

**Government Response to  
Report of the Environment Committee  
on  
Petition of Lydia Chai: Ban plastic waste exports to developing  
countries**

**Presented to the House of Representatives**

**In accordance with Standing Order 252**

# Government response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Lydia Chai: Ban plastic waste exports to developing countries

## Introduction

1. The Government has considered the Report of the Environment Committee on Petition of Lydia Chai: Ban plastic waste exports to developing countries.
2. The petition raised concerns about the large volumes of our exported plastics being burned or dumped in recipient countries such as Malaysia instead of being recycled - causing an environmental and health problem. The petition requested a ban on plastic waste exports from New Zealand as this will transition more quickly to a safer, circular economy in which plastics are minimised.
3. The Government welcomes the Environment Committee's (the Committee) report and thanks them for their efforts in compiling the report and recommendations. The Government also thanks Lydia Chai for raising the concern.
4. This is the Government's response to the Committee recommendations in accordance with Standing Order 256.

## Recommendations and Government response

5. The Government is committed to continuing to reduce plastic waste from being created in the first place, better domestic waste management and managing overseas exports of plastic waste, where it is economically viable to do so, and overall environmental and human health outcomes are improved.
6. Action is already underway to reduce plastic waste and better manage it domestically, including through the investment of the waste levy. Transitioning away from plastics to alternative materials wherever practicable, ensuring it does not create other environmental problems, should be the longer-term goal.
7. In terms of the Committee report recommendations, the Government supports two of the four proposals, as follows:

Committee recommendation	Proposed response
<i>i a) To set a deadline for the phase out of unlicensed exports of plastic waste to countries beyond Australia and b) develop more comprehensive policy to</i>	<b>a) Reject.</b> It would be challenging and risky to set a deadline for unlicensed exports without further detailed analysis of the volumes, types and destination of plastic waste exports and some form of formal agreement with Australia that they are

<p><i>avoid the creation of plastic waste.</i></p>	<p>willing and able to accept our future unlicensed plastic waste exports.</p> <p>Given the dynamic and volatile nature of the plastics recycling market relying on one export country is very risky, as any change in policy or Government could result in our exports being significantly limited or stopped altogether (as was the case with China's <i>National Sword Policy</i>).</p> <p><b>b) Reject.</b> The Government has developed several initiatives to manage plastic waste.</p>
<p>ii <i>To increase investment in plastic reprocessing infrastructure in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognising facilities in Australia.</i></p>	<p><b>Accept.</b> The Government has agreed the strategic waste levy investment priorities [CAB-24-MIN-0138] includes investing in waste and resource recovery infrastructure and prioritising plastics, in addition to other waste streams.</p> <p>However, incentivising an increase in plastic reprocessing on its own, could create a surplus of recycled polymer with no corresponding demand. Therefore, interventions to stimulate onshore demand for recycled plastic polymers, such as recycled content requirements, would reduce this risk of this perverse outcome.</p>
<p>iii <i>Consider regulations to strengthen the licensing and monitoring of waste exports until new waste legislation is operative</i></p>	<p><b>Reject.</b> It would not be an efficient use of resources to consider regulations at this time. The Government's priority is reforming the Waste Minimisation Act 2008 and the Litter Act 1979. If resourcing allowed, the Ministry could collate and publish the Statistics New Zealand data and/or collaborate with Plastics New Zealand to voluntarily survey and report on their members' exports.</p>
<p>iv <i>Increase monitoring of plastic exports to ensure that the Basel Convention requirements are being implemented.</i></p>	<p><b>Accept.</b> The Ministry is aware that there are limitations with the Imports and Exports (Restrictions) Act and Order, particularly in relation to monitoring, inspection and enforcement functions. Subject to Cabinet approval, the Ministry could undertake a policy review of these regulatory settings.</p>

8. The Government's initial focus is on improving the existing border controls via the following actions:
  - i. Undertake a review of the Imports and Exports (Restrictions) Act 1988 and Imports and Exports Restrictions (Prohibition) Order (No 2) 2004 including to improve compliance, monitoring and enforcement to tighten export border controls, improve data collection and increase the transparency of Basel Convention plastic waste exports [subject to Cabinet approval].
  - ii. Continue to work with like-minded countries through the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) process to ensure global action happens to tackle plastic pollution.
  - iii. Continue to invest in increased domestic capacity for plastic waste to be 'prepared for recycling' (such as washing, shredding, pelletising) and reprocessed.
  - iv. Continue the development of Regulated Product Stewardship schemes for priority products such as plastic packaging, e-waste and farm plastics to better manage these types of plastic waste.
  - v. Continue to encourage industry-led activities such as the Recycling Leadership Forum to collaborate on plastic waste reduction initiatives.
  - vi. Consider implementing the Basel Convention e-waste amendments to improve the transboundary movement of e-waste containing plastic.
  - vii. Review the Waste Minimisation Act 2008 and the Litter Act 1979 to modernise and ensure there is a fit-for-purpose legislative framework to prevent and deter littering of plastic waste.
9. In 2028, or soon after the interventions underway are implemented, the Government could review the plastic waste export situation. If plastic waste exports to developing countries remain a concern the Government can investigate options to restrict plastic waste exports. This will support onshore infrastructure development for the New Zealand economy and reduce the environmental impact of New Zealand's waste plastic overseas.