ENVIRONMENT SEMINAR 2026 | SESSION REPORT

# Working together: Consultation or collaboration?

*The panel examined ways industry evidence could lead to better packaging regulation.*

05 November 2026 | Stationers' Hall, London



**Martin Kersh**

Martin Kersh is joint chief executive of the Packaging Federation and previously spent 22 years with the FPA.



**Paul Vanston**

Paul Vanston has led INCPEN since 2017 following a lengthy career in central and local government.



**Sebastian Munden CBE**

Sebastian Munden is chair of UK Packaging PRO and a former chief executive of Unilever UK and Ireland.

## KEY POINTS

- The panel questioned whether consultation consistently amounts to collaboration.
- UK Packaging PRO aims to turn producer experience into system-wide evidence.
- Obligated producers were encouraged to engage with the new PRO and its advisory structures.
- A distinction emerged between improving implementation and reviewing legislation.

## FULL SESSION REPORT

Genuine collaboration between government and industry, rather than consultation alone, is essential to delivering a packaging EPR system that supports environmental progress, economic growth and investment. That was the central theme of a candid panel chaired by Martin Kersh, with Paul Vanston of INCPEN and UK Packaging PRO chair Sebastian Munden.

## Talking together is not necessarily working together

Opening the discussion, Kersh questioned whether the principles of better regulation – robust evidence, proportionality and independent scrutiny – had been applied consistently to packaging reform. He asked whether the proliferation of consultations, working groups and stakeholder meetings had actually resulted in decisions reflecting industry's practical experience.

Vanston responded that effective regulation needed to recognise not only environmental objectives but also business growth, supply-chain resilience and the economic and societal value provided by packaging. The contribution of packaging to food protection, trade, safety and economic activity, he argued, should not be treated as an afterthought when environmental policies are developed.

## Rebuilding trust through the PRO

Munden recalled earlier government and industry discussions facilitated by WRAP that had created expectations of a collaborative packaging EPR system. He argued that the arrangements eventually implemented were not the same as those producers had envisaged, contributing to frustration and reduced trust.

The new UK Packaging PRO, he explained, offers an opportunity to work within the existing scheme and provide better evidence for practical improvements. Rather than serving as a traditional lobbying organisation, it is intended to draw together information across materials, sectors and business interests, producing balanced recommendations on the performance of the system as a whole.

Its objectives include fairer fees and costs, support for compliance, better access to reprocessed materials, improved packaging design and continuous system improvement. Munden said obligated producers, including data-reporting businesses without a disposal-fee liability, could become members, though rights would vary by membership category.

## Ensuring smaller producers are heard

Responding to concerns that major brands might dominate the discussion, Munden encouraged producers to become members and participate in the PRO's governance. He described plans for a Packaging EPR Advisory Council with standing contributors and invitations for specific issues, designed to incorporate perspectives from manufacturers, local authorities, waste operators, reprocessors and others.

Vanston welcomed the opportunity to create a forum wider than any individual industry association. He also suggested that the packaging supply chain could act with greater unity on shared issues without losing the individual identities of its trade bodies.

## Should the EPR system be reviewed sooner?

The panel debated whether the statutory review timetable should be brought forward in light of financial pressure on some businesses. Vanston argued that a proper review needed industry involvement and that evidence gathering should begin during 2027. Munden questioned the utility of reviewing a scheme that had only recently become operational, while accepting the importance of improvement within its existing design.

The distinction was significant: there was no consensus demand for immediate legislative overhaul. The discussion instead identified mechanisms for operational changes, including RAM improvements, better guidance and evidence-led adjustments.

The conversation reinforced the value of the FPA's monthly meetings with PackUK while highlighting the potential of PRO membership and advisory mechanisms as additional routes for raising members' concerns and ensuring that practical evidence influences implementation.

## SESSION PHOTOGRAPHY






### Source and publication note

This session report is intended to be an overview and is not a verbatim transcript.