

Australians clean the way! - 1



Kerry Denton: Good evening and welcome to Environment Australia, the weekly radio show in which you, the public, have the chance to ask questions about issues of environmental concern. This week's guest is Ian Kiernan, co-founder, with Kim McKay, of 'Clean Up Australia'. Welcome, Ian.

Ian Kiernan: Thank you, Kerry. It's good to be here ... another opportunity to stand on my soapbox!

Kerry Denton: Ian, it's been about a quarter of a century since the 'Clean Up Australia' campaign began. For many of our listeners, it's always been a part of their lives. Tell them how it started.

Ian Kiernan: In 1987, while I was living my life's dream, competing in the 'Round the world' yacht race, I was appalled at the massive islands of rubbish I saw scattered across our oceans. I knew I had to do something to wake people up to the refuse tip we are making of our world.

When I returned to Sydney, I gathered a group of friends, including Australian environmentalist Kim McKay, and together, we organised a 'Clean Up Sydney Harbour Day' in January 1989. The response was overwhelming—40 000 people signed up to join us!

Kerry Denton: Quite remarkable, Ian. Now that inspired you to greater things, didn't it?

Ian Kiernan: We believed that if such an event could be so successful in one city, then why not in all cities, towns and communities across the country. So, in 1990, we launched 'Clean Up Australia'.

Kerry Denton: I have some figures here, Ian. Through your campaign, Australians have volunteered approximately 25 million hours and collected 250 000 tonnes of rubbish. That's roughly one million hours and 10 000 tonnes each year! That is truly amazing, but rubbish collection isn't all you do, is it?

Ian Kiernan: No, Kerry. It's a great start but we also have the problem of water pollution and this needs to be attacked at its source. In Sydney alone, the pressure we have applied on local and state governments has resulted in a number of positive steps being taken. These include, a ban on the use of toxic paint on boats, which has brought oysters back to Sydney Harbour, and a water recycling plant at Taronga Zoo so that waste water from animal enclosures and toilets is not being dumped into the harbour anymore.

Kerry Denton: Having conquered Australia, Ian, you were then ready to take on the world. Tell us about that.

Ian Kiernan: Yes, indeed. It is marvellous to know that we have the Australian people on side to do what we can for our country but we need to look at the health of the whole planet, not just our little bit.

We took our case to the United Nations and gained the support of its environment program, UNEP, and 'Clean Up the World' was launched in 1993. The first event involved 30 million people from 80 countries and now, more than 35 million from 120 countries take part.

Kerry Denton: Ian, I'm sure I speak for all Australians when I say we are very proud that it is a group of Australians, captained by you, who are the engine behind this global machine. Your work with communities, businesses and governments, helps to provide practical solutions to pollution problems.

Ian, thank you for coming on the show.

Ian Kiernan: Thank you, Kerry. We enjoy every success but we are always thinking, 'Ok, we've got that project underway, what's our next target?'

Kerry Denton: The lines are now open for you to pose your own questions to Ian ...

