

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CANADA'S PROPOSED PLASTIC PROHIBITION REGULATIONS

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Justin Trudeau's government had introduced a single use plastic ban in 2021 to effectively manage waste in Canada. This ban impacts recycling, reduce and reuse programs and business operations across Canada. This pathway to zero waste introduced by the federal government will cause producers to innovate new ways to reuse plastic in the country. Create a policy brief outlining and analysing the existing actions taken on the plastic pollution and how they will aid in meeting sustainable development goals. Further include recommendations and strategies to effectively achieve zero waste by 2030. Consider looking into Fisheries ACT and UNDRIP for a more in-depth analysis.

Executive Summary

Canada's current plans to ban six categories of single-use plastics will result in a sheer 4% reduction in Canada's annually generated plastic waste, and a 7% reduction in plastic pollution generated in the same period (Government of Canada 2021). With 2.8 million tonnes of plastic going to landfills and 29,000 tonnes becoming plastic pollution (Government of Canada 2021), these reduction numbers, to say the least, aren't extremely impressive. Through the revision of criteria regarding the selection of which single-use plastics to ban, and the closing of loopholes that allow more and more plastic to be produced regardless of the regulations, Canada will improve its chances of being sustainable and

achieving zero-waste by 2030.

Introduction

Canadians produce approximately 3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste every year; of this number, merely 9% of the waste is recycled and an additional 4% is incinerated with energy recovery; the rest ends up in landfills or as pollution (Government of Canada 2021). The Canadian plastics economy is thus mostly linear, meaning that most plastic is produced from scratch with "virgin" materials (i.e. fresh oil) instead of recycled ones, used, then thrown away at the end of their useful life without having their value recovered. This is a problem as producing virgin plastic increases reliance on fossil fuels and levels of environmental pollution (Government of Canada 2021).

Canada's plastic economy is mostly linear because compared to virgin plastic production, recycled plastics are more difficult and labour-intensive to produce, and lack a consistent supply of quality feedstock (recyclable plastic) for their production; this in turn is a result of low collection rates of recyclable plastic, and the cost of the process being shouldered by individuals and communities, instead of higher-level governments (Government of Canada 2021). Around 1% of plastic waste ends up leeching into the environment as pollution, which has significant detrimental effects to wildlife and makes outdoor environments less habitable, functional, and aesthetically pleasing (Government of Canada 2021). It is agreed upon that preventing plastic pollution from entering the environment (i.e. producing less plastic) is the only viable method of managing plastic pollution in the long-term (Government of Canada 2021). For these reasons it is imperative that the issue of plastic waste is dealt with.

Approach and Results

To investigate Canada's actions

on plastic pollution, the research done for this paper is focused solely on the Canadian federal government's proposed regulations to ban six categories of SUPs (single-use plastics) in the country, the details of which are exhaustively documented in the Canada Gazette. The six forms of SUPs being restricted (with exemptions) are checkout bags, cutlery, foodservice ware made from or containing problematic plastics, ring carriers (six-pack rings), stir sticks, and straws (Government of Canada 2021). These six categories were deemed as "harmful" based on the criteria that they must be both "environmentally problematic" and "value-recovery problematic" (Environment and Climate Change Canada 2020). Overall, these regulations represent a decent start for tackling the plastic pollution issue, and the government deserves credit for going to great lengths to ensure all stakeholders are accounted for, such as addressing accessibility concerns and future impacts on small businesses. However, in terms of absolute impact, the effect these regulations will have will be minuscule. According to the government's own estimates, "the proposed regulations are expected

to result in a net decrease of approximately 1.4 million tonnes in plastic waste over a 10-year period (2023–2032), which would represent around 4% of the total estimated plastic waste generated in Canada each year. It would also result in a decrease of around 23 000 tonnes in plastic pollution over the same period, which would represent 7% of the total plastic pollution generated each year” (Government of Canada 2021). The proposed regulations would hardly make a dent in Canada’s overall plastic pollution footprint; something clearly needs to be done to broaden the restrictions. Finally, all plastics involved in the ban are not subject to restrictions if they are manufactured, imported, and sold for the purposes of export (Government of Canada 2021).

Implications and Policy

Recommendations

Two recommendations will be made to remedy the low impact of the regulations documented above. **First, it shall be proposed that the criteria of selecting which SUPs are harmful enough to be banned be revised.** Currently, only plastics that are

both environmentally problematic and value-recovery problematic are considered under the regulations, which cuts out the majority of SUP categories initially considered – eight, to be precise (Environment and Climate Change Canada 2020). While the present proposed regulations do address the most problematic SUPs, it is important to remember that most plastic production is reliant on oil, and thus increases our reliance on fossil fuels. Further expanding the criteria to restrict plastics that are either environmentally problematic or value-recovery problematic, for example, would help decrease this fossil fuel reliance and accelerate potential future plans Canada has to transition to green energy. However, this would come at the cost of making the implementation of the regulations more difficult, since there would be more forms of plastic that need to be accounted and alternatives found for, and it would create a larger inconvenience for businesses and consumers. Nonetheless, it would improve the absolute impact the regulations have on reducing Canada’s plastic waste problem.

The second recommendation is for the government to remove the loophole in the regulations that

allows for the plastics to be made and sold for the purposes of export. Gabriel Brunet, a spokesperson for Environment Minister Stephen Guilbeault, noted this and cited the fact that the rules are consistent with those set by other nations like the European Union, and that the demand would be met by other countries that allow exports (Hill 2021). However, this would ultimately still encourage significant levels of plastic production; the plastic simply would go to other countries instead of Canada. Thus, the detrimental effects of producing the plastic (reliance on fossil fuels) and the issue of plastic waste and pollution still exist, if mainly in other nations. Closing this loophole would have the negative effect of hurting plastic companies' well-being and bottom line, and therefore hurting the Canadian economy, but if the Canadian government wants to commit itself to sustainable development goals and zero-waste by 2030, this is a necessary step.

Conclusion

Canada's plastic waste is a significant problem that the federal government currently

has made baby steps to address, but whose solution still needs a lot of work in order to adequately resolve the issue. As mentioned above, with a 4% reduction in 2.8 million tonnes of plastic waste and a 7% reduction in 29,000 tonnes of plastic pollution still leaves a massive amount of plastic to deal with (Government of Canada 2021). However, with the proposed recommendations of widening the scope of plastics considered under the ban, and no longer allow an exception with regards to export, Canada's issues with plastic waste and pollution will be less daunting, and the country will have a stronger chance of aligning itself with sustainable development goals and zero-waste by 2030.

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