

Yangon, 16th of July 2019



Plastic crisis in Myanmar: New survey reveals 119 tons of plastic enter Ayeyarwady River every day

A new survey on plastic pollution in Myanmar conducted by Fauna and Flora International (FFI) in collaboration with Thant Myanmar reveals that 119 tons of plastic waste enter the Ayeyarwady River every day. A related study conducted by the Fridtjof Nansen research vessel found that Myanmar's coastlines are heavily affected by micro plastics. On the 9th of July 2019, these findings were discussed by experts and policy makers in Nay Pyi Taw.

Keynote speaker, Deputy Minister of MONREC Dr. Ye Myint Swe, who opened the workshop "Plastic pollution in Myanmar: Focus on the Ayeyarwady River", accused plastic pollution of damaging the beauty of Myanmar and affecting people's health. He believes that the government and private sectors can make a change by encouraging and supporting a national reduction of plastic waste.

The findings of the survey confirmed that the Ayeyarwady River is one of the most polluted rivers on the planet. Navigating its flow from Mandalay to Pyay and taking water samples along the way, experts found that the most polluting region is the Delta Region, which is responsible for around 32 tons, followed by Yangon where approximately 29 tons of plastic waste enters the river every day.

Another striking fact presented in Nay Pyi Taw is that the ocean surrounding Myanmar – especially in the Bay of Bengal – is heavily impacted by micro plastics. The researchers of Fridtjof Nansen research vessel recorded high contamination rates on Myanmar's coasts, reaching up to 28,000 micro plastic particles per square kilometer. During a panel discussion, the majority of the audience agreed that reducing plastic at its source has to be the first priority.

The event successfully stimulated and contributed to the general debate on how to tackle the urgent plastic pollution issue Myanmar is facing. Different tools and policy options were discussed, including plastic taxation and bans, improved focus on awareness raising, and giving incentives to businesses through tax exemptions when switching to environmentally-friendly practices. Reducing packaging was another option discussed with actors from the private sector. At the workshop, large scale producers of plastic packaging such as Nestlé, Unilever and Coca-Cola gathered to form an industry-led movement to step up the recycling of plastic. This initiative can be supported by policy makers by forcing producers to use recycled plastic in their products. The Environmental Conservation Department is currently in the process of drafting their "Master Plan for Solid Waste Management".

"The crisis is pressing but solutions exist," Friedor Jeske from FFI and Thant Myanmar said during his presentation. Jeske is one of the key researchers of the study presented in Nay Pyi Taw. "It is up to all of us; policy makers, producers and civil society, to find the right solutions for Myanmar, put them into action and make sure we stop the plastic pollution in time."

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Note to editor

Survey highlights

- 119 tons of plastic waste enter the Ayeyarwady River every day, which makes it one of the most polluted rivers in the world.
- Myanmar's coastlines have a high concentration of micro plastics with up to 28,000 plastic particles per square kilometer.
- Myanmar's rural areas are specifically endangered since there are no official waste collection systems in these areas and waste is often dumped directly into the river.

Further information

For follow-up questions or interview requests, please contact Friedor Jeske or May Thet Htwe from FFI.

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Further details

- Infographic on plastic in the Ayeyarwady River: <https://www.thantmyanmar.com/en/riversurvey>
- Related pictures: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1_BLHvv3i1ORM1JHtHl6MOCdHb801guyH
- Short info video on micro plastics produced by WWF: <https://yourplasticdiet.org/>