

Australia scapegoating China for our own waste woes

By Louisa Bochner *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 04 April 2018

Link: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/australia-scapegoating-china-for-our-own-waste-woes-20180403-p4z7it.html>



Kerbside recycling is in jeopardy after China ended imports of waste.

Australia has found itself unprepared and floundering in a waste crisis - but China isn't to blame.

Australia has the privilege of pristine beaches, blue skies, and drinkable tap water. We take pride in our natural environment: it is a core component of our national identity.

Until recently, one way we maintained this identity was shipping 619, 000 tonnes of rubbish annually to the People's Republic of China, where it was processed. The PRC has a history of developing sophisticated recycling technology, and benefiting financially from it.

However, the environmental damage was too big a price to pay. The lucrative waste import industry meant tonnes of illegal rubbish was being imported. Improper

disposal of the non-reusable blackmarket products then led to greater environmental pollution on Chinese shores.

So in July last year, China notified the World Trade Organisation of an impending ban, prohibiting the import of 24 categories of foreign garbage, including both recyclables and solid waste. The ban took effect in January, some seven months later.

Rubbish is now piling up in Australian waste centres with nowhere to go. Tens of thousands in Melbourne are now facing no bin collections at all, as waste centres fill to breaking point. The crisis has spread to NSW, with the state government [pledging](#) \$47 million to help consumers, councils and the industry. Australia's kerbside recycling system is in jeopardy.



Recycling company Visy had warned of a looming crisis. Photo: Greg McKenzie

The Bureau of International Recycling is begging China to reduce the high standards now imposed. The unfortunate implication of such a plea is the fear, heaven forbid, that the pristine streets of the West become rubbish riddled like, say, China.

Some have accused the PRC of directly "[inflicting](#)" this crisis on Australia. Further, the entire conversation that the "[China ban](#)" has caused waste woes is indicative of

Australia's attitude. The PRC is the scapegoat for our waste removal inadequacies. In reality, Australia's short-sighted policy on waste, and failure to establish a viable alternative at home, has caused the crisis we now see ourselves in.

Gayle Sloan, the chief executive of the Waste Management Association of Australia, thinks the crisis could be a positive outcome for Australia. She argues the problem will force Australia to deal with our waste independently, and hopes we are able to now recycle our own material, "and reuse it back in the economy".

Australia, as a first world country, is financially and morally obligated to deal with its waste thoughtfully and considerately. Ignoring this responsibility may be disastrous for Australia as the rubbish will only continue to pile up.

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