

The Week

The plastic bottle meltdown



DAMIEN MURPHY

A BOTTLED water epidemic caused widespread panic after the disease was first identified at Bundanoon in the Southern Highlands.

Angry residents – outraged that a Sydney company had come to town to extract local water and sell it back to them at a 300 per cent mark-up – decided to isolate Bundanoon and waterboarded retailers until they agreed to stop stocking supplies of cold water bottles.

When word of the outbreak leaked, the Premier, Nathan Rees called an emergency meeting and announced a plan for a public campaign to discourage the use of the environmentally unfriendly packaging. With Ian Kiernan, of Clean Up Australia fame, cheering from the sidelines, towns and villages across NSW moved to ban plastic bottles.

Lismore's Mayor, Jenny Dowell, calmed residents and ratepayers, asking them to eschew the plastic experience and return to public water bubblers. She declared thirst at future council meetings could be slaked only with jugs of tap water.

The Bundanoon ban pushed the container industry into meltdown, fearing Rees could follow South Australia's practice of paying cash refunds on plastic and glass bottles and cans. Nothing too quick, however. The croweaters have been at it for only four decades.

Meanwhile speculators are puzzled about whether Bundanoon will follow the lead of La Gloria, the small Mexican village that was ground zero for the previous epidemic, swine flu. Sponsored by the government of Veracruz state, La Gloria's villagers have erected a sculpture – modelled on the famous Manneken Pis statue of a child urinating in Brussels – of Edgar Hernandez, the five-year-old who was said to be the first to be diagnosed with swine flu in April.

With world media bestowing similar global fame on Bundanoon, it is surely only a matter of time before locals capitalise on their achievement and the town's nickname, Bundy, and erect a statue of a giant plastic bottle – sponsored, of course, by Amatil, the Coke company.