



Trend Report # 3

AUSTRALIA

Nature, Biodiversity and Circularity in the Paper Economy



The Nature-Positive Industry

Paper is one of the few truly renewable, recyclable and nature-positive products on Earth.

Across Australia and New Zealand, **17 million hectares of forests are certified** under Responsible Wood, PEFC and FSC standards, ensuring that for every tree harvested, many more are replanted and regrown.

Forestry for paper is not deforestation: it's reforestation in action. Managed plantations absorb vast amounts of CO₂ as trees grow, while harvested timber and paper continue to store that carbon throughout their lifetime. Each tonne of paper acts as a carbon bank, **one tonne of paper stores roughly 1.4 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.**

Certified forest management also safeguards biodiversity. Riparian buffers, wildlife corridors, and habitat retention zones protect species from the Leadbeater's possum to the yellow-bellied glider. The **Australian State of the Forests Report (2023)** confirms that over 90% of forest areas used for paper are either regrown native forest or plantation wood, harvested under strict environmental codes of practice.

"Paper is renewable, recyclable, and regenerative. It's the original circular economy material — capturing carbon, supporting biodiversity, and reconnecting Australians with the natural world."

said Kellie Northwood,
Chief Executive Officer of
the Visual Media Association.

Australians Choose Sustainable Paper

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Australians rate paper as the most recycled product.



81%
of Australians and
83%
of New Zealanders
want the **right**
to choose how
they receive
communications.

75%
of Australians
believe
sustainably
managed forestry
should be used for
communication
papers.

56%
Among 25–34
year-olds,
physical mail
ranks as the most
environmentally
friendly channel
(56%) — a strong
signal from the
next generation.



Across all
age groups,
Australians rate
paper as the most
recycled product,
ahead of glass,
metal, plastic, and
e-waste.

87%
of paper and
cardboard
consumed in
Australia is now
recovered and
recycled - one of
the highest rates
globally.

63%
of Australians
prefer their online
purchases to
arrive in **paper**
packaging, and
82 % recycle
that packaging
through
household bins.

These numbers reveal a growing understanding that sustainable paper use supports, rather than harms, the planet.



③ The Circular Economy in Practice

Every sheet of paper starts life as a renewable fibre. As those fibres are recycled, they shorten and weaken, typically lasting five to seven life cycles.



New virgin fibre from certified forests is then added to strengthen the loop. This cycle of *harvest–reuse–renew* is the definition of a circular economy in motion.

Paper recovery and recycling reduces landfill, saves energy, and supports thousands of Australian jobs in regional forestry and recycling operations. According to the Australian Forest Products Association, the pulp, paper, and packaging sector contributes over \$10 billion annually to GDP and underpins local manufacturing resilience.





Mail Moves in Harmony with the Planet



Far from being an outdated medium, physical mail and print communications are aligned with the sustainability expectations of both business and community.

Australia Post, the nation's regulated mail distributor, has:

**Reduced
carbon
emissions
by 20%
compared to
FY19**

**Shifted
to 100%
renewable
electricity
across all
operational
sites.**

**Introduced
a fleet of
electric postal
vehicles,
further cutting
delivery-stage
emissions.**

As a result, posting a letter or catalogue today carries a significantly smaller footprint — specially when combined with recycled paper and certified inks.



The facts on Deforestation and Land Use

Public perception often blames paper for deforestation, yet the real drivers are urban development, agriculture, and high-yield crops such as soy and palm oil.

In Australia, forestry for paper operates under a closed-loop model: forests harvested for pulp are replanted, regrown, and certified.

Indeed, 60 % of Australians believe urban development is the top cause of deforestation, and they're right to question it. Urban sprawl replaces forest permanently; paper forestry regenerates it.

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Nature, People and Planet

**Responsible
Wood and PEFC
certification
ensures:**

Protection of endangered species and water quality

Respect for Indigenous and community rights

Reinvestment in forest health and local economies

FSC certification complements this by tracking the “chain of custody”, from tree to print, guaranteeing that each catalogue, book or letter is part of a global sustainability network protecting biodiversity.

In choosing certified paper, brands and consumers alike actively support nature-positive outcomes: cleaner air, thriving forests, and resilient regional jobs.



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The Bigger Picture: Trust, Tangibility and Biodiversity

Paper connects people to place, it's tactile, trusted, and transparent in its lifecycle. From seedling to recycled sheet, every stage of the paper journey contributes to environmental stewardship

Each tonne of recycled paper saves up to 13 trees, 4 000 kWh of energy, and 2000 litres of water.

Paper recycling prevents more than 5 million tonnes of waste from reaching Australian landfills annually.

Fibre-based packaging is now the preferred sustainable alternative for 63% of Australians

By contrast, digital infrastructure is far from immaterial: global data centres now account for over 3% of total electricity demand and produce 2.5% of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the aviation industry. Choosing print and mail where it makes sense is not regression; it's responsible balance.

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A Message for the Future

The paper, print, and mail industry has proven itself an ally of the environment, not through claims, but through measurable action. Every tonne of certified paper represents trees regrown, carbon stored, biodiversity protected, and local jobs sustained. This is an industry that has long practised what the world is now calling for: a nature-positive, circular economy built on renewal rather than depletion.

Print and mail remain powerful, modern communication channels that embody environmental responsibility. As Australia moves toward a low-carbon economy, paper-based media already operates within a renewable framework, powered by certified forestry, closed-loop recycling systems, and a transition to 100 % renewable energy across its supply chain.

When Australians choose paper and mail, they are participating in an ecosystem that gives back more than it takes, regenerating forests, supporting regional communities, and connecting people through tangible, trusted communication.

Looking ahead, the next decade will see fibre-based materials at the centre of sustainability innovation, replacing plastics,

supporting sustainable packaging, and delivering low-impact communication. The partnership between industry, consumers, and government will continue to strengthen this transformation, ensuring that paper remains both a symbol of trust and a tool for planetary recovery.

“In the race toward carbon neutrality and biodiversity restoration, paper stands as proof that industry and environment can thrive together. Choosing certified paper and printed communication channels is more than a communication choice, it’s a commitment to a regenerative future,” –

*Jonathan Tame,
Global Director,
Two Sides.*

Sources

Australian State of the Forests Report 2023;
PEFC Australia / Responsible Wood 2025;
FSC Australia 2025;
Two Sides Toluna Trend Tracker 2025;
Australia Post Sustainability Report 2024;
Holmen Paper 2024;
Scamwatch (ACCC) 2025 data;
VMA Sustainable Green Print + Sign Program.

About Open up to Mail

The Open Up to Mail campaign has been developed to share insights into the role of the letterbox across societal balances and consumer trends throughout Australia and New Zealand. The research will run across three (3) years and has been independently conducted by well-regarded research agency, The Source brings expertise in market research across the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, having worked across sectors including media, retail, government and telecommunications. From fact sheets to shareable resources, the Open Up to Mail campaign website is your hub for downloadable content, quarterly industry insight events, and networking.

Funding is secured from the Visual Media Association and industry stakeholders. For more information go to: www.openuptomail.com.au.

About the Visual Media Association

The Visual Media Association is the peak industry body representing the paper, print, packaging, labels, sign, display, publishing, mail and distribution sectors across Australia. An employer association, the Visual Media Association reports to the Fair Work Commission representing the industry across skills, promotion, protection and regulation. For more information go to: www.visualmediaassociation.org.au.