following recommendations can be furthered and championed by the various audiences of this paper – from within the industry, from academia and research, and from government.

**Let's keep the momentum going.**

# Conclusion and recommendations

## Recommendations for immediate action

- › A greater effort for different sectors of the book industry and various industry bodies to work together, to set and communicate targets and measures for meaningful change.
- › Individual industry players to not just set net zero goals but to communicate and share data that will help other businesses calculate their own carbon footprint, so that players big and small can meet these goals faster.

## Recommendations for government

- › Funding could be provided for further research into the Australian book industry and sustainability but direct funding to aid and encourage businesses in the industry (publishers, printers, distributors, booksellers, industry bodies) to achieve a green transformation would be of immediate benefit. Funded projects could include: the trialling of greener packaging and shipping methods; moving an entire operation over to solar or other green energy; improving the quality and efficiency of print-on-demand so it's a viable option for publishers who wish to avoid overprinting; and the creation of a portal for pre-orders of proof copies/ARCs from publishers and minimise the amount sent unsolicited and ending up as waste.
- › Funding could be provided to create a carbon calculator for Australian booksellers based on the UK model.
- › A green transport network would greatly reduce the emissions in the book industry, as it would in so many other industries.
- › Investment into productive recycling for economic circularity.

## Recommendations for further research

- › How can we manufacture books effectively in Australia using post-consumer-waste paper? Where are the gaps in the chain (from the recycling industry through to the pulp, paper and printing industry) that mean this paper type is not available in an economical format for printer use?
- › A deeper investigation into sale and return: how to improve buying, stock efficiency and to minimise returns; and possible alternative models for the future.
- › A study of book marketing and publicity practices and how these can be made greener while still being effective at promoting the product.
- › What are the possibilities of print-on-demand and what is holding this up in becoming a viable, sustainable option? This may require an investigation of the limitations of publishers' contracts when it comes to print-on-demand or short-run print runs.
- › What are booksellers' best practice in generating and maintaining community (both geographical and online) and how can this help them subsequently curate inventory, boost pre-orders and control stock effectively, resulting in fewer returns?
- › What is the footprint of ebooks and audiobooks in Australia?
- › What is the footprint of the server-based business systems publishers and booksellers use?
- › Building on the IPG's research, what is the life cycle of a book in Australia and how can we account of its end-of-life usages in calculating its carbon costs?

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# Who *we* are.

We have been advocating for bookshops, books and reading for almost 100 years, originally as the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA). Along the way, we have evolved for the needs of our members and our industry. We are a not-for-profit and exist exclusively for the benefit of our members.

We are a sustainable and strategic retail partner for our members, representing our booksellers' uniqueness, individuality, and expertise. We nurture positive relationships with all our stakeholders and promote professional and ethical practices.

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