

Rethink Your Rubbish: Stewardship Scheme Updates

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Australia's agricultural sector is embracing smarter, more sustainable solutions for managing waste. From bulk bags to chemical drums, a growing number of accredited product stewardship schemes are helping producers recycle responsibly and meet environmental obligations. This article outlines four key programs making a difference on farms today: Big Bag Recovery, which targets bulk plastic bags and sacks; bagMUSTER, a new industry-led initiative for single-use polypropylene bags; drumMUSTER, the national scheme for recycling chemical containers; and ChemClear, which provides a safe disposal pathway for unwanted agvet chemicals. Together, these programs support cleaner farms and a stronger circular economy.

Big Bag Recovery

Big Bag Recovery is an Australian Government Accredited Product Stewardship Scheme for plastic bulk bags and sacks over 15kg/l of contents.

Big Bag Recovery began with honest and humble roots. Founder and Director, Stephen Richards originally worked in the agricultural industry and noticed a growing issue; bulk bags were being burned or buried on farms. Stephen saw an opportunity to support farmers and reduce our environmental impact by encouraging them to segregate their bulk bags on farms. A few times per year, he and his kids would take road trips to collect the bags and deliver them to recyclers.

Fast forward 10 years, Big Bag Recovery is now a nationwide initiative, helping brand owners take responsibility for the end-of-life impact of their bulk bag packaging.

Why is stewardship important?

Under the mandatory national co-regulatory framework for packaging, *National Environment Protection (Used Packaging Materials) Measure 2011 (NEPM)* and the Australian Packaging Covenant there are environmental obligations for brand owners that must be met.

These obligations include brand owners taking **responsibility** for their packaging waste and ensuring that it can be recycled – this is where Big Bag Recovery steps in! They support brand owners to ensure the material is collected, pelletised and processed into new products.

How does it work for farmers?

If you're a consumer and are purchasing bulk bags or sacks from suppliers, Big Bag Recovery can recycle the material **at no cost** to you.

Why should I recycle my bulk bags?

Unfortunately, most bulk bags are single-use and after their use, end up either landfilled, burned, or buried all of which contribute to:

- Climate Change
- Carbon Emissions
- Contamination of Soil & Water
- Human Health Issues
- Loss of Valuable Resources

Rather than disposal, Big Bag Recovery offers the only Australian Government Accredited Stewardship Scheme for recycling these large bulk bags.



(L) Co-Founder & Chief Strategy Officer Stewart Ford and (R) Director & Founder Stephen Richards

Photo credit: Big Bag Recovery

What happens to the bulk bags?

All recovered bags are recycled via Circular Communities Australia who have just opened a dedicated facility in Toowoomba, Queensland.



Collection

Used bulk bags are gathered from businesses in various conditions, beginning their transformation journey



Sorting

Bags are sorted and inspected for contamination



Pelletising

Once received, materials are processed through shredding and granulating to create clean plastic pellets



New Products

Clean pellets are then manufactured into new valued products

What are bulk bags transformed into?

The recycled plastic pellets are transformed into water evaporation disks, new school chairs and other sustainable products.



Return locations in berry growing areas:

Area	Return Location	Program Bags Accepted	Non-Program Bags Accepted
Bundaberg	Council-Bundaberg Qunaba Landfill, Potters Road Mon Repos, Bundaberg	YES – FREE	YES-AT A COST
Coffs Harbour	Bellingen Shire Council, 33-39 Hyde St, Bellingen	YES – FREE	NO
Adelaide	Hackham Recyclers, 16 Cottage Lane, Hackham	YES – FREE	NO
Longford	Incitec Pivot, 4 Carins Street, Longford	Incitec Pivot Bags Only	
	Impact Fertiliser, Woolmers Lane, Longford	Impact Fertilisers Bags Only	
Lismore	Richmond Waste Depot, 15 Skyline Road, Lismore	YES – FREE	NO

Contact Big Bag Recovery to find other return locations near you
www.bigbagrecovery.com.au

bagMUSTER: A sustainable solution for agricultural plastic waste

What is bagMUSTER?

bagMUSTER is an industry-led, not-for-profit program designed to provide producers with an environmentally responsible way to recycle single-use polypropylene (PP) bags. These smaller bags, commonly used for fertilisers, seeds, grain, stock feed, and pet food, are collected through a streamlined process to reduce plastic waste on farms and support sustainable agricultural practices.

How does it work?

Eligible bags: Only single-use PP bags purchased from participating retailers after 1 October 2024 are eligible for the program

Preparation: Bags must be clean, empty, and free of non-PP liners. Neatly rolling or folding them ensures efficient transportation

Find a site: Customers visit bagMUSTER.org.au to find their nearest collection site

Drop-off: Bags can be delivered to designated collection sites, where they will be responsibly recycled into new products

Program rollout

bagMUSTER launched in early 2025, starting with phase 1 in Western Victoria. Collection sites are now operational from Mildura to Geelong, providing producers with convenient locations to drop off eligible bags for recycling. As infrastructure expands, more sites will be added across Western Victoria. Planning for Phases 2 and 3 has begun, with future expansion set to extend the program into other states.

Why participate?

Environmental benefits: Reduce plastic waste and prevent pollution of waterways, farmland, and ecosystems

Local recycling: 100% of collected bags are recycled in Australia, supporting the circular economy

Convenient recycling: Participating in bagMUSTER is straightforward, with an easy preparation and drop-off process

Support for QA programs: Participants receive compliance certificates, assisting with food safety and Best Management Practice requirements

Free disposal: Dropping off bags at collection sites comes at no additional cost

For producers, bagMUSTER is an opportunity to contribute to a circular economy and promote sustainable practices in agriculture.

Visit bagMUSTER.org.au to learn more, find participating retailers, and sign up for updates as the program grows.

Other Accredited Product Stewardship Schemes

drumMUSTER

drumMUSTER is Australia's national recycling program for eligible, empty, triple-rinsed agvet chemical containers. Farmers and chemical users can return cleaned drums to designated collection sites, where they're inspected and safely recycled into new products like fence posts and wheel stops. The service is free, funded by a levy on participating chemical products.



Visit www.agsafe.org.au/dm-program-overview to find your nearest collection site, learn how to prepare drums correctly, and see which products are eligible. You can also contact your local council or ag supplier for collection dates.

ChemClear

ChemClear is a national program that helps farmers and agricultural businesses safely dispose of unwanted or obsolete agvet chemicals. Managed by Agsafe, the program offers an easy online registration process for listing chemicals no longer in use. Once registered, eligible chemicals can be dropped off at local collection events or picked up by arrangement. Since 2003, ChemClear has collected over 1 million litres of chemicals, supporting safer farms and environmental sustainability.



Visit www.agsafe.org.au/cc-program-overview to register chemicals, check upcoming collections, or learn about accepted products.