

The Ecopolitics Podcast - S01E03: Environmental Change in Canada - Plastics Case Study
<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-3-environmental-change-in-canada-plastics-case-study-2/>

Hosts: Peter Andrée (Carleton University) and Ryan Katz-Rosene (University of Ottawa)

Guest: Jay Sinha (Life Without Plastic)

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Plastics are everywhere - in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and even the food we eat. As products that essentially never disappear, plastics have a huge impact on both our environment and our health. In this episode, we talk plastic pollution, regulating waste, and green entrepreneurship with Jay Sinha, Author and Co-founder of Life Without Plastic. He shares with us the ways businesses, government, and even individuals can impact our plastic use, in Canada and abroad.

Episode 3: Environmental Change in Canada - Plastics Case Study

Jay Sinha: So environmentally global plastic pollution is a global, I guess you could call it a pandemic too. It's a global issue without a doubt. Plastic is literally everywhere. You can try and avoid it, but it will find you because it is now in the air at the microplastic and even nanoplastic level of small particles from the highest Himalayan peaks to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, it has been measured. So environmentally it's very clearly an issue.

[00:00:34] **Peter Andrée:** Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast. This podcast series tackle some of the big questions in the field of environmental politics for university students in Canada. I'm Peter Andrée from Carleton University, and my cohost for the show is Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa.

[00:00:51] In this episode, we are talking with Jay Sinha. Jay is a scientist, lawyer, policy advisor, writer, and speaker on the topic of the environmental impact of plastics. He is also co founder and co owner of Life Without Plastic, a Quebec-based business he co-owns with Chantal Plamondon. Life Without Plastic is a globally established online shop and information resource for safe, high quality ethically-sourced earth-friendly alternatives to plastic products for everyday life.

[00:01:20] We are talking with Jay early in our podcast series to present the plastics issue as an example of one of the many critical environmental issues we are wrestling with in Canada and in the world. In today's conversation, we'll explore the nature of the plastics problem and how people like Jay are working to address it. Given that Jay is an entrepreneur, we're particularly interested in exploring the role of businesses in responding to environmental issues. Given Jay's experience in the legal and policy world, we'll also explore the relationship between individual lifestyle change and government regulation.

[00:01:56] Plastics are one of the many miracles of the modern age, but their environmental impact is becoming increasingly apparent, especially in the world's oceans, where over 12 million metric tonnes of plastic end up each year, literally choking the birds and fish that live in the ocean. Plastics are derived from fossil fuels, oil, natural gas, and coal. So the production of plastics is also implicated in climate change. Plastics also have public health impacts, as many of their constituent parts are dangerous for human health. In response to such issues, we're starting to see industry move to develop alternatives to plastics, and governments are increasingly regulating in this area with bans on single-use plastics like plastic straws and bags, just for starters. With his background in biochemistry, law, and business, we're very fortunate to have Jay Sinha with us today to help us understand plastics as an eco political issue.

[00:02:50] Welcome to the show, Jay, and how are you doing today?

[00:02:52] **Jay Sinha:** Thank you very much, Peter. I'm doing well, thanks, it's a beautiful sunny today and I'm very happy to be here to talk about plastics and why the world doesn't need them as much as they are out there.

[00:03:03] **Peter André:** Well, you're an activist and an entrepreneur working on eliminating plastics from the environment. Why is this such an important issue today and what can be done about it?

[00:03:13] **Jay Sinha:** I think the issue is actually really more important today than ever before. And just to begin with really timely example of that is just with everything that's been happening with the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe. Even before that began, the plastics issue was front and center in terms of pollution, so very much at the environmental level, but also at the health level. But with what's happened in the past few months, the pollution issue has literally skyrocketed with there being so much more plastic use and plastic production having gone into effect as a result of the pandemic, mainly because of the increased use of personal protective equipment. So we're seeing a lot of, for example, masks and gloves already showing up in large scale amounts coming up on coastlines in the oceans and in the environment. So I think it's more timely than ever, but just to step back a bit, the larger issue - well, the issues - of why this is such an important issue today is, we always look at it from two pillars, in terms of the environment and also in terms of health. Environmentally, it's very clear that it's an issue both at that microscope like level, but also, and I think this is partly, what's gotten it onto the public agenda and into the public psyche is that it's a very visible problem out there too. Very much so, for

example, in the oceans, which you mentioned in the intro. And it's also very visible in its impacts on wildlife, who ingest much of it. So environmentally it's very clearly an issue.

[00:04:49] There's also the health side of things because plastics are synthetic substances made of a variety of chemicals. You will have generally a core plastic resin, which is the base plastics, such as, for example, polyethylene terephthalate, which is used to make most of the plastic bottles you see out there, for example, the single use water bottles. But also within the plastic, you have a lot of additives, other chemicals, which are in the plastic to give it certain properties, whether they might be color, flexibility, chemical resistance. And these chemicals, as well as the plastic resin itself can leach out of the plastic as it's used. And what we don't really know are the extent of the health problems that can arise from exposure to these chemicals. What we do know is that many of these chemicals are what are called endocrine disruptors. They are hormone disruptors. They actually have an impact on our hormonal systems in our bodies. And just to put that in perspective, our hormonal systems basically control all bodily functions. They're utterly crucial for human life and for life of all living beings that that have hormones in them.

[00:06:06] So it's a fundamental health issue, which is out there. And we know there are direct effects already, things like reproductive and developmental disorders, diabetes, obesity, even cancers coming from certain chemicals, such as Bisphenol A or phthalates that come out of plastics. But this is very much where the core hardcore research is happening now is, What are the effects of these chemicals on not just humans, but all living beings at this point, given that we are now exposed to plastic in the air and the water at microscopic levels. So we just don't know, it's an open question, but those are the two big reasons, I guess, that outline why it is a big problem today from the environmental and health perspective.

[00:06:53] **Peter André:** Great. Well, I think you've summarized it really well there, both in terms of the environmental impacts and the human health impacts. Both what is known, and as you say, there's a lot of research happening right now on trying to figure out what we don't know yet, but what is likely happening both in the environment and for people. We introduced you as both an activist and an entrepreneur and I think that's a very interesting identity that you hold, and I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how you bring that together. Both how do you see the role of business and yourself as a business person working on this issue? And I'm also curious just about the businessperson who is also an activist. I think I saw in your bio, the ecopreneur.

[00:07:40] **Jay Sinha:** Sure. Yeah, no, it all kind of melds together. Well, in terms of the role of business, I guess I'll step back and look at the larger issue first and then take it down to me. But in terms of the role of business, I think business has a huge role to play in environmental challenges in general, but definitely in the plastics issue.

[00:08:06] One reason why I think this way is because business can make things happen quite quickly. Business is obviously directly impacted by market conditions and less so by the democratic process, which, I mean, that may sound awful, but in this respect it can be seen as a positive, whereas governments have certain processes they need to go to approve things, business can just go ahead and do things. You have an idea, you can implement it. And so in terms of the plastic issue, businesses also can influence consumer behavior very directly, through, for example, the products that are put out there, through product design. In terms of the plastics issue itself, we really feel that the core way to address the plastics problem is to try and reduce production of plastic at the stores. Plastics have a whole life before them, before they come to you as a consumer. So they are made out of fossil fuels, which are quite literally hundreds of millions of years old. So you have massive embedded energy in those fossil fuels, which is then extracted from the earth, refined, made into a plastic resin and then distributed somewhere sometimes across the world. Often these plastics are made in Asia and coming back to, for us, North America. All of these steps, massive amounts of energy that are being used to actually get the plastic to use. So you finally have the plastic in your hand with all of this energy consumption built into it. And if it's a single use disposable item, you may be using it for minutes. On average, a plastic bag is used for about 12 minutes. So all of that embedded energy and then the bag is then very often discarded. So what businesses can do is to look at ways to try and avoid using fossil fuel based plastics or products.

[00:10:17] Bioplastics are coming up, but you do have to be careful with them and make sure it is a bioplastic, which is actually not just having a little bit of bio feedstock in it, and then, you know, 50 - 60% of it still being a traditional plastic resin, which is actually currently the case with a lot of bioplastics.

[00:10:36] So smart product design is a real important point for businesses to work on. Another key one I would highlight is the whole idea of extended producer responsibility, which is definitely gaining traction around the world. The idea here, being that a business which puts out a product remains responsible for that product through the lifetime of it. So when, for example, that plastic bottle its use has finished, the business that created it would then be responsible for its afterlife, after usable life,

future. And that would mean ideally it would be either reused to make another product or broken down completely in a biodegradable way or compostable.

[00:11:25] And what this leads to is what is being as has been called a circular economy. And that's become quite a trendy term now, which has gained a lot of traction. The idea being a distinction from our traditional linear economy, where you have raw materials that are extracted, and then used to make a product, and then the product becomes waste. It's just a linear, straight line from product development, to use, to waste. The idea of the circular economy is that you have materials that are used to make products. But that no waste is produced from the product. It's a circular cycle whereby once the product's usable life is over it, as I mentioned, either is reused, recycled, composted. In some way, it goes back into the system.

[00:12:15] So this, we're seeing a lot of businesses moving in this direction and it's interesting because the businesses are increasingly working with governments and with NGO or nonprofit organizations, a big example is the Ellen MacArthur foundation, which has been instrumental. They're based out of the UK, instrumental in getting this whole idea of a circular economy on the global agenda. And they work with both corporations and governments bringing everybody together with this idea.

[00:12:44] And one example of a company which has really taken this to an incredible level is a company called TerraCycle based in New Jersey. Their raison d'etre has always been to take waste products and make them into usable products. things like chip bags, gum, wrappers, all kinds of things. And what they've done is they've actually partnered with the Ellen MacArthur foundation, a number of other big corporations around the world, things like Unilever and Danone, large corporations with massive amounts of products that create waste through their packaging. And they put into effect something called Loop, which is a system whereby people can still purchase, for example, the yogurt from Danone, but it comes in now a stainless steel container and it's essentially a deposit-return sort of scheme at a large scale, whereby the person buys that yogurt, it comes in that container, once they're finished with it, they put it into a container, it's picked up and then it goes back to a central sort of location where it can be refilled again.

[00:13:52] And there's no actual packaging that is disposed of, so it's a big system to put into place and there's a lot of infrastructure involved and, you know, energy inputs there as well. But it's something, it's

a real start in that direction of moving away from a disposable, sort of a linear economy, into a very more circular economy.

[00:14:13] So that's a big way that I think businesses can have effect. Another one is just, I think there's a whole growing movement towards socially responsible behavior in business in general. I mean, in what do we're kind of clicked into this sort of network and see it growing vastly. But one example of a kind of umbrella organization that signals businesses that are in this sort of mindset is the B Corporation movement - B standing for benefit. And this is something we're actually applying for right now. But now there are thousands of businesses that are B Corps and they actually have to embed into their DNA, into their corporate documentation that they are not just in business for profit, but they actually have public purpose behind what they do. So the idea of multiple bottom lines, not just a financial bottom line, but also social, environmental, labour aspects play into that sort of business. So that's sort of how I see business having a very major role in addressing all environmental challenges, not just the plastics issue.

[00:15:21] **Peter Andréé:** That's really fascinating, Jay. I think that you're really, your business and some of the others that you're mentioning are really setting up a whole new way of of doing business. Right. And certainly in this sphere where your work is, and these companies are trying to eliminate plastics in the product streams and the waste streams, the idea of the circular economy, extended producer responsibility are really going to be intriguing to students of environmental politics as they think about, How is this capitalist world is going to function in a much more sustainable way. So I mentioned at the beginning that I'm co-hosting this show and I didn't give a Ryan Katz-Rosene a chance to say hello to listeners right off the top, but I'm going to turn it over to Ryan now for a couple of questions towards you Jay.

[00:16:12] **Jay Sinha:** Great. Hello, Ryan.

[00:16:14] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hello, and yes, hello to the listener too. That's okay. So I wanted to pick up on something you touched on briefly Jay, when you were telling us about how businesses are approaching, the challenge and you talked about the ways that they might work with governments. And I wanted to take a step back and just ask about the context of government regulation when it comes to plastics in Canada. You know, what is the role of government in this? We talked about businesses and to a certain extent activists, but where do governments fit in? And, in a Canadian context, you know, how

do we regulate plastic? How is the recycling of plastic regulated in this country? I get the sense that it's a little bit of a patchwork from one jurisdiction to the next, but, I'd love to hear your insights on that.

[00:17:08] **Jay Sinha:** Sure, Ryan. Yeah. Great question. So in terms of the role of government regulation, I mean, I think it plays a very direct and key role. Another sort of broad theme that'll illustrate this, that I think is key to understand is the difference between individual action and systemic action in dealing with an issue as huge as something like the plastics issue, you could say the same thing about climate change. And government has a role to play in addressing the issue from both of those angles, both the individual and the societal or systemic.

[00:17:42] I think it's so important, government regulation, because it can spur change very directly. Now I kind of referred to this earlier, the disadvantages that the time required for government regulations to be, you know, developed, passed, and actually implemented, can be very long. But at the same time, you know, I'm an eternal optimist. And as we have seen in the past few months where there is a pressing issue at hand, even governments can work very, very quickly and massive change, very quickly. I think this is one of the huge lessons that have come out of this whole pandemic that we can change quickly if we need to. And so I think we're going to see the direct effects of plastic pollution on both the environment and the health only increase, I would argue exponentially, in the coming years. So this is going to help governments work faster, to put in place regulations, to, you know, directly address plastics issues. And this is already happening, in terms of how plastics are regulated. There's a lot happening in Canada. Canada is, I would argue one of the leaders in terms of addressing the plastics issue. And I think part of it began back in 2018 when Canada had a role at the G7 as president and championed the development of the Ocean Plastics Charter at a more international level. And I think that to some extent, puts some pressure on Canada to try and do as much as it can domestically as well.

[00:19:17] And so Canada has in place what's called a 'strategy on zero plastic waste', which came into effect, or has begun to be implemented back in 2018 and is in the process now. And there are various elements to it. There's a lot going on at many levels. And so I guess at the federal level, how plastics are regulated, there are, you know, a number of federal acts and regulations that prevent plastic waste and marine litter.

[00:19:50] One very direct plastic-related regulation are the microbeads and toiletries regulations, which came into effect in June 2017. And they prohibit the manufacture and import and sale of toiletry items

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that have plastic microbeads, which are tiny, tiny little pieces of plastic that are added in some personal care products to act as an abrasive, completely unnecessary.

[00:20:16] And this is a perfect example of utterly crazy product design. That's why I mentioned product design early upfront. The whole idea of putting these little plastic particles in product when it's evidently clear that the plastic microbeads are going to wash down the drain, and go out into water systems, which is exactly what has happened. And they're not caught by waste management systems for water treatment. So they go straight out into rivers and lakes and oceans. But so these regulations address that by phasing out the use of these microbeads. That's one example of something Canada has done. But there's much more happening.

[00:20:53] I guess, to jump into a little bit about what you asked about recycling. You're absolutely right. It is a bit of a patchwork because, and that's kind of the nature of the way Canada works in terms of its constitutional structure where provinces, the federal government has certain responsibilities and provinces and municipalities have other responsibilities and recycling would come within waste management, which is largely provincial responsibility and by extension municipal responsibility, and much of the waste management really happens at municipal levels, which is why you see recycling systems are very much a municipal animal. And so, yeah, it can really differ from municipality to municipality in terms of what sort of infrastructure is actually in place, the extent of it and what actually can be recycled. For example, only certain municipalities will actually have in place the infrastructure to recycle plastic bags. Others may be restricted just to hard plastics, which have a very clear market value and are easily resalable things. Things like, for example, those, I mean, among the plastics and just to give you some context here, in the recycling world, the easiest way to distinguish plastics is through that numbering system where you see a number on the bottom or somewhere on a plastic from 1 to 7, 1-6 refers to each one, a particular plastic resin, and 7 is a bit of a catch all category for everything else. So plastics, 1, 2, 4 and 5 are the most recycled ones. These are ones that are used to make, for example, single use disposable water bottles and harder plastics for things like Rubbermaid containers or, ketchup bottles, mayonnaise, and certain bags as well, heavier bags. So those plastics are the ones which are most recycled, but they are not necessarily the bulk of all plastics out there. You have a lot of plastics which are used for takeout food, which would fall into category 6, which is polystyrene. So all the styrofoam containers and clear polystyrene plastics as well, they created an enormous amount of waste and they're really not recyclable to any large degree.

[00:23:14] So, a lot of those can then, and that brings up another issue. A lot of those still go into the recycling system but they're not necessarily recycled at all. They can, they'll be taken out and will essentially just be landfilled or they can also contaminate some of the recycling as well, especially if it's a product that has a mix of plastics on it. That polystyrene piece with say a polypropylene, which is number 5, piece. If they're together on the plastic, the same product, it becomes waste. It goes to a landfill because it's simply not cost effective for the actual recycling organization to try and separate them.

[00:23:52] So there are lots of limitations to the recycling system, and this is happening all over the world because, Again, to give a little more context, back in 2018, China stopped accepting waste from countries in the world, and much of it ended up being plastic waste. So this forced governments around the world to begin to look at their recycling systems very carefully, including Canada.

[00:24:18] So there's a big push to increase recycling infrastructure. And one thing Canada has done, which I think is very wise, is to bring together the provinces, through an organization called the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and to develop a very clear strategy to work towards waste management in general, to reduce plastic waste. And obviously that very much includes recycling as a core element of it, but it also brings into play the whole idea of extended producer responsibility as well. So yeah, these are ideas that are being looked at very closely in Canada, across Canada, both at the federal and provincial and municipal levels, and with all three working together. So I think it's very positive what's happening in Canada that way.

[00:25:04] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Cool. And so that's a great recap of sort of the regulatory setup in this country. And, you know, talked about the zero plastic waste initiative, regulations around microbeads in toiletry, so on and so forth. And some of the interprovincial cooperation. And you mentioned China, briefly, but I'm curious to hear about the international context, which I know you're familiar with. What are some of the countries that are really getting this right, really progressive on action on plastics, out there?

[00:25:42] **Jay Sinha:** Sure. Yeah. Well, it really is a global issue, you know, it's right up there with climate change. So there's a lot happening around the world and a lot of positive things. I mean, clearly one of the leaders is Europe. You see this in a lot of environmental issues. Europe is very, very advanced in terms of its, I would say eco-awareness and eco-consciousness and actual implementation of actions.

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And since, January, 2018, there's been a European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy. So really implementing this idea of a circular economy, trying to transform the way plastic products are both designed and used and produced and recycled. So within their program, there's a pretty clear focus on the design of plastic products and increasing plastic waste recycling rates, but also, better quality recycled products, like ensuring - a huge problem within recycling systems around the world is contamination, because if anything is contaminated, it just isn't cost effective to keep it within the system. So it's removed and landfilled or incinerated, incineration still does happen even of plastics around the world in various places. And that's not a good thing. That's in general producing a lot more pollution and chemical release into the environment. But so Europe is definitely a positive example.

[00:27:05] One of the neat things that I think is a positive direction that other countries could go in is that Europe still has some very effective deposit-return schemes. And this kind of harks back to what I mentioned earlier about Loop and TerraCycle, where you have these containers being used for food over and over again. Or as well, cleaning products, things like that. But in various, I think over more than 10 countries in Europe still have access to successful deposit-return schemes, Germany and Norway are, I understand, the most successful ones and Norway I think it has like a 97% recycling rate for plastic bottles and Germany is very high up there as well, for various different plastics and metals. These are systems that are costly though, that's an issue, to actually put in place. And part of the reason, I think why they work in these countries, which have always been quite eco-conscious is because they've been in place for quite a while, you know, since the eighties, but they're very effective in terms of recycling.

[00:28:13] So that's, that's a success story. I mean, I'll mention two others quickly. One, just quickly, perhaps unlikely one is in the U.S. in the sense that right now there is a bill before Congress, which is to try and pass what's being, what is known as the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act of 2020. It's currently before a Congress congressional committee. And so this is a quite a wide-ranging bill related to waste and recycling. And it would make certain producers of products responsible for collecting, managing, and recycling or composting the products after their use. So it's actually implementing this whole idea of extended producer responsibility, which is very, very cool and somewhat revolutionary. Of course, if it does get passed - the U.S. has a lot on its mind these days. but it would - another key thing that this bill would do is to phase out a variety of single use products, such as for example, plastic utensils, and have other provisions to reduce single-use products by putting in place programs, to refund

consumers for returning certain containers. So it's quite a revolutionary bill. We'll see if it actually does go through, but it's a positive one.

[00:29:35] One other country I'd really like to highlight is on the other side of the world and that's Indonesia, cause they're doing some pretty incredible things. They are in an area of the world where plastic pollution is front and center every day in just extreme ways and where there is a massive amount of plastic pollution being produced, going out into the oceans from certain Southeast Asian countries and Indonesia is one of them. And so they've really put in place, taken action to try and put in place a strategy to reduce their own plastic pollution. They're aiming, for example, to, by 2040, be completely plastic pollution free. And a few of the things they are putting into practice are a reduction or substitution of plastic usage by at least a million tons a year as they're working with industry within Indonesia to do that very directly. And again, there, the focus is very much on replacing single use plastic packaging with reusable packaging. As well, they're looking at redesigning plastic products and packaging with reuse or recycling in mind. They're also looking at doubling waste collection to 80% by 2025. And building or expanding safer waste disposal facilities.

[00:30:57] So, that's a lot of what's happening around the world is ramping up waste disposal facilities and infrastructure, which simply isn't there right now. So even if governments want to do what they can and put in place regulations, you need the actual facilities to do it. So this is where again, you have the interplay between business and government and regulation. Absolutely critical to get things going fast.

[00:31:22] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** So maybe that's an opportunity to jump in onto a theme, which you did briefly touch on previously. And that is the relationship between your own, this lifestyle change and more systemic change. Or we could talk about this in terms of collective action. So I'm curious to hear, and it's really interesting to hear all of these examples of what I suppose we could say are, you know, government regulations in different parts of the world, in some cases, some surprising parts of the world, tackling this issue.

[00:31:57] And I'm assuming your answer to this is no, but does that leave individuals off the hook or like, what is the role of the individual, the consumer? Is there an opportunity to think about things in terms of, you know, changing the way we consume or focusing on green products or innovations in plastic that we can focus on at the level of the individual consumer?

[00:32:23] **Jay Sinha:** Yeah, no great question. And my answer is definitely a no, definitely not off the hook. I mean, the way I look at it is sure you have individual and individual change and then collective or systemic change, but the collective and systemic change is put into place by individuals. You know, we have a prime minister who has a lot of power. There's a president down South who has a lot of power. There is the United Nations, which has representatives of heads of state from around the world who have a lot of power. These are individuals. And what I've seen is that the way these individuals think at a very personal level and in terms of what's happening in their own personal lives and who they interact with and who they're affected by can have a very direct effect on their decision making.

[00:33:12] So I see the individual impact as being crucial, regardless of what the issue is, whether you're looking at it from a systemic or an individual perspective. But yeah, in terms of the individual perspective, that's clearly where we've put our focus for the past 15 years and have seen that it's been extremely effective.

[00:33:30] When you pair it with a government regulation to spur people on and changing their consumption habits, I think that's where you see like the real systemic mainstream change happen. So initially we were catering to a very niche crowd of people who were very environmentally aware and eco-conscious, and actively looking for ways to decrease their waste and, and decrease their plastic use and consumption. But in recent years, we've seen a gradual and then even a quite abrupt shift in consumer behavior being impacted both by external global events and direct government action. And then in ways that government action has been directly influenced by those global events too, I'll give you a couple of examples.

[00:34:13] So like when we started out back in 2006 and then in 2007, Canada put in place a ban on the use of Bisphenol A, which is a plastic resin. It's also in a very clearly researched endocrine disruptor. A ban on the use of BPA in baby bottles and in the lining of baby formula containers. So this put, I think initially the plastic issue really on the public agenda and got it into the public psyche.

[00:34:48] So fast forward again to 2018 and then the whole China thing of not accepting waste and then governments beginning to realize that, okay, plastic is a problem. Then you see another shift and change there. All along you've you've had certain individuals, that niche group I've talked about, taking steps to really reduce their, their plastic use and using different types of containers and reusable containers or avoiding straws in a restaurant, little things like that, which may not seem like much, but

even if they don't have a huge effect on, for example, decreasing the actual gross or net amount of plastic pollution that is out there, they do cause a shift in the public psyche. And the fact of seeing so much plastic pollution in the oceans has been huge effect on the individual too. So I really see the two as working together in terms of the individual is still needing to take a close look at their actual plastic consumption. And we always suggest doing what we call a personal plastic audit, where you just look around your life and even notice and become aware of the plastic around you. And if you consciously do that for someone who hasn't done it before, you'll probably be pretty amazed by how much plastic actually is in your life.

[00:36:14] If you go from room to room in your home and just notice the plastic it can be quite stunning. It's really infiltrated our life from every angle. So we never advocate getting rid of all your plastic wholesale because we do feel that plastic does have very important uses as well. And especially durable plastics, but there's lots you can do to get rid of single use disposable plastics especially packaging. In your consumption habits, in the way you buy food, trying to minimize plastic packaging can go a very long way in reducing the plastic waste in general. So, yeah, there's lots of room for the individual to still act.

[00:36:54] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** So to a certain extent, I mean, when I'm hearing you talk about both the role of the individual, and especially when you were talking about all of the regulations that we are seeing around the world, I kind of get a hopeful tone from you, which I'm a little surprised by just because, you know, you're someone who knows of the extent of the problem. You introduced the podcast telling us a little bit about the extent of this of the damage related to plastic pollution, not just in terms of the environment, but wildlife health, so on and so forth.

[00:37:34] So yeah. Is that fair to say you're hopeful? Are you hopeful? What, you know, what is it that kind of keeps you motivated and hopeful when you're trying to deal with this issue on a day to day basis?

[00:37:46] **Jay Sinha:** Yeah, I'm totally hopeful. Yeah, no, I mean, I guess maybe in some ways I'm a bit of an optimist or at least I try to be, but it's interesting. So when I do public talks, usually begin the talk with kind of the way I did at the beginning, laying out the issue from the health and the environmental aspects. And it's super depressing cause yeah, there's awful stuff happening out there. Wildlife is dying left, right and center. We're breathing in plastics, whether we want to or not. They're just there now and

in the dust and house dust coming, not just from outside, but within the house from carpets, you know, curtains, the plastics that are within us and breaking in the house and breaking down. Yeah, it's awful. But there is so much happening at the same time.

[00:38:31] I mean, I've never. The awareness, the way it's grown. I would never predicted when we began this, that two things, I guess, that I didn't think the issue would become as huge as it has been. And by that, I mean, I didn't think it would become as serious as it has become. It's really everywhere now. And it's really broken down completely because there's so much waste out there, but I also didn't think the world would jump on it in the way the world has and in the past few years, and will have to even more, now that it's become much more serious than I thought it was. So that's one of the reasons why I see hope, I see action happening around the world.

[00:39:16] The other reason is because of the youth. I sometimes do talks in schools and we work with a number of NGOs and some of them have programs focused on educating youth about the plastic program. And it is phenomenal. And when I say youth, I mean like seven and eight year olds even, who are doing things in their communities to reduce plastic, like large-scale programs that are getting the level of influence. There's one a girl down in Georgia, Hannah Testa, who put in place a plastic reduction, plastic bag reduction program, which was, she started a plastic bag-free day and it actually influenced the creation of legislation. And another example is in Indonesia, what I mentioned what's happening there, I think a large part of why the government is so sensitive in Indonesia is because of the work of two at the time, young girls, Isabel and Melati Wijzen who had began an NGO called Bye Bye Plastic Bags, which has been instrumental in lobbying the government to reduce plastic bag use and has led to a ban back in 2018 on plastic bags, certain types of plastic bags.

[00:40:35] So, when I see what's happening with the youth and how they're charged with the issue, just like with climate change, that's where I see a lot of hope for education, awareness and further activism. And yeah, I think nature also is very resilient. You know, we can still keep putting plastic out there, but in nature, nature rules, and that's no reason to stop our efforts on the contrary, but nature is much more powerful than we think. I think.

[00:41:06] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Hmm. Well, maybe those two notes, nature's more powerful than we think, and your anecdote are are a good way to end the show. Unfortunately, it does look like we may have lost Peter to the internet, but that's OK, we'll, we'll wrap things out without him. But before I do

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wrap things up, Jay are there any final things, final thoughts or wisdom that you want to share with our listeners?

[00:41:34] **Jay Sinha:** Well, sure. One thing I guess. Since our focus always has been at the individual level of action and change, I would just put out to people to not get discouraged by the issue and to just take one thing at a time, try and make one small change in your life and, and be aware of it and not try and take on the whole issue all at once, but really do believe. And we have seen this, it actually does work, but every little bit makes a difference. So I would encourage people to take even just a very small single action towards reducing their plastic use and know, then that you're actually making a very real difference.

[00:42:17] **Ryan Katz-Rosene:** Well, there you go. One small change and you heard it from Jay himself. So thank you so much. I think that wraps up this episode of the Ecopolitics Podcast. But of course for those listeners out there, don't forget to check out the other episodes in the series at our website at [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). So thanks once again, Jay, and thanks to our audience for tuning in and we'll catch you next time. Hopefully Peter will join us for the whole show, but that sums things up. Thanks again.