Just five years ago, a trip to the local hardware store was a challenge for any environmentally-conscious renovator. Shower heads used 22 litres of water a minute, light bulbs were incandescent and most paints contained chemicals that left you with a headache.

Today, green products that were once expensive and hard to source are now affordable and accessible – and these products are now stocked on the shelves of every hardware store in the land. Water-efficient fittings, LED lights and compact fluorescents, paints low in volatile organic compounds – the list is endless.

With an increasing number of building professionals guided by Green Star in the design and construction of their projects, as well as in the procurement process, the demand for green products is greater than ever before. In fact, a 2012 report by Accenture found that a third of firms selling environmentally-friendly products are struggling to keep up with demand.

“The vast majority of businesses surveyed by Accenture said that sustainability was vital to their future growth, and that regulation and corporate reputation were becoming less important as sustainability continued to rise in a virtuous circle of commercial opportunity and investment growth.”

President and Chief Executive Officer of Interface Asia Pacific, Rob Coombs, believes that Green Star has had a far-reaching impact across Australia’s supply chain and we are now reaping the benefits.

“Manufacturing has been driven to comply with new benchmarks for emissions, recycled content and product stewardship. In fact, Green Star has introduced a new competitive dynamic that, these days, is often the difference between winning and losing business,” Rob says.

Interface has established a goal to be entirely sustainable, which it calls ‘Mission Zero’, by 2020. As a result, Interface views all its product development and work processes through a lens of sustainability.

Rob says manufacturers today must ask themselves “to what degree do products and the processes adopted demonstrate a commitment to a lower environmental footprint and compliance with Green Star standards?”

“Once you influence upstream supply, the effect on the environment is multiplied. Interface read this change very early and our ability to support Green Star compliance has been one of the key drivers behind our growth in recent years,” Rob explains.

Dulux sustainability specialist, Rod Vockler, agrees, saying that Green Star was the primary driver for the development and release of Dulux Professional EnvirO2.

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Rob Coombs
President and Chief Executive Officer
Interface Asia Pacific
One of the first low-VOC product offerings on the market, EnvirO2 paved the way for future low-VOC paint innovations such as the reduction of VOC levels in the mainstay Dulux Wash & Wear range.

"Certainly, the Green Building Council of Australia is influencing product choice," Rod says. "We felt it was important to provide the industry with sustainable products. Early adoption has made it easier for Dulux to provide innovative products that meet painters’ needs and environmental requirements, while maintaining a leading position in the market."

"Rating systems have supported the growth of our business for many years. As our research and development is undertaken in the US, product innovation has been, in part, driven by the USGBC’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating tools," says Frank Harrington, Commercial Manager of Solatube Australia, which produces high-performance daylighting systems.

"We are starting to see the design community take on our daylighting systems for Green Star projects, and, as we found in the US, we expect that Green Star will also help drive our sales in the commercial space in Australia."

Furniture manufacturer Schiavello Group has established a reputation for environmental sustainability. According to Mark Thomson, Schiavello’s Corporate Sustainability Principal, Green Star has "complemented our natural approach to ESD and has assisted us to fine-tune various processes and market offerings. Green Star gives us an industry-leading benchmark as not only a baseline for measuring our efforts, but a respected medium to highlight our capabilities," Mark says.

One of Schiavello’s most recent innovations is a workplace platform which can adapt to new workplace developments and technologies. This means workspace managers can redeploy existing infrastructure rather than replacing entire systems to accommodate ever-evolving workspace needs. "It’s a significant shift away from heavy workstations that become quickly dated and end up in landfills," Mark says.

From green dreams to everyday reality

Countless case studies of Green Star-rated projects are positive proof of how Green Star has accelerated the innovation cycle to a lightning speed. Many green building design features and technologies that were once leading-edge are now integrated into new projects as a matter of course.
range so that it no longer needs to be packaged with cardboard cores. Kingspan estimates this saves almost 22,000 kilograms of cardboard waste material on construction sites annually. “If all those cores were rolled flat, they’d cover close to 30,000 square metres, or about 5 soccer fields. While cardboard is a recyclable waste, it’s clearly far better not to produce the waste in the first place.”

Another innovation reduced manufacturing waste by eliminating the need to trim the edges of the Air-Cell bubble range before being packaged. This has saved almost 15,000 square metres, or 5,500 kilograms, of waste going to landfill each year.

Equally impressive is Godfrey Hirst’s $3.5 million water recycling facility that opened in 2010 and is now saving 250 million litres of water a year. By reprocessing 175 million litres of effluent production water along with 75 million litres of captured storm water and returning it to Class A water for reuse, the facility saves 250 million litres of water each year – the equivalent of 100 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Robert Lunardelli, an environmental engineer at Godfrey Hirst says that both external and internal forces have driven the company’s environmental initiatives – and Green Star is one of them. “Increased cost of resources and services and increasing consumer demand for products with positive environmental credentials manufactured by companies with sustainable practices” have converged, Robert says.

In this environment, manufacturers and suppliers are beginning to understand the importance of maintaining responsibility for their products throughout their lifecycle. This, in turn, helps purchasers to make buying decisions based on what’s right not just today and tomorrow, but well into the future. Now THAT’S true sustainability.