



Not quite full bottle on water

By Julia Carlisle in Sydney

YOU can blame it on Madonna. The pop queen is partly responsible for the craze of bottled water, a new book says.

In *Bottlemania: How Water Went On Sale And Why We Bought It*, New York investigative journalist Elizabeth Royte says supermodels and celebrities like Madonna fuelled the trend during the 1980s.

"Back then, supermodels were the reigning gods, and they were drinking Evian. They were photographed drinking it. They would walk around carrying it in leather slings," she says.

"They were saying they drank the water because it helped them suppress their appetite and it made their skin clear and their hair shiny," said Ms Royte.

Madonna even had Evian on tap at home.

And in her 1991 film *Truth or Dare*, she did more than just drink from the green glass bottle of fizzy water, Ms Royte said.

And thus a litre of Evian became a bona fide fashion accessory and a marketer's dream.

"No one started criticising it until about a year ago, and this absence of criticism helped the industry grow," Royte says.

Today, globally, the bottled water business is worth \$64 billion a year.

Australians guzzle about 250 million litres of bottled water a year while in the US (33.3 billion litres a year) sales of bottled water surpass beer and milk.

But our thirst for bottled water has come at a huge environmental cost.

The processes used to manufacture and fill the plastic bottles, as well as transporting and refrigerating the products, leave a major carbon footprint, Ms Royte argues in her book.

In America alone it takes 17 million barrels of oil to supply the nation with plastic water bottles each year.

Finally, there's the global waste created by billions of empty bottles each year. In Australia, only 35 per cent of water bottles are recycled and most end up in landfill, according to the Total Environment Centre's Waste and Energy campaigner Jane Castle.

Clean up Australia Chairman Ian Kiernan is also a long-time campaigner against bottled water.

"Plastic water bottles are becoming a major environmental hazard," he said.

Mr Kiernan points out the absurdity of paying for something that is available virtually for free in every household.

"Tap water costs less than a cent per litre (across all states prices range from \$0.50 to \$1.33 per kilolitre for 1000 litres) while the average price of bottled water is \$2.53 per litre," he says.

"And there is little environmental damage associated with tap water."

Mr Kiernan says while Australians complain

about petrol prices, many fail to realise they're spending more on a litre of bottled water.

"In Australia, the cost of buying water instead of drawing it from a tap is comparable to driving a car," he said.

Ms Castle, from the TEC, describes bottled water as "a huge con-job on consumers who are not aware of the environmental and economical impact".

"People have pure, clean water on tap, so if people want to pay 2500 times the cost of piped water, they can," she says.

Ms Castle says the Australian Government is yet to take a position on bottled water, but she would like to see a deposit scheme introduced to encourage recycling, such as exists in South Australia.

"Certainly, bringing in a container-deposit scheme which would solve the end-of-life issue, which would be a great start."

Ms Royte believes a backlash against bottled water has already begun in the US.

The backlash includes posh eateries, such as Chez Panisse in San Francisco, which has stopped offering bottled water.

As for Madonna, she's seen the light and has stopped drinking Evian.

But her turnabout apparently isn't complete.

She's replaced her Evian with bottled Kabbalah water from Israel.



Ballarat Courier

Thursday 26/6/2008

Page: 9

Section: General News

Region: Ballarat VIC Circulation: 19,399

Type: Regional

Size: 392.54 sq.cms.

Published: MTWTFS-

Brief: BRITA WATE

Page 2 of 2



LANDFILLERS: A worker sweeps around bales of plastic bottles at the Sacramento Recycling and Transfer Station. Each year more than 93 billion plastic drink containers end up in landfills.