

Environment and Communications References
Answers to questions on notice
Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Portfolio

Inquiry: Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling policies
Question No: IQ24-000095
Hearing Date: 08 May 2024
Division/Agency: Circular Economy Division
Topic: Morrison Government ban on waste materials
Hansard Page: 57
Question Date: 08 May 2024
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

CHAIR: You may need to take my next question on notice. I've got the timeline of when the previous Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, announced a ban on waste materials. I'm seeking the origin of this policy. Is anyone able to enlighten me as to the origin of this policy and who it originated from?

Ms Lynch: I'm conscious that this came up earlier today. We've been trying to monitor the proceedings. I have some information I'm happy to share. Perhaps we can take further detail on notice as needed.

CHAIR: Yes, please.

Ms Lynch: Effectively, the origin of this work was China's Green Sword policy. That certainly brought to a head issues around the current status of Australia's waste exports at the time. Quite a lot of Australia's domestic waste was exported to South-East Asian countries at that time. When China's Green Sword policy came into effect and they announced that they would no longer be accepting waste imports, it was—

CHAIR: Ms Lynch, sorry to be rude. I'm well aware of China's Green Sword policy. We had a very extensive Senate inquiry following that with suggestions on how we would reform our waste sector. But no witness around the country, after 18 months of collecting evidence, suggested a ban on waste exports. I want to know specifically who this policy originated from. I don't need to know why; I want to know who.

Ms Lynch: Apologies. Perhaps I'll jump to the COAG decision that was communicated in August of 2019. There was a COAG communique released in August 2019, where COAG leaders agreed that Australia should establish a timetable to ban the export of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres while building Australia's capacity to generate high-value recycled commodities and associated demands.

CHAIR: I don't think COAG plucked it out of the air. I'd sort of like to know the origin of this policy.

Ms Lynch: Okay. Beyond that, we will have to take that question on notice. My understanding is that there was a range of work that had been done in consultation between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments at the time, looking at opportunities to effectively respond to that situation with China Sword, and that this policy position was put to COAG and was agreed to by COAG.

CHAIR: Great, thank you. If there is anything you could provide to us on notice, please do, as to who originated this policy and where the idea came from. I understand the China Sword background, but, given no other country has done this before and industry groups today have told us that they felt they were blindsided by this—no one saw it coming—I'd be fascinated as to the origin of it

Answer:

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water has found no written record of a proposal to introduce a waste export ban prior to the 9 August 2019 meeting of the former Council of Australian Governments.

It is understood that the proposal for a waste export ban was raised under other business and subsequently agreed at that meeting.