



Recalling plastic bags on clean up day.

SEE CHANGEIN YAMBA and beyond

THE Yamba Chamber of Commerce and the Yamba Community to unite for this global environmental initiative!

The Chamber of Commerce, with the support of Clarence Valley Council and many other significant members of the community are endeavouring to make a positive difference to the environment by working towards a Plastic Bag Free town.

The challenges that confront our global community mirror those that face us locally, and with this in mind we want our residents to feel empowered and know that their individual and conscious efforts can and will make a sustained difference.

If we can be inspired by one another and initiate a change in our collective behaviour, think what a positive message this will send to our children, our politicians and the law makers at every level of Government.

We are looking to raise \$10,000 to purchase 3,000 eco friendly hemp shopping bags. It is anticipated that the bags will be distributed through shopping outlets and other businesses in the area. Money raised will purchase more bags in the future, and become a self sustaining.

The Yamba Chamber of Commerce will auspice the Plastic Bag Free Project steering Committee as we collect the funds required. We hope to have as many local, grass root contributors involved as possible in our Partnership Program. This will enable everyone to participate at a level of their choosing whether a business, an individual, a club or a group of friends. All participants will receive their bags printed with an environmental logo and slogan to be designed by our local school children. These attractive and extremely long lasting bags will be yours to sell, keep or give away and all partners will be invited to attend the launch and receive due acknowledgment of their contribution.

The four partnership levels to choose from are:-

Gold level entry - \$500

entry - \$250

Bronze level entry - \$125

Silver level

Friends - \$50

Gold, Silver and Bronze Partners will be advertised every week in Coastal Views and "Friends" will be acknowledged at the launch early spring 2009.

Your participation will encourage us to teach young and old that they can make a difference by shopping without petro chemical plastic bags.

If you would like more information or to become a partner contact - Marea Buist Project Coordinator phone 66458337 or Jane Mitchell 66463477



General Information

Do you know?

Australians pay a big price for using plastic bags – from the devastation they cause to our unique natural environment, to the financial cost to the retail sector of supplying plastic bags to customers... the price we pay for using plastic bags really adds up.

20 million Australians use 6.4 million plastic check-out bags per year. That's nearly one plastic bag person per day or 345 bags per person per year.

A person's use of a plastic check-out bag can be counted in minutes – as long as it takes to get from the shops to their homes. Plastic bags however, can take between 15 to 1000 years to break down in the environment.

At least 80 million plastic bags end up as litter on our beaches, streets and parks. Australian local and state governments spend over \$200 million a year picking up litter.

In the marine environment plastic bag litter is lethal, killing at least 100,000 birds, whales, dolphins, seals and turtles every year. When the dead animal decays, the plastic bags are freed to be re-ingested by other animals for many years to come.

On land, plastic bag litter can block drains and trap birds. They also kill livestock. One farmer near Mudgee NSW carried out an autopsy on a dead calf and found 8 plastic bags in its stomach. The loss of this one calf cost the farmer around \$500.

Not all litter is deliberate. 47% of wind borne litter escaping from landfills is plastic and much of this is plastic bags.

Fewer than 5% of Australian's plastic bags are currently being recycled, despite recycling facilities being available at major supermarkets.

In many council areas, plastic bags are the single main contaminant of kerbside recycling.

Plastic bags are not free to consumers; they are actually adding an estimated \$173 million a year to Australia's grocery bills.

Plastic bags are a by-product of the oil industry. Four billion HDPE (High Density Polyethylene) plastic bags are imported into Australia every year.

Since Planet Art started its campaign to reduce the use of plastic bags, their use has dropped by half a billion.

In Australia Coles Bay, Huskisson, Kangaroo Valley, Mogo and Sydney suburbs of Oyster Bay and Hunters Hill have all successfully banned plastic check-out bags in all their retail stores.



Fishing for plastic bags in the river



Education stands have been held at Yamba Markets.

Ways in which people can do their bit

So what can I do?

Saying NO is easy

Here are two things you can do today!

Refuse

If you're only buying a couple of items, consider carrying them.

When shopping, take reusable alternatives like calico or hemp bags, sting bags, baskets or boxes with you. Put them at the top of your shopping list or put your car keys in them at home so you don't forget to take them with you.

Consolidate purchases into one bag rather than getting a new bag at each store.

Place fruit and vegetables directly into your basket.

Be aware that the thicker department store bags are generally non-recyclable so the best action is to avoid taking them.

Reduce

Count the number of plastic bags you use and aim to reduce that number each week.

If you have no other option than to accept plastic bags at the check-out, make sure at least eight items are in each bag.

Avoid using small plastic bags as bin liners. Simply put your rubbish straight into your household bin and give the bin a quick rinse afterwards then reuse the water on your garden.

Degradable plastic bags are available. However, be cautious when using these bags, as there are no standards in place to test the effectiveness of their biodegradability.

Alternatively you can buy reusable bags at all leading supermarkets.

What are the benefits of using a reusable bag?

Reusable bags;

- Hold around twice as many items as plastic bags
- Are easier to carry as they have more comfortable handles
- Won't burst under the weight of heavy shopping items
- Reduce the number of plastic bags that are produced and disposed of
- Don't pose a threat to wildlife.

What can I use for my garage bin instead of shopping bags?

There are alternatives to using plastic shopping bags in your bin, lining it with old newspaper or don't use a bin liner at all. Wrap your garbage instead.

If possible, use a compost bin or worm farm for your food and garden waste – this can reduce the amount of waste by up to 50% and takes out the 'wet' waste that makes your bin dirty. And compost is great for the garden too.



Plastic bags wash up in the mangroves



Dog poo left behind neatly wrapped in plastic

What can I use to pick up dog poo instead of reusing my shopping bags?

Picking up after your dog is very important as dog poo left on the street ends up in our waterways, contributing to E.coli pollution and possibly passing roundworm onto humans.

Many people use their plastic shopping bags to pick up their dog poo, but there are many other plastic bags that come into our lives that are also suitable for picking it up. Bread bags, fruit and veggie bags, chip bags, do and food bags, pasta bags... the list is almost endless. Alternatively, you could try using newspaper or a pooper scooper, with your dog poo then going straight into the compost bin.

What about biodegradable plastic bags?

While biodegradable shopping bags might seem like a good idea, there are a number of problems associated with them.

Many bags that claim to break down naturally actually don't and there is currently no national standard to verify this.

Using biodegradable shopping bags may promote littering as people think the bags will break down in the environment no matter how they are disposed of.

Until biodegradable products actually break down they still pose the same danger as non-biodegradable plastic bags and hence have the same short term potential to harm wildlife and create litter problems as non-degradable products. Even if biodegradable bags do break down it is not known, at this stage, what is left over once the biodegradation takes place. These leftover pieces could be just as harmful as plastic bags if ingested by animals.

Biodegradable bags also require energy, water and resources in their production and are still used only once, so substituting the habit of using billions of shopping bags with billions of biodegradable bags isn't a great environmental outcome!

I have added this next paragraph as we researched several avenues to draw up this fact sheet that we will be distributing with the bags

Saying "No" to plastic Bags is an initiative of the Yamba Chamber of Commerce and a committee of concerned Yamba residents in conjunction the Australian Government, Australian Retailers Association and Clean Up Australia.