

Clean Up Australia

"Our Mission: work with communities to clean up, fix up and conserve our environment."



In 1989 an 'average Australian bloke' had a simple idea to make a difference in his own backyard - Sydney Harbour. This simple idea has now become the nation's largest community-based environmental event, Clean Up Australia Day. It is hard to believe that this campaign began as the inspiration of one man, Australian builder and solo yachtsman, Ian Kiernan. As an avid sailor, Ian had always dreamed about sailing around the world. In 1987 his dream came true when he competed in the BOC Challenge solo around-the-world yacht race. As he sailed through the oceans of the world in his yacht 'Spirit of Sydney' he was shocked and disgusted by the pollution and rubbish that he continually encountered in areas such as the Sargasso Sea in the Caribbean. Having waited years to see the Sargasso's legendary long golden weeds, Ian's excited anticipation turned to anger and disappointment when he found them polluted and tangled with rubbish. The polluted state of the world's oceans motivated Ian to act. Once back in Sydney Ian organised a community event with the support of a committee of friends, including Clean Up co founder Kim McKay AO - Clean Up Sydney Harbour. What happened after this is now well documented. Clean Up Sydney Harbour Day in 1989 received an enormous public response with more than 40,000 Sydneysiders donating their time and energy to clean up the harbour. Rusted car bodies, plastics of all kinds, glass bottles and cigarette butts were removed by the tonne. The idea of a clean up day had ignited an enthusiasm and desire among the community to get involved and make a difference to their local environment themselves. The next year Clean Up Australia Day was born. Ian and his committee believed that if a capital city could be mobilised into action, then so could the whole nation. Almost 300,000 volunteers turned out on the first Clean Up Australia Day in 1990 and that involvement has steadily increased ever since. In the past 25 years, Australians have devoted more than 27.2 million hours towards the environment through Clean Up Australia Day and collected over 288,000 tonnes of rubbish. The next step for Ian and Kim was to take the concept of Clean Up Australia Day to the rest of the world. After gaining the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Clean Up the World was launched in 1993. In its inaugural year, Clean Up the World involved approximately 30 million people in 80 countries. The appeal of Clean Up the World (an estimated 35 million people from 120 countries annually take part) has demonstrated that this simple Australian idea has universal appeal and the health of the environment is of concern to people and communities worldwide. Clean Up the World demonstrates that people across the planet are willing to do something themselves to help protect and care for their environment. Since then Clean Up Australia has evolved into an organisation that works with the community, government and business to provide practical solutions to help us all live more sustainably every day of the year.

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