

From København to Kuala Lumpur: The reach of Danish plastic is drastic

Sent to Germany to be recycled, a fair proportion ends up in Malaysia



A sea of Danish plastic is making its way into the oceans (photo: pxhere.com)

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Danish plastic waste has been found in Malaysia, according to a new TV2 documentary.

The revelation comes months after a report by SDU on plastic pollution pointed to the concerning possibility that Danish plastic was ending up in Malaysia.



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The images were filmed for a TV2 documentary in Pulau Indah, about an hour from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur.

Plastic from many countries

"We have found plastic waste from many countries here," revealed Greenpeace environmentalist Heng Kiah Chin told TV2.

"For example, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and France. Most of it is household waste that cannot be recycled,"

The SDU report points that out of 754,000 tonnes of plastic received by Malaysia between January and July 2018, approximately 10 percent was sent by Germany, where most Danish plastic is sent to be recycled.

"Finally, we have visual evidence", Professor Gang Liu, the author of the original report by SDU, said after seeing the images.

"Deeply, deeply worrying"

Denmark exports a fair proportion of its waste because it does not have the technology to recycle it here and it is therefore more cost-efficient to export it.

But when Germany cannot recycle it, it sends the plastic to middlemen, who keep exporting the waste until the waste stream cannot be traced.

The environment minister, Lea Wermelin, said that the new images of Danish plastic in Malaysia were "deeply, deeply worrying" and that the plastic had "never been intended to end in Asia".

The amount of waste ending up in Malaysia has exploded following China's decision to no longer accept it from January 2018. According to Greenpeace, around 91 percent is burned or dumped because Malaysia does not have the means to recycle it

Denmark, Germany, Malaysia, the ocean, back again

A McKinsey & Company report published in January pointed that although Denmark's plastic pollution is relatively low; the country is exposed to plastics pollution transported by ocean currents. Annually, more than 1,000 tonnes of plastic are collected on the Danish west coast.

"It is deeply, deeply worrying that we can see that plastic from Denmark pollutes nature and the environment around the world, but of course also damages human health," said Wermelin.

The minister had also promised to address the issue with the EU next week.

"We have to make sure we don't export our plastic waste to other parts of the world – it has to stay in the EU," she said.

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