

# 'Why punish legal recyclers?'

## Zuraida: Better enforcement needed for RM30bil business

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The government intends to capitalise on the RM30bil plastic recycling industry, stating that the industry should not be punished if the problem lies in enforcement.

Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin said it was not right to penalise the legal plastic recycling players when poor management and enforcement against the illegal operators was to blame.

"There are genuine players who have invested in their plants and willing to follow the new regulations," she said at the "Malaysia's Plastic Dumping Problem: Get Back to Where You Once Belonged?" forum here presented by the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia.

Zuraida described the plastic waste recycling industry as a "low-hanging fruit" to convert rubbish to cash and contribute to the economy.

"This is a RM30bil business in Malaysia and RM60bil international-

ally, why don't we capitalise on it?"

"If we blame management and enforcement, let's fix that.

"We should improve it, rather than kill the industry.

"When all countries are trying to reject plastic waste, I think Malaysia should be smarter from a business point of view ... there are weaknesses that we need to overcome," she said.

The plastic waste recycling industry is facing opposition from environmental activists who want the government to stop all imports of such waste.

"Under the Customs code HS 3915, the ministry allows the import of only clean, recyclable plastic waste.

However, illegal plastic waste recyclers are known to falsely declare unrecyclable plastic scraps under code HS 3915, leading to louder calls for a total ban on imports of all plastic waste.

To stop the deluge of unrecyclable plastics, Zuraida said the ministry was collaborating with the Customs Department and the Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry (Mestec) to tighten import

conditions, remove outstanding plastic waste, convert the nation's landfills to waste-to-energy plants and inculcate the recycling habit among Malaysians.

Only 24% of Malaysians recycle, she added.

Among the import conditions is a levy of RM50 per tonne, which is expected to generate about RM2mil to RM3mil a year, said Zuraida.

Between January and July 2018, Malaysia imported 456,000 tonnes of plastic waste from its 10 biggest source countries, a sharp increase from its 2015 and 2017 figures.

Zuraida said that currently, 64 companies had approved permit (AP) to import recyclable plastic waste.

According to National Solid Waste Management Department deputy director-general Noreha Muslim, companies have to fulfil 18 strict conditions before they can get the AP.

This includes certification by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health, Sirim, Department of Environment and International Organisation for Standardisation.

"When they fulfil the 18 condi-

tions, our officer will check their premises.

"The reports will be sent to the minister, who will approve the AP," Noreha said, adding that previously it was the director-general who approved the permits.

According to Mestec deputy secretary-general Dr K. Nagulendran, there are 202 containers of plastic waste imports in the country waiting to be sent back to their countries of origin, 199 of which do not have AP.

Nagulendran said Port Klang had an outstanding 19 containers, Penang Port 106 and Senari Port in Sarawak 73.

"We are in the process of notifying the countries of origin that they have violated domestic law. We gave them 14 days to respond and are engaging with various embassies," he said.

However, he added that the challenge was in identifying the country of origin as many of the containers had been abandoned by unscrupulous recyclers.

"Banning plastic is not a solution. Plastics is not the issue, it is our behaviour," he said.



### Underwater highlight

A diver displaying the Jalur Gemilang in an aquarium during the SEA-MPHONY programme in Aquria KLCC, Kuala Lumpur, as part of the Merdeka Day and upcoming Malaysia Day celebrations. — Bernama