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No more Aussie trash exports

PM set to stop sending out recyclables to Asean countries

SYDNEY: Australia pledged to stop exporting recyclable waste amid global concerns about plastic polluting the oceans and increasing pushback from Asian nations against accepting trash.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison agreed with Australian state and territory leaders to prepare a timeline to phase out the exports of recyclables like plastics, paper and glass.

"It's our waste and it's our responsibility," he told reporters yesterday.

"We're laying it out very clearly that there will be no export of plastics and paper and glass to other countries where it runs the risk of ending up floating around in our oceans - whether off the Great Barrier Reef, which we know there's strong evidence of that, or anywhere else," he said.

"We will do everything that is in our remit to achieve that goal," he added.

No deadline has been set but local leaders have been tasked with reducing landfill and boosting the recycling sector in Australia, where just 12% of plastics are currently recycled.

Government figures show the country shipped over four million tonnes, or 12%, of its recyclable waste overseas last financial year, largely to Asian countries.

China began restricting imports on foreign plastics in 2017, leaving developed nations seeking new destinations to dump their rubbish.

They started shipping huge amounts of trash to other Asean nations like Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

But they too have been pushing back.

Indonesia last month said it would return more than 210 tonnes of garbage to Australia after authorities said they uncovered hazardous material and household trash like diapers in containers meant to hold only waste paper.

In May, neighbouring Malaysia



Take out the trash: (Top) A customs officer showing a waste paper imported from Australia at Tanjung Perak port in Surabaya while Morrison (third left) holds a press conference to set a timetable for banning the export of waste in Cairns, Australia. — Reuters/AP

of degraded waste that absorb harmful chemicals and accumulate inside fish, birds and other animals.

Morrison's call comes before an annual meeting of Pacific nations next week, where ocean pollution and climate change are expected to dominate discussions.

Australia's conservative government has come under fire from Pacific leaders for not doing enough to tackle climate change, with many low-lying nations threatened by rising seas.

Morrison earlier pledged A\$16mil (RM45.5mil) toward a Pacific Ocean litter reduction project. — AFP

announced it was shipping 450 tonnes of imported plastic waste back to its sources, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

Earlier this year, G20 nations agreed on a voluntary plan to reduce the plastic waste choking the seas.

A particular environmental concern are microplastics - tiny pieces