

# Indonesian 12yo activist tells Scott Morrison to take back Australia's waste

By Erwin Renaldi and Alan Weedon, 22nd January 2020, ABC News: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-22/indonesian-activist-urges-scott-morrison-to-halt-waste-exports/11885848>



*PHOTO: Non-recyclable waste exported to Indonesia often turns into cheap sources of fuel, which is hazardous for health. (Supplied)*

A 12-year-old Indonesian activist has called on Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to halt his country's exports of waste paper and plastics to her home province.

Aeshninna (Nina) Azzahra from Gresik, East Java, made the request in an open letter to the PM which was delivered personally to the Australian embassy in Jakarta yesterday evening.

The letter notes Ms Azzahra's dismay at the ecological and health impacts of foreign waste in Indonesia, and details the direct impacts of the export trade on villages in her region.

"I feel so sad to know that my city become the dump sites for plastic wastes from developed countries," Ms Azzahra wrote.



*PHOTO: The 12-year-old has sent letters to Donald Trump, Angela Merkel and Scott Morrison. (Supplied)*

She said plastic scraps she came across carried labels whose origins lay in Canada, Australia, the US and UK, among other developed nations.

“Please keep Australian wastes in Australia and do not send non-recyclable waste to Indonesia, that will add more plastic waste problems in my country,” she told Mr Morrison.

“Stop exporting waste paper mix with plastics scraps to East Java and Indonesia. Please take back your trash from Indonesia.”

### **Indonesia imported 283,000 tonnes of waste in 2018**



*PHOTO: Ms Azzahra said some of the labels she came across toted Australian addresses. (Supplied, Fully Syafi )*

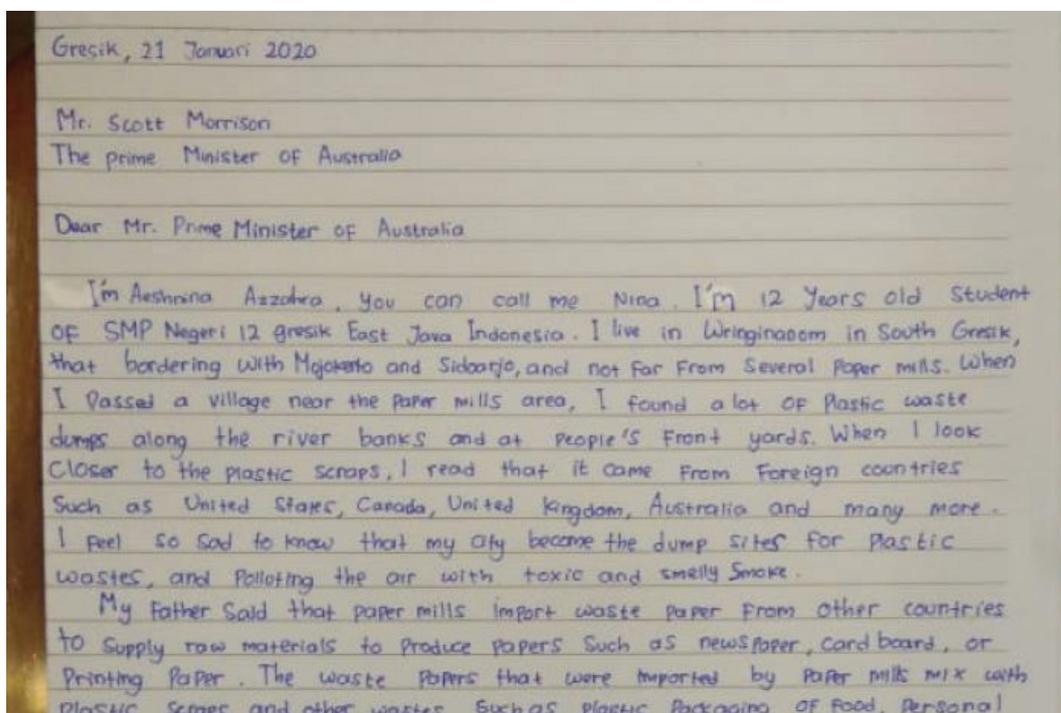
Many rich countries export both non-recyclable and recyclable waste to poorer nations which are tasked with the often hazardous work of recycling or destroying it.

China was previously the world leader in the trade, but since Beijing imposed a waste import ban in July 2017, millions of kilograms of waste from Australia and other developed nations have ended up in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

In 2018, Australia exported 52,000 tonnes of waste to Indonesia’s East Java province alone, a 250 per cent increase from 2014.

Ms Azzahra told the ABC that during her trips to East Java’s rubbish fields, waste with Australian labels was the most common she found after US-labelled rubbish.

The Prime Minister’s office told the ABC in a statement the Australian Government would phase in a ban on waste plastic, glass and paper exports starting from July.



*PHOTO: In her open letter, Aeshninna Azzahra says she feels sad to know her city is a dump site for developed countries. (Supplied)*

"Just like Nina, our Government thinks tackling waste is a key priority because it's an important issue for our environment at home and across the region we live in," the statement said.

The spokesperson also said the Government would work with industries to phase out single-use plastic packaging and harmful microbeads.

"We back Indonesia's plan to cut marine debris by 20 per cent and waste by 30 per cent and we're partnering with them to share our knowledge and what our two countries have learned."

Reuters estimates Indonesia's overall waste imports climbed by 141 per cent to reach 283,000 tonnes in 2018 — equivalent to about 123 average-sized white rhinoceroses.

Last year, Indonesian environment activist group Ecoton accused Australian companies of "smuggling" huge amounts of plastic and waste paper supposedly sent for recycling.

Poorer populations in provinces such as East Java turn to waste processing in order to find paid work or generate employment in areas typically bereft of consistent well-paid employment.

Eko Wahyudi, a waste-processing business owner, told the Los Angeles Times he once had 20 people employed sorting waste, paying them about \$US3.50 per day (\$5.10).

In Indonesia, the minimum wage is set per province, which for East Java is set at \$US4.07 per day in 2020.

Non-recyclable waste, such as plastic scraps, are sold as sources of cheap fuel for the province's tofu producers.

"Waste from the US means jobs here," Mr Wahudi said. "Everyone here depends on this trade — the rich and the poor."