



**International  
Help Fund  
Australia**

ABN 69 108 077 176

P.O. Box W125  
Watsons Bay  
2030 NSW Australia

T. (+61 2) 9389 8707  
F. (+61 2) 9389 8706  
M. 0415 243 066  
E. [kpmm@ozemail.com.au](mailto:kpmm@ozemail.com.au)

[www.internationalhelpfund.org](http://www.internationalhelpfund.org)



## MEDIA RELEASE

### AUSTRALIANS HELP LAUNCH THE WORLD'S FIRST PLASTIC BAG SHOPPING FREE NATION

The tiny sovereign nation of Tuvalu has become **The World's First Plastic Shopping Bag Free Country**. From Friday 8 July 2005 the 11,000 Tuvaluans have switched from plastic to Calico shopping bags. The Hon Maatia Toafa, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, confirmed that Tuvalu will ban the importation of plastic shopping bags. Australian law firm, **Freehills**, are drafting the legislation. The program, initiated by **International Help Fund Australia (IH)** and **Internationaler Hilfsfonds Germany**, in partnership with the **Tuvaluan Ministry of Environment** and the **Office of the Prime Minister**, was approved by Cabinet in April 2004.

Tuvalu, perhaps best known as the nation most at risk from rising sea levels, faces major problems with waste disposal. A flat, narrow coral atoll, rubbish cannot be buried and most finds its way to surface tips. Trade winds sweep the island for most of the year so even plastic bags that make it to the surface tips end up blown out to sea. With 200,000 plastic shopping bags imported each year this represents a significant environmental and waste management problem and threat to marine and bird life. The country's main importer of plastic shopping bags, the Tuvaluan Cooperative Society (TCS), has confirmed publicly on radio that it will cease to import plastic shopping bags.

"The success of this program shows what can be achieved when international resources and goodwill combine with a determined local community," said Petra Campbell, CEO of IH Australia and Pacific Region Program Director for IH Germany. "While other Pacific Islands, such as Vanuatu are addressing the problem of plastic shopping bags via replacement with biodegradable or recyclable plastic bags this still doesn't address the problems associated with the accumulation of unmanaged plastic bags in the environment. Tuvalu is the first country in the world prepared to totally ban all forms of plastic shopping bags" continued Ms Campbell.

IH supplied one calico bag for each resident over the age of 12, a total of 6,800 bags. The bags were sent to Tuvalu gratuitously by **Reef Shipping**, a New Zealand based company with a strong environmental commitment to the Pacific. School children and young men then personally distributed the bags to every household. The Ministry of the Environment and IH will provide the calico and artwork to Tuvalu's women's group who will produce future calico bags locally.

IH also provided shops with a stock of brown paper bags to illustrate the alternative to carrying items such as fruit and vegetables and bakery products, and for those who forget their calico bags, as well as paper wrapping for meat, fish and frozen products. In a talk back radio program presented by the Ministry of Environment, The Office of the Prime Minister, TCS and IH, the public was encouraged to cease buying any new stocks of plastic bags ordered prior to the program and IH confirmed that it will buy back all remaining stocks of plastic bags.

There has been a considerable public information campaign to support the program. This includes consultation with women's community groups, two ongoing radio programs, brochures printed in Tuvaluan and English which were handed out to each household, a school children's poster campaign and in class education. A theatre group is touring the island communities and outer islands with a play centered on the death of sea life and the ugliness plastic bags create for their Island. Hotels will display signs in each room asking visitors to take any plastic bags they bought in with them, back out again.

The success of the program was immediately apparent. "The Tuvaluan people responded with great pride. Calico bags could be seen being carried everywhere. I was stopped in the street often and thanked for the bags and the program," said Ms Campbell. The government of Tuvalu and the Tuvaluan people believe the program will be sustainable because of overwhelming public support and the importation ban. Prime Minister Moatia Toafa said "I hope that other Pacific Islands will follow suit".

**VISION AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA: professional footage and photos of the implementation of Tuvalu's shopping bag free program including the visit of Petra Campbell to Tuvalu**



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The program partners in Tuvalu are:

1. **The Ministry of Environment of Tuvalu:** spearheaded the implementation. Contacts, Sue Tupulaga: [waste@tuvalu.tv](mailto:waste@tuvalu.tv) and Pepetua Latasi: [pepetua@gmail.com](mailto:pepetua@gmail.com)
2. **Freehills:** one of Australia's largest commercial law firms, is providing pro bono legal services to IH Australia. [www.freehills.com](http://www.freehills.com)
3. **Reef Shipping:** a New Zealand based market-leader in cargo transportation transported the calico bags to Tuvalu gratuitously. [wayne@reefship.co.nz](mailto:wayne@reefship.co.nz)
4. **Internationaler Hilfsfonds Germany:** has funded the program development and the bags, paper and information campaign. [www.international-hilfsfonds.org](http://www.international-hilfsfonds.org)
5. **International Help Fund Australia:** designed and coordinated the program. [www.internationalhelpfund.org](http://www.internationalhelpfund.org) (under construction).

For further information call Petra Campbell, CEO of IH Australia and Pacific Region Program Director for IH Germany. Sydney, Australia. Tel: (61) 415 243 066 Fax: (61-2) 93898706.

Between July 17 and July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005, please contact IH Director Claire Hanley: (61) 414 184 747



### SCRAP METAL REMOVAL AND RECYCLING UPDATE: NUIE, EASTER ISLAND AND TAHITI

The Plastic Shopping Bag Free Pacific Program is part of IH's Pacific Region Scrap Metal and Plastic Removal and Recycling Program (SCRAP).

IH Australia, IH Germany, Sims Pacific Metal, Reef Shipping and the Ministry of the Environment of Nuie successfully removed 356 tonnes of scrap metal from Nuie in March 2005. The scrap was reprocessed in Auckland, New Zealand.

The SCRAP team went on to provide its services to Tahiti and Easter Island in April of this year.

For further information, including film and photographic footage, please contact Petra Campbell. (61) 415 2430 66