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Media Release

Typical Aussie outdoor lifestyle no longer reality

Research reveals shrinking backyards, screen time and long working hours have concerning implications for Australia's renowned outdoor way of life and our health

Backyards, barbecues, beach and bush – Australians are known around the world as lovers of the great outdoors. However, recent research commissioned by Planet Ark for National Tree Day shows that people's ideas of what it means to be Australian do not necessarily align with our lifestyle.

The startling research shows that the laid-back outdoor culture we pride ourselves on is being eroded as Aussie backyards are shrinking, we're working longer hours and kids are playing on-screen rather than outside.

For every hour we spend outside, we spend over seven hours in front of screens watching television or on the Internet. Approximately 1 in 3 people spend less than 18 minutes per day doing outdoor recreational activities, which is about the same amount of time it takes to hang out a load of washing.

The research indicates that even quintessential backyard pastimes such as playing cricket and football and having barbecues are in jeopardy as a result of our changing lifestyles.

Released in the lead up to National Tree Day on Sunday 28 July 2013, the research report, titled *Missing Trees – The Inside Story of an Outdoor Nation* and sponsored by Toyota, builds upon previous research commissioned by Planet Ark that shows a direct link between childhood contact with nature and a range of health and wellbeing benefits.

The research reveals that a house with a backyard is still held up as the ideal Australian home. While 72% of people would prefer to live in either a separate house with a large backyard or on a farm or rural property, only 53% of us currently do, and government policies and population pressures mean the number of houses with large backyards is only going to get smaller.

Since the early 1990s, backyards have been shrinking due to new houses covering a bigger proportion of the lot, a proliferation of sub-divided blocks with townhouses and apartment complexes, and a reduction in average lot sizes in metropolitan areas, mainly as a result of decreasing supply and rising land costs. Furthermore, changes in the working hours of parents, the use of childcare, time pressures on families and proximity to the CBD have all contributed to many Australians placing less value on having a backyard, despite the fact that they still see it as an important part of the Australian identity.

The survey results clearly show that, for both adults and children, the larger their backyard, the more time they spend doing outdoor activities. On average, those living in units or flats spend only 3.5 hours per week doing outdoor activities, while people living in separate houses with large backyards spend 5.1 hours per week doing outdoor recreational activities.

"This research indicates that while most Australians over 30 are likely to have clear childhood memories of playing in their backyard, for the first time in a number of generations, many children today are likely to have a very different set of memories," said Planet Ark Spokesperson Rebecca Gilling.

The shift to smaller backyards in suburban Australia has been swift, and in many areas, quite dramatic, yet there has been little discussion among the public or media about this issue.



The survey found that more than 3 in 4 people (77%) are concerned about Australia's shrinking backyards, including 83% of parents with young children.

The top concerns about the loss of backyards are the loss of safe, outdoor play spaces for children, loss of Australia's outdoor lifestyle and culture, loss of privacy and reduced opportunities for children to learn about nature and the environment.

Backyards play an important role in Australian cities and towns, for both the environment and the health and wellbeing of individuals and wider communities, especially given the well-documented shift from outdoor to indoor activities such as television and electronic games over recent decades.

As a result of the research report's findings, Planet Ark is encouraging Aussies to participate in a National Tree Day event in their community, or to plant at home, in their backyard, on their verandah, rooftop or street as a way to connect with nature and the great outdoors.

"As lifestyles change and the ¼ acre block is no longer the norm, it's more important than ever for families to foster and maintain that important link with nature, which provides direct health benefits," said Gilling. "Events like National Tree Day are a fun community-focused way to get back outside, and this year we are encouraging people to register events in their own green spaces as well as get involved in public plantings."

For more information and to find your nearest Tree Day site, please visit treeday.planetark.org or call the National Tree Day Hotline on **1300 88 5000**.

National Tree Day is organised by **Planet Ark** in partnership with **Toyota** and its dealer Network, which provide on-the-ground support at local and community tree-planting sites Australia wide.

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Missing Trees – The Inside Story of an Outdoor Nation, is an independent study commissioned by Planet Ark, and sponsored by Toyota Australia, in March 2013. It was conducted by Pollinate, a specialist communications research company, to investigate: People's opinions and concerns about the loss, or decline in size, of Australian backyards since the 1990s; the difference, if any, in the participation in outdoor, nature-based activities between people (and their children) living in separate houses with backyards and those living in dwellings with very small or no backyards; and how people living in Australia define what it means to be Australian. To view the full report, please visit: <http://treeday.planetark.org/MissingTrees>

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