

4. LAO PDR

Summary of research topics: *With Lao PDR being inland, there is no research on marine plastic pollution in the country. However, as the Mekong River flows into the South China Sea and through other ASEAN states, their waste management approach is relevant.*

Summary of understanding at national level: *Plastic pollution appears to have been missed as a priority in the scientific scene.*

Keywords/research fields: *N.A.*

4.1 Context

4.1.1 National approach to plastic waste and its management

Marine plastic pollution is not an important topic for Lao PDR, the only landlocked ASEAN state. In Lao PDR, plastic waste is typically discussed in the context of solid waste management which is a priority area identified as part of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)'s green cities programme in Vientiane (GGGI, 2018). Plastics are considered recyclable materials that are collected by informal workers, but no major recycling industries are reported to exist in Lao PDR (GGGI, 2018).

Plastic waste management is also crucial as land-based leakage into the waterways of the Mekong River are important pathways through which plastic materials can enter the South China Sea. In order to reduce plastic waste, Lao PDR encourages the usage of recyclable bags which are sold in downtown cafes and markets (Greenpeace, 2019). In July 2019, the Minister of Industry and Commerce signed a ministerial order in a bid to protect the environment and improve the operations of plastic waste recycling plants, The order authorised the freezing of licences to new manufacturing plants that would utilise plastic waste as a raw material (Asian News Network, 2019: available <http://annx.asianews.network/content/industry-ministry-orders-suspension-plastic-waste-recycling-plants-102439>).

Socially, the consumer lifestyle of Laotians has been noted to shift towards reliance on imported and manufactured products, including those of plastic materials. However, there is no proper and established waste disposal management system, which often results in local solutions of either simply burning or dumping plastic into the rivers, as the Laotians appear to be lacking awareness of the harmful impacts that such solutions may bring about (Asia Foundation, 2017: available <https://asiafoundation.org/2017/04/19/love-laos-keep-clean/>).

4.1.2 Plastics as a proportion of solid waste

In 2016, the municipal solid waste (MSW) for Lao PDR was estimated at 364,000 tonnes, and with a projection of reaching 522,000 tonnes in 2030 and 748,000 tonnes in 2050 (Kaza et al., 2018). Based

on these estimations, Lao PDR appears to be one of the smallest generators of MSW among the ASEAN+3 member states (UNEP, 2017).

Of the 500 tonnes of solid waste generated daily in Vientiane, the capital and largest city of Lao PDR, plastics made up 6.1% (Climate and Clean Air Coalition, 2015).

4.1.3 Illegal trade of plastic waste

Following the 2018 China ban on import of plastic waste, plastic waste import into Lao PDR quadrupled from 1,120 tonnes in early 2016 to 4,800 tonnes in end 2018. The top exporters of this plastic waste were from Thailand and Japan (Greenpeace, 2019).

4.2 Main players in marine plastic research

No players are identified. Some information on Lao PDR's plastic waste situation was obtained from a policy brief produced by Greenpeace Southeast Asia (Greenpeace, 2019). No government agency or department could be identified.

4.3 Summary of understanding

Leakages of plastic into the waterways of the Mekong are important to the issue of marine plastics in Southeast and East Asia. A better understanding of sources, leakages and hotspots of plastic would be useful in the context of both local and transboundary pollution.