



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement / Letter to the Editor

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Tackling Plastic Pollution in Malaysia

Today the world celebrates Consumer Rights Day and the theme for this year is “Tackling Plastic Pollution”.

Plastic pollution is the scourge of humanity. In Malaysia the problem is serious. In 2020 we used 148,000 metric tons of plastic packaging for food. Our annual per capita plastic packaging usage is 16.78 kilogram. Our use of plastic has been increasing year by year despite campaigns to move away from single use plastics.

The situation here is made worse by the import of waste from the developed countries. The UN Comtrade data indicates that Malaysia imported 333.5 million kg of plastic waste/scrap in 2019 and it doesn't include large quantities that are illegally imported. While Malaysians are producing large quantities of plastic waste it makes no sense for the authorities to permit the import of plastic waste from developed countries. While it may contribute to the profits of the recycling companies it causes serious adverse effects on the health of our people and our environment.

Plastic waste contains toxic chemicals which can seriously impair our health. When we eat fish we are ingesting plastic particles into our body because 90% of the fish have plastic particles in their stomachs. We consume 70,000 micro plastics particles every year. Toxic chemical in plastics can cause serious illnesses like kidney damage, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, cancer, coronary disease and others. Some of them appear only many years after exposure or ingestion.

What must consumers do to address this problem? Most important is for consumers to reduce their consumption of non-essential foods and goods. This will contribute to very much to the reduced use of plastics for packaging. Don't use plastic bags when you go shopping, use other environment friendly alternatives e.g. jute and cloth bags. Reduce waste through reuse and recycling.

Covid-19 has led to increased plastic use resulting in more waste. People have been buying food and goods which are packaged in plastic and delivered to consumers. We can cut down on the use of single-use plastics by cooking and eating our food at home. Also we should not buy unnecessary goods online.

The Government must take urgent measures to deal with the problem. It must impose a total ban on the import of plastic waste from other countries. Our people's health and environmental integrity must not be sacrificed at the altar of private profits. Manufacturers of plastic products must be made legally responsible for collecting their products after use and to recycle or reuse them. Our laws must be amended to provide severe punishment for those who pollute our rivers, ocean, land and the atmosphere. Law enforcement must be improved and corrupt practices eliminated.

The government's road map towards zero single use plastics must be implemented efficiently and effectively and its progress monitored and reports published at regular periods. However, the roadmap's initial target is straws and bags. We have various other plastic products that have to be tackled for instance plastic containers, cups, cutlery, wrappers that are still being used and being dumped in landfills or rivers or end up as litter after single use. These types of plastics have different target timelines. We can't wait till then. We must reduce plastic pollution by refusing unnecessary plastics, especially hazardous and single-use plastics.

The plastics product industry needs to put the health of our people before just profits and take measures to alleviate plastic pollution. Redesigning products, packaging, and delivery systems to eliminate the use of single-use plastic products and packaging is the ultimate solution to plastic pollution. Manufacturers should ensure that their activities do not pollute the environment and adversely affect human wellbeing. Comply with the laws and don't try to get around them by bribing officials and politicians.

Fighting plastic pollution is the responsibility of all Malaysians together with the Government.

Mohideen Abdul Kader

President

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP)