

Planet Ark Environmental Foundation – A brief history

In August 1992 Planet Ark Environmental Foundation was incorporated as a not-for-profit company. Its vision was and is to work with business, community groups and individuals to bring about positive and measurable environmental change. Its strategy is to run campaigns that make it as easy as possible for people to adopt better environmental practices and enjoy more sustainable lives. Planet Ark is non-confrontational and not politically aligned. It relies on broad community, business and government support to deliver and fund its work and campaigns.

Planet Ark's strong growth and brand awareness has owed much to the vision & hard work of three of its founding directors: Jon Dee, Paul Klymenko and Peter Shenstone. Jon had brought the idea for a new kind of environmental organisation to Australia from the UK in 1991. He had the public relations and communications ability necessary to galvanise broad public support; Paul brought an understanding of environmental research and product evaluation while Peter had a background in market research and strategy. Jon resigned as managing director in 2006. Paul and Peter remain actively involved in the organisation.

Kerbside recycling was introduced into Australia in the early 1990s, but had teething problems resulting in low volumes of recovery. Through a range of campaigns, including the [National Steel Can Recycling Campaign](#) and [National Recycling Week](#), Planet Ark sought to address a perception that recycling was ineffective, and helped to ensure that recycling became a cornerstone of a sustainable lifestyle. Planet Ark also pioneered drop-off recycling with campaigns like [Cards 4 Planet Ark](#) and [Cartridges 4 Planet Ark](#).

To sustain recycling even further Planet Ark recognised the need to 'close the loop' by promoting the purchase of products containing recycled material, such as [Safe toilet tissue](#). It also initiated partnerships to offer [environmentally responsible products](#) – the first being [laundry powder](#). Planet Ark continues a program of endorsement for products that are both cost-effective and meet rigorous environmental criteria.

In 1995 [Planet Ark's National Tree Day](#) was born, bringing together a number of existing tree-planting activities and building on the tradition of Arbor Day. Co-hosts of the highly successful *Better Homes & Gardens* Noni Hazlehurst and John Jarrett launched the inaugural event. Other celebrities who have lent their support to Tree Day include Olivia Newton John, Pierce Brosnan, & Jamie Durie. Today over 300,000 volunteers plant around 1.5 million native plants annually at more than 3,000 sites around Australia.

Responding to a United Nations report, which observed that a major environmental problem was a lack of credible environmental news and information, Planet Ark launched its own website in 1995, and in 1997 joined with Reuters to create a [World Environment News Service](#). Read by people in over 50 countries, it averages around 8 million page views annually, and is today sponsored by Colonial First State.

Planet Ark wouldn't be where it is without the involvement and support of many people and organisations. Community-based environmental and service groups, schools, councils, and plant nurseries have thrown their weight behind Planet Ark's activities. Through sponsorship of key events and campaigns a number of businesses have helped fund our work. Toyota Australia has been a major sponsor of National Tree Day since 2000, and the AMP Foundation was also involved for many years. More recently Colonial First State conducted the pilot program of [Papercutz 4 Planet Ark](#), a campaign designed to assist organisations to encourage more judicious use of paper.

Through Jon's and Peter's contacts, Planet Ark has been able to garner the generous support of an extensive network of international and local celebrities, many of whom are noted for their environmental commitment. Among them are Paul McCartney, Dustin Hoffman, Jeff Goldblum, Rachel Ward, Jack Thompson and former tennis champions Pat Cash, and John McEnroe. Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise fronted Planet Ark's video promotion to the IOC in support of Sydney's successful bid to make the 2000 Olympics the 'Green Games'.

Until 2007 the management and governance of Planet Ark rested largely in the hands of its original founders Jon, Paul and Peter, with the support of a committed cohort of staff and volunteers. In 2007 an external CEO, Sean Barrett, was appointed by the board to implement a series of strategic and operational reforms. [Experienced, enthusiastic individuals](#) carry the day-to-day responsibilities of the organisation and good governance is assured through a board composed almost entirely of non-executive independent directors. While Peter and Paul are still actively involved in the work of Planet Ark, Jon resigned his position as a director in late 2008.

Today Planet Ark holds firm to its original vision to help us all, as individuals and organisations, to minimise our impact on the environment and to develop practices that contribute to the ongoing sustainability of our planet.