

**NGOs urge all state governments to follow  
Selangor's example and stop plastic waste imports**

Selangor's Exco for State Tourism and Environment, YB Hee Loy Sian announced on 19 May 2022 five new policies with regard to the operation of plastic waste recycling factories in the state, including not allowing the import of plastic waste for the purpose of recovery or final disposal by factories that conduct plastic waste recycling processes. Non-governmental organizations comprising the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), Greenpeace Malaysia, Kakacaucau Eco Hub, Persatuan Tindakan Alam Sekitar Kuala Langat (PTASKL), and Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), commended the move by the state government to curb pollution and urge other states to emulate Selangor.

The imported plastic waste highlights a 'broken' system. Malaysia was the largest recipient of global plastic waste in 2018 and soon became a dumping ground as some of the plastic waste imports included mixed plastic waste, non-recyclable plastic waste, or plastic waste that was significantly contaminated with other wastes. The issue of illegal plastic waste recyclers, illegal dumpsites, and open burning were highlighted by affected communities and civil society organizations since then. The enforcement authorities eventually started taking action by shutting down illegal operations and imposing stricter conditions for importers with approved permits to import the waste. However, evidence on the ground and an INTERPOL report of 2020 indicates that there is still plastic waste leakage or mismanagement, illegal trade, and false declaration in the bills of lading.

Even though we appreciate the Selangor state government's commitment to curbing pollution, it would be remiss of us if we did not emphasize the importance of regular inspections and assessment of the current operating facilities with legal permits in order to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and to avoid shady deals with illegal premises or accepting imported plastic waste from other states. With respect to the last concern, it is especially important to completely ban the importation of plastic wastes into the country in the first place. It is vital for our enforcement agencies to check every international waste shipment and shippers involved in the waste trade so that we can 'plug the leak' at its source.

The Selangor government needs to be mindful of plastic waste contamination in paper waste imports and also e-waste. There are several paper waste recycling plants currently operating in Kuala Langat with a few in planning stages. There are in-situ incinerators in the paper waste recycling plants to burn residual waste comprising of plastic and other wastes. These incinerators will emit toxic gases and harm public health and the environment. In addition, the approval of paper recycling plants at water catchments such as in Hulu Selangor or upstream of Langat River increases the risk of pollution to the drinking water of residents in Selangor.

There is also the issue of e-waste imports which have been steadily increasing in recent years. Our recent field survey found dumpsites at Sri Cheeding comprising among others shredded plastics from e-waste. Greenpeace Malaysia's previous investigation revealed that the layer of topsoil is contaminated with high concentrations of heavy metals including cadmium and lead, relative to background environmental levels. Laboratory tests also revealed the presence of persistent organic compounds such as brominated flame retardants and phthalates at some dumpsites.

Hence we urge the Selangor government to ensure inspection and enforcement by the authorities to curb pollution from all waste processing factories, in addition to plastic waste recycling plants. It is also vital that other states like Penang, Kedah, and Johor follow suit and commit to banning waste imports and impose strict policies on waste processing factories. We need to stop importing waste from other countries, and focus on prioritizing waste reduction, waste separation at source, safe recycling, and composting

organic waste as well as building institutional capacity to facilitate a safe, non-toxic circular economy led by the local recycling operators.

We also urge the federal government to play an active role to plug existing loopholes in the Basel Convention at the 15th Conference of Parties meeting in June where governments will congregate to decide on further regulations on the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, including plastic waste.

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