

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY PLUGS LOOPHOLE THAT ALLOWED PLASTIC WASTE IMPORT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Plastic pollution | Photo Credit: [Shiv Kumar Pushpakar](#)

The government has plugged a loophole that allowed the import of plastic waste into India for processing.

“...Solid plastic waste has been prohibited from import into the country including in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and by Export Oriented Units (EOU),” the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) said in an order made public on Wednesday. The change in law was part of the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Amendment Rules, 2019.

The Hindu had [reported on January 21](#) that India, in spite of having a significant plastic pollution load of its own, and a ban on plastic waste imports, imported PET bottles from abroad for processing in Special Economic Zones (SEZ).

The influx of PET bottles has quadrupled from 2017 to 2018, the Delhi-based environmentalist organisation, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Smriti Manch (PDUSM) had pointed out in January.

“Indian firms are importing plastic scraps from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling and the imports of PET bottle scrap & flakes has increased from 12,000 tonnes in FY 16-17 to 48,000 tonnes in FY 17-18 growing @ 290%. India has already imported 25,000 MT in the first 3 months of FY 18-19,” a note by the organisation revealed.

India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes. To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles, in 2015. In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in SEZs.

A senior MoEFCC official, who declined to be identified, had then told *The Hindu* that while the Ministry couldn't vouch for whether such plastic imports had quadrupled, it was true that the imports had “substantially increased” and action was being contemplated.

The lack of an efficient waste collection and segregation system is the root cause for much of the plastic not making its way to recycling centres.

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