

August 2, 2003

Planet Ark launches huge giveaway of FREE calico shopping bags

- Also new developments in push to get rid of plastic bags -

Planet Ark today launches a campaign to give away **hundreds of thousands** of free calico bags to Australian households.

In a direct move to reduce the **7 billion plastic bags** that Australians use every year, Planet Ark is joining with councils and corporations to do **mass giveaways** of reusable shopping bags.

Hunters Hill Council in Sydney is the first council to join Planet Ark in this exciting new venture. Every household and primary school kid in Hunters Hill will be getting a free calico bag.

“It’s wonderful that Hunters Hill council is taking the lead in reducing plastic bag use,” says **Jon Dee**, the Founder of Planet Ark. “By giving away free calico bags, the council is making it easy for people to cut down on their usage of plastic shopping bags.”

Planet Ark has long campaigned to reduce Australia’s dependence on plastic bags and its campaign is helping to bring about results.

Yesterday, **Environment Ministers** agreed to support the phasing out of lightweight single-use plastic check-out bags **within five years**. The **Australian Retailers Association** have also set a target of reducing plastic bag use **by 50 per cent** by December 2005.

The chain of 176 **Bunnings Warehouse** stores yesterday announced that it will be charging a plastic bag levy of **10 cents** per bag. The aim is to reduce the **25 million plastic bags** that they use every year. Planet Ark believe that this is the most effective way to reduce plastic bag use.

Income from the levy will be used to fund the environmental work of Keep Australia Beautiful. “Keep Australia Beautiful’s ultimate aim is to receive zero dollars from this levy as it will then show that Bunnings have been able to reduce their plastic bag use to nil,” said Dee.

Bunnings are expecting the levy to dramatically reduce their use of plastic bags. “When **IKEA** Australia introduced a 10 cent levy on plastic bags, stores reported reductions of **up to 85%** in their use of plastic bags,” said Dee. Planet Ark has already provided all the residents of **Coles Bay** in Tasmania with free calico bags. The town has banned the use of plastic bags.