

# FACT SHEET

# PLASTIC BAGS



## THE FACTS

- Australians use four billion plastic bags annually, which means over 10 million new bags are used every day, or that we each use 200 bags a year.<sup>1</sup>
- About 30 to 50 million plastic bags end up as litter on our beaches, streets and parks.<sup>1</sup>
- Plastic bags don't go away; they just break up into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic, taking between 15 and 1,000 years to break down in the environment.
- Every year more than six million tonnes of rubbish is dumped into the world's oceans, 80 per cent of which is plastic, and a further 10 per cent of this being plastic bags.<sup>3</sup>
- Australians throw away about 7,150 recyclable plastic bags a minute, with 429,000 recyclable plastic supermarket bags dumped into landfill every hour.<sup>3</sup>
- Only three per cent of Australia's plastic bags are recycled, despite recycling facilities being available at major supermarkets.
- The energy consumed in the life cycle of one plastic bag is estimated to be equivalent to 13.8 millilitres of crude oil, or about a teaspoonful.<sup>4</sup>

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- In the marine environment, plastic bag litter is responsible for killing tens of thousands of birds, whales, seals and turtles every year, as they often mistake plastic bags for food such as jellyfish.
- After an animal is killed by plastic bags, its body decomposes and the plastic is released back into the marine environment where it can kill other wildlife.
- A Bryde's whale died on a Cairns beach after ingesting six square metres of plastic – including plastic bags. Such obstructions in animals can cause severe pain, distress and death.<sup>1</sup>
- On land, plastic bag litter can block drains, trap birds and kill livestock. One farmer near

Mudgee NSW carried out an autopsy on a dead calf and found eight plastic bags in its stomach.<sup>1</sup>

- It has been estimated that it costs governments, businesses and community groups more than \$4 million a year to clean up littered plastic shopping bags.<sup>1</sup>
- When gas, oil and coal are used to produce plastic bags, they emit dangerous greenhouse gases.<sup>2</sup>
- Reducing our use of plastic bags is an important step towards a sustainable future. Each plastic bag you don't use represents resources saved for use by future generations of Australians.<sup>1</sup>

## LITTERING IS ILLEGAL

Leaving your plastic bags in public areas such as on footpaths, roads, gutters, parks and beaches can incur a fine. Under the **Litter Act 1979** you can be fined \$200 for the incorrect disposal of your plastic bag.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP REDUCE PLASTIC BAG LITTER

- SAY NO to plastic bags! Visit Clean Up Australia's 'Say NO to Plastic Bags' campaign for great actions and tips [www.cleanup.org.au](http://www.cleanup.org.au).
- Use alternatives to plastic bags such as green bags, calico bags, Onya bags or paper bags.
- Reuse your plastic bags again and again and again.
- If they can not be reused, recycle them. Take your plastic 'checkout' bags to participating retailers for recycling. They can not be placed in the home recycling bin. To find your local plastic bag recycling locations, go to [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://RecyclingNearYou.com.au).
- If it can not be reused or recycled, make sure it goes in a bin.
- When out and about, carry them with you until you find a bin.
- If you are someone who does the right thing, you can also help make a difference by registering to become a litter reporter.

## REFERENCES

1 Planet Ark [www.planetark.org](http://www.planetark.org); 2 Clean Up Australia [www.cleanup.org.au](http://www.cleanup.org.au); 3 Government of South Australia, News Release – SA Pushes Ahead with Bag Ban by End of Year <http://www.epa.sa.gov.au/media/media207.pdf>; 4 Plastic bags join the endangered species list, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/environment/plastic-bags-join-endangeredlist/2008/01/09/1199554742673.html>

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