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Smart Approved WaterMark: Helping consumers make water-wise choices

Our latest research shows that consumers want to have sustainable gardens and are keen to use water-saving products to achieve them.

This Nursery Paper gives you all the information you need on Smart Approved WaterMark, Australia's labeling scheme for products and services that help save water in the garden and around the home, from how it works and the types of products that are included, to how to apply for the Smart Approved WaterMark and promoting the label to consumers.



Smart Approved WaterMark: Helping consumers make water-wise choices

In the latest NewsPoll survey commissioned by the Nursery and Garden Industry Australia (NGIA)*, 91% of respondents found a sustainable, environmentally friendly garden appealing. In the same survey, 60% of participants associated their garden with 'doing their bit' for the environment. So how do you achieve a sustainable garden? Using water wisely is an important part of the picture.

Conserving water, living sustainably

Despite recent rainfall in some parts of Australia water use remains a significant national issue. In Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, the ACT, and in some parts of New South Wales and Queensland, permanent water conservation or efficiency measures have been introduced to underpin more stringent water restrictions in residential areas.

The good news for the nursery industry and allied traders is that 76% of NGIA's NewsPoll survey participants said they would consider using water-efficient products in their gardens, which means they can keep their gardens growing even in dry times. "This boils down to an opportunity for our industry to reach consumers on an issue that's important to them: saving water irrespective of the level of water conservation required by water

authorities," says Michael Danelon, National Portfolio Manager – Water, for NGIA.

In 2004, NGIA became one of four founding partners of the Smart Approved WaterMark program, Australia's national labeling scheme for products and services that help save water in the garden and around the home. The scheme is also supported by all states and territories through the National Water Initiative, and by the Federal Government through the Water Smart Australia program. There are now more than 150 products and services that have been approved by the scheme, as well as growing consumer awareness of the logo.

"Manufacturers and retailers of water-saving products can benefit in several

ways by being involved with the scheme: through showing leadership in a key area of sustainability, demonstrating corporate social responsibility and getting an edge over their competitors," continues Michael.

* Survey of 1200 Australians conducted in July 2008.



Independent experts assess all applications

How does the Smart Approved WaterMark scheme decide which products and services can use the logo? The simple answer has been to call in a team of experts.

All seven expert panel members bring with them considerable experience in water conservation, horticulture, irrigation, education or retail. Angie Thomas from Yates (Australia and New Zealand) is one panel member that has worked with the scheme since it was set up in 2004. She says, "The panel takes a scientific approach to all the applications we review. We expect to see clear, independent evidence of how a product or service saves water, and that it meets health, environmental or other relevant regulations. That's the very least you would expect from a label that has been built on the trust of consumers."

In fact, all applications need to demonstrate to the expert panel how they meet four key criteria:

1. Water saving.

A product or service must contribute directly to reducing water use or improve water use efficiency.

2. Fit for purpose.

The appropriate use of the product or service is consistent with the instructions supplied to consumers.

3. Regulations and standards.

The product or service must be of high quality and meet industry standards, as well as customer and community expectations, in relation to water use.

4. Environmentally sustainable.

While a product or service might demonstrate that it meets the first three criteria, it must not adversely affect the environment in other ways.

The panel members meet four times each year to consider the applications submitted to the scheme. "There's often healthy debate among the panelists on whether to approve an application and we regularly follow up with referees. This rigorous approach is what brings value to manufacturers, retailers and consumers," says Angie.



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Case study: A truly national scheme

Richgro Garden Products was among the first applicants to the scheme for one of their products, EZI WET Premium Soil Wetter. Evelyne Laure, Richgro's National Marketing Executive, says "We were looking for a national water-saving accreditation scheme which could be applied to our water-saving products, since we're a national company with products distributed across Australia."

The application process included submitting independent test results to demonstrate EZI WET's water-saving capacity and, once assessed by the scheme's expert panel, the product was approved. "EZI WET is an amazing product with strong water-saving properties but the Smart Approved WaterMark gives it further credibility in the customer's eyes. The scheme also has an independent expert panel and strong backing which made it very appealing to us," says Evelyne.

Following the launch of PRO MULCH on the Australian market Richgro applied to the scheme for this new product. "Having been happy with the interest generated by EZI WET's approval, we applied for PRO MULCH. We are very pleased to have the only mulch in Australia that bears the Smart Approved WaterMark," says Evelyne.

"We use the logo on EZI WET and PRO MULCH packaging, promotional materials, signage, print advertising, on our website, in our newsletter and also at gardening shows. It gives us independent support to our water-saving statements," continues Evelyne.



Making claims in the age of 'greenwash'

'Green', 'eco', 'environmentally friendly'; there are lots of great products that really do live up to their marketing claims because they are better: they will help reduce waste, energy and water use, and chemical load. But how do consumers choose between these genuinely helpful products and those that make misleading claims? 'Greenwashing', as the use of misleading claims has become known, is being targeted by the consumer watchdog.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has started taking legal action against companies that make misleading environmental claims, while consumer association CHOICE has launched a campaign to raise consumer awareness of greenwashing.

The Smart Approved WaterMark logo can only be used on products and services that

have verified the amount of water they save, so it's a clear sign to consumers that they can trust the water-saving claims made by a manufacturer or service provider. It all adds up to good news for consumers as well as those products and services approved by the scheme.

Want to find out more?

- Green marketing and the Trade Practices Act, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, www.accc.gov.au
- Green claims on supermarket labels, CHOICE/Australian Consumers' Association, www.choice.com.au.

More than 150 products & services approved

Rainwater harvesting systems, pool covers and waterless car washes, as well as items for the garden, are among more than 150 water-saving products and services now approved by the scheme.

Ian Alexander, inventor of a simple greywater collection device that won the scheme's Product of the Year Award 2008, says "Since the Hughie Sink received Smart WaterMark approval we've seen increased interest in our product from media, retailers and consumers. In fact, a large order was recently brought forward following a radio interview about the Hughie Sink and its approval by the scheme."



Gardening products and services approved to date include:

- Wetting agents and soil enhancers
- A mulch and hose connector
- Smart pots
- Sub-surface irrigation driplines
- Greywater treatment and irrigation systems
- Sydney Water's 'Love Your Garden' program



Promoting the WaterMark

Over the past 18 months the Smart Approved WaterMark team has been busy promoting the label to consumers, retailers, water utilities and rebating authorities as well as representatives of all three levels of government.

Here's a brief snapshot of the promotional work that's been conducted:

- Launched a new website for consumers, www.smartwatermark.org
- Exhibited at consumer events including the Queensland Home Garden Expo, Going Green Expo and HIA Sydney Home Show
- Participated in industry events such as Fusion 07 & 08 in Sydney and Spring Fling 07 & Revealed 08 in Melbourne
- Distributed more than 500 information packs to garden, irrigation and hardware retailers
- Announced the inaugural Product of the Year winner, resulting in strong media coverage
- Signed agreements to work with WA's Water Corporation, Sydney Water, ACTEW Corporation and SA Water to promote water conservation
- Worked with licensees and partners to secure promotional opportunities through their communication channels
- Hosted the scheme's first Stakeholder Forum, which will become an annual event



This spring and summer the promotional campaign will continue with activities such as:

- Launching a 'Pledge Tool' on the new consumer website
- Exhibiting at the Save Water Save Energy and GreenTech expos
- Placing advertising in targeted publications
- Continuing to work with key print, radio and TV media outlets
- Creating a reference committee to further develop the scheme's retail awareness campaign



Interested in applying?

If you have a product or service that helps consumers save water in their gardens then the Smart Approved WaterMark team wants to work with you.

Applying to the scheme follows three basic steps:

- Check that your product or service meets the criteria for approval on the industry stakeholder site at www.smartwatermark.info
- Prepare supporting documentation to back up your water-saving claims and, if necessary, that your product or service meets relevant regulations
- Complete an application form and submit it along with your supporting documentation and application fee by the closing date for the next quarterly Expert Panel meeting.

If your application is approved you can license the Smart Approved WaterMark logo for two years. All approved products and services have their own entries on the scheme's two websites, and you will receive a welcome pack with an official certificate and login details for the scheme's Members Centre. You'll also be kept up-to-date about the scheme with a quarterly e-newsletter.

Criteria for approval, application forms, fee schedules, closing dates and answers to frequently asked questions are all available at www.smartwatermark.info.

If you would like to discuss your product or service, or have questions about the application process, then contact the Smart Approved WaterMark team on ph (02) 9290 3322 or email info@smartwatermark.info.

Acknowledgements

This Nursery Paper was written by Gabby Russell, Marketing Co-ordinator, Smart Approved WaterMark

For more information on the scheme visit www.smartwatermark.info, call (02) 9290 3322, or email info@smartwatermark.info.