

Ministers set out pathway to strengthen Australia's packaging framework

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The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) supports stronger accountability, with industry seeking certainty on implementation

APCO says the outcomes of today's Environment Ministers' Meeting (EMM), including agreement on the [Circular Economy Roadmap](#) (The Roadmap) and further packaging reform work provides a basis to strengthen existing arrangements and pursue greater national consistency.

The Roadmap identifies work over the next six months to examine options to strengthen the Australian Packaging Covenant and the [National Environment Protection \(Used Packaging Materials\) Measure 2011 \(NEPM\)](#), alongside a commitment to stronger monitoring and enforcement.

Ministers also tasked officials with developing a packaging reform plan under the [National Competition Policy \(NCP\)](#), for discussion at the next EMM. The work will consider environmental outcomes and cost impacts, with soft plastics among the initial priorities for exploring national harmonisation.

Chris Foley, CEO of APCO, said the commitments keep substantive reform on the agenda, while acknowledging industry's continuing uncertainty.

"Our members have invested in better packaging and have been seeking clear, consistent obligations to support those investments. This Communique and Roadmap provide welcome clarity on the direction of reform, and we will ensure that our Members are front and centre as the detail is thrashed out over the coming months," Mr Foley said.

"Strengthening existing arrangements means we will continue to enhance the tools, data and capability-building efforts that have been developed with industry. The NCP process also creates opportunities to reduce duplication and improve certainty across jurisdictions."

"The NCP is a proven vehicle for achieving national harmonisation across sectors, as demonstrated in various forms in telecommunications, retail and food safety standards. It offers a pathway that packaging reform can follow."

"The priority now is to translate this direction into decisions businesses can plan around."

The Communique and Roadmap provide strong recognition of the work that APCO and its 2,500 Members have done over the past few years to make the existing co-regulatory arrangement a viable reform pathway.

“Our Members have told us we need to provide three things to support an extended producer responsibility approach under the Covenant: effective enforcement, regulatory certainty, and the right model. Ministers have a commitment to putting enforcement in place and providing longer-term regulatory certainty through the NEPM. The Roadmap provides a pathway to get the model right, including options for consistent standards in packaging design, recovery and recycled-content outcomes, liability thresholds and labelling,” Mr Foley said.

“Strengthening the existing framework can support progress now. The broader reform plan must also address the investment and shared responsibility needed to improve packaging outcomes, with household affordability central to its design.”

Working with the NEPM – APCO webinar

With confirmation from ministers to strengthen the current arrangement under the NEPM, APCO invites Members and other stakeholders to its NEPM 101 webinar on Wednesday, 23 September, led by Peter Brisbane, Head of Regulatory Policy. The session will walk attendees through how the framework works, provide clarity on the roles of governments, businesses and APCO, and break down what the ministers’ announcements mean going forward.

APCO’s initial assessment is based on the published Communique and Circular Economy Roadmap. Further engagement with the [Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water](#), state and territory governments, heads of environmental protection authorities and industry stakeholders will help clarify implementation and inform updated guidance to Members.

Quick Links

- [Environment Ministers’ Meeting Communique 18 September 2026](#)
- [Circular Economy Roadmap](#)
- [National Environment Protection \(Used Packaging Materials\) Measure 2011 \(NEPM\)](#)
- [National Competition Policy](#)

The **Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation** (APCO) manages and administers the Australian Packaging Covenant, the national framework for minimising the environmental impact of packaging. APCO works with businesses across the packaging supply chain and with Commonwealth, state and territory governments.