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Coles Bay celebrates one year without plastic bags

The bag ban that inspired a nation to reduce plastic bag usage

Coles Bay in Tasmania reaches a milestone today. It's one year since they banned plastic bags at the checkout in all of their retail outlets. As a result, the town has stopped the use of 350,000 plastic check-out bags.

The idea of getting Coles Bay to become Australia's first plastic bag free town arose from a phone call between Ben Kearney, the owner of the local bakery and Jon Dee, the Founder of Planet Ark. Before the ban, Coles Bay had a problem with plastic bag litter on their beaches and in their local national park. Migrating whales also used to be at risk from plastic bags.

"The experience has united our community and they can see the environmental results," says Ben. "We have proven that Australians can live without plastic shopping bags and that they can easily adapt to taking their own bags when shopping."

Over the past twelve months, 200,000 tourists have visited Coles Bay and experienced life without plastic shopping bags. Instead of using plastic check-out bags, retailers in the town only offer reusable options such as calico and paper bags. Locals have also got into the habit of taking their own Planet Ark reusable bags when shopping.

Thanks to enormous media coverage, the Coles Bay bag ban kick-started a year of plastic bag reduction across Australia. NSW tourist towns such as Huskisson, Kangaroo Valley and Mogo have also gone plastic bag free. Planet Ark is also receiving funding from State Governments to take the Coles Bay role model to other communities nationwide.

Since the Coles Bay ban, Federal and State Environment Ministers have put in place an agreement with the Australian Retailers Association to reduce plastic check-out bag use nationally - by 25% by the end of this year and by 50% by the end of next year. It was also agreed that single use plastic check-out bags would be phased out within 5 years.

In the last year, Bunnings and IKEA started charging a 10 cent levy on each plastic check-out bag. As a result, Bunnings have reduced their plastic bag usage by up to 80% and IKEA reduced their's by 85%. ALDI continue to be the only major supermarket chain who charge customers for plastic check-out bags, thereby severely restricting their use.

Coles have also sold 2 million reusable bags, reducing their plastic bag usage by 12%. Woolworths and Safeways have also sold 1 million reusable bags. Between them Coles, Woolworths and Safeways have reduced their bag use by 200 million plastic check-out bags.

Red Rooster trialed a program in WA to use paper bags to put their takeaway food in. Because it improved the quality of their food, this successful trial was rolled out nationally reducing their plastic bag use by 50%. KFC have yet to follow their example.

For interviews please contact Jon Dee on 0414 971 900 or Ben Kearney on 0417-162-562