

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia is still dumping waste in Asia

Thailand’s Minister for the Environment has ordered the repatriation of 130 tonnes Australian waste, imported into the country as paper and cardboard but found to be highly contaminated with plastic wastes. The Minister has also ordered an investigation and potential legal proceedings.

Despite Australia’s world first “Waste Export Ban” held up as a moral and legal precedent to address the global plastic pollution crisis, it appears that Australia has failed to live up to their promises.

“This is an embarrassment for Australia – a country that prides itself on its love and care for the ocean and its leadership in environmental protection, technology innovation and respect for human rights. Yet the awful truth is that the previous Prime Minister’s strong marketing and public relations agenda seems to have overshadowed the reality of achieving this goal while the waste management sector carried on with business as usual,” said Jane Bremmer, Coordinator Zero Waste Australia.

Australia has failed so far to commit to systemic changes in the waste management sector that would improve the collection and source separation of waste, essential strategies to create clean waste resources and reduce contamination. Instead, Australian governments and industry have focussed on the disposal end of our waste streams resulting in massive funding for residual waste treatment and disposal at the expense of supporting the reuse and recycling sector to create clean waste resources for safe closed loop recycling. Container Deposit Schemes have been a welcome programme in Australia to reduce litter and feed these PET plastics back to industry for recycling, but the scheme is not nearly enough to address the prime causes of the global plastic pollution crisis.

“This is what happens when our governments take advice on best practice waste management from the waste *disposal* sector and not zero waste, circular economy and sustainability experts.” warns Jane Bremmer.

China and countries like Thailand in the Asia Pacific region raised the alarm about the ecological, health and human rights violations that Australian (and other OECD countries) waste exports were causing in their respective countries.

Australia’s plan to resolve the adverse impacts of their international waste exports, is to require industry to only export single polymer plastic and Process Engineered Fuel – a fuel created from residual waste.

Yet it appears that some waste management companies in Australia are hiding plastic waste in paper and cardboard exports. It also suggests that Australia’s “Most advanced material recovery facilities in the Southern Hemisphere” are not living up to their claims and are generating poor quality baled waste outputs where contamination is high. There can be no excuse for exporting bales of paper and cardboard full of dirty nappies and plastic waste scraps.

"It's past time for Australia to invest in better collection and source separation so as to ensure that waste exports sent for recycling in other countries, does not cause harm to those receiving communities. Further, it's time for the Australian government to prioritise and legislate for sustainable zero waste policies that put a focus on waste reduction, such as capping plastic production, eliminating toxic substances in our materials production systems and redesigning materials and products for safe, closed loop recycling and a circular economy. The solutions exist, we just need the political will to make it happen. We cannot continue to send Australian waste to be burnt in the Asia Pacific region and nor should we invest, as we are, in the biggest waste burning infrastructure rollout Australia has ever seen. This is a climate bomb soon to explode". said Jane Bremmer.

As such Zero Waste Australia requests:

- 1. An immediate repatriation and compensation for all contaminated waste exported to Thailand.**
- 2. An immediate moratorium on all waste exports, including all Refuse Derived Fuels from Australia**
- 3. Investment in safer, more effective zero waste city models.**
- 4. An independent federal inquiry into Waste Management in Australia.**

"Waste imports is a long-time contributor to Thailand's environmental problem. This recent case shows that despite the existence of international laws such as the Basel Convention, and national laws such as Thailand's prohibition of municipal waste imports - loopholes still exist. It is through these loopholes that contaminated waste continue to flow from developed to developing economies. But this is also an opportunity for the Australian government to show its commitment to environmental justice by swiftly repatriating these 130 tons of wastes and implementing further measures against exports of other types of polluting wastes. "Said, Punyathorn Jeungsmarn, Information and Communications Officer, Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH).

"We found Australian plastic waste dumped near places where one of the highest levels of dioxins and other persistent organic pollutants were measured in in free range chicken eggs in Indonesia. This unfortunately documents how the waste imports from developed countries like Australia pollute the environment and food chain of local people in Southeast Asia. We don't want to see the same story in Thailand again. We ask Australia to avoid further pollution caused by plastic waste exports to developing countries." said Jindrich Petrlik, Program Director of Arnika – Toxics and Waste Programme and IPEN dioxin and waste expert

"Before Australia announced its waste export ban, our studies were finding a rapid increase in Australian plastic waste hidden in paper waste exports for recycling in Indonesia. Most of it ended up being open burned, exposing recycling workers and poisoning the food chain with dangerous chemicals like dioxin. We hoped Australia's waste export ban would stop this practice but the incident in Thailand shows little has changed. It's very disappointing to see a wealthy country like Australia still dumping waste on its regional neighbours." said Lee Bell, Mercury and POPs advisor for the International Pollution Elimination Network (IPEN).

IPEN is the leading global network working for a healthier world where people and the environment are no longer harmed by toxic chemicals. IPEN's work has exposed health threats from chemicals in plastics and includes active participation in the Plastics Treaty process and through global agreements to create controls on plastic waste and on toxic chemicals from plastics.

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Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH) is an independent non-governmental organization striving for social and environmental sustainability and justice in Thai society. EARTH serves as a watchdog monitoring the Thai government's industrialization policy, industrial pollution and unsustainable consumption patterns. We promote climate justice, good governance and accountability of governmental and international agencies. EARTH focuses on the impacts of hazardous substances on ecosystems, local communities and workers' health. Read more at <https://www.earththailand.org/en/>

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Arnika is a Czech non-profit organization that has been uniting people striving for a better environment since 2001. Our mission is to protect nature and a healthy environment for future generations both in Czechia and abroad. In our activities, we rely on three components - public involvement in the decision-making process, expert opinions and justified requests, and media coverage of the problems. In the long-term, we are promoting less waste and hazardous substances, wild living rivers and diverse nature, and the right of citizens to make decisions about the environment.

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Zero Waste Australia was created by members of the National Toxics Network to address Australia's unsustainable waste management systems and low recycling rates. With a strong technical background in the chemicals and waste nexus and working towards a "Toxics Free Future" at a local, state and international level, these representatives bring expertise and valuable insights about our materials production processes and the ever-increasing generation of waste that is harming our environment, our health and our oceans especially for indigenous communities and other vulnerable communities in Australia. While Australia faces a barrage of false technology solutions, such as waste to energy incinerators, landfills and plastic waste downcycling technologies, the role of Zero Waste OZ in helping the community to understand the impacts of these technologies and provide advice on sustainable and effective zero waste management options, is more important than ever. Zero Waste OZ works to uphold the precautionary principle, toxics elimination, zero waste solutions and community right to know.

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