

## Moken Guardians of the Sea: Safeguarding Oceans from Plastics with Local Fishermen Communities in Thailand

Since April 2019 the Swiss Foundation Jan & Oscar is running a plastic sorting facility with direct access to the sea in Ranong (South West Thailand), allowing fishermen to bring and sell plastic with their long tail boats directly at our pier. We focus our activity on six islands of the Andaman Sea, as well as in Ranong province. We target exclusively ocean-bound plastics defined as plastic found within 50km distance of an ocean coastline.

Our project named “Moken Guardians of the Sea” aims to reduce the amount of plastic waste entering the sea. We provide education for young students, employment and income opportunities for local precarious minorities, of which are the Moken, an ethnic group of semi-nomadic fishing people who live on several islands in the Andaman Sea.

In 2020 we partnered with Tide Ocean material (#tide), a Swiss company deriving from the Swiss watch industry. Together we are promoting the concept of a circular economy by turning plastic waste into granules and yarns, which are upcycled into bags, chairs or electronic devices. We also recently partnered with Caudalie Paris, a French skincare company, willing to compensate its plastic footprint.

### Photos/Visuals



March 2020, Some Moken from Surin islands, working as waste pickers for the project, are picking plastic and other waste on remote white sand beaches of their islands. Credits: Lena Bumiller-Klathale



March 2020, The chief of the Moken village of Surin islands is bringing plastic waste on the mainland with his boat. After 4 hours crossing, the long tailed boat arrived safely in the local harbor on the mainland in Kuraburi. Credits Lena Bumiller-Klathale



March 2020, Palinya Chansamout, a fisherman from Sinhai island, is bringing plastic waste at the pier of *Ranong Recycle for Environment* to sell it, "I've been picking plastic for six years. Before *Ranong Recycle for Environment* I made almost no profit on my sale because the purchase price of the plastic was too low: we have high transport costs." Credits: Jan & Oscar Foundation



January 2020, Burmese and Moken women working to sort the plastic waste at Ranong Recycle for Environment.  
Credits: Jan & Oscar Foundation



August 2019, Inauguration of the waste bank at Khao Niwet school in attendance of Dr. Michel Pardos, volunteer

project manager for Foundation Jan & Oscar, Mrs. Phranee Sophaphun, at the time director of Khao Niwet school and honored by Mr. Jirawach Charoennitiphokin, Mayor of Ranong Province.

Shifting the system to a circular economy involves everyone: NGOs, businesses, governments and individuals. We need to mobilise fishermen and local coastal communities. We collaborate with them by offering them training and a fair price for their plastics, including transportation costs.

“Ocean-bound plastic crosses 60km from the Surin Islands to the mainland. The boats are so full that one of the drivers steers the boat from the roof. Fortunately, the weather is good and the sea calm. The prices offered by *Ranong Recycle for Environment* are more than twice the local price, giving an incentive to Moken to collect plastics” say Lena and Hook Bumiller-Klathale, the Moken ambassadors of our project.

Since January 2020, we have collected around 74 000 kg of ocean-bound plastics (PET, HDPE, PP). The plastic is sorted at our facility by around 15 daily workers: young Moken girls from Lao island who are living at our centre and migrants of Myanmar. The sorted plastic is compressed into bales by the social enterprise’s team of 4 Thai and Burmese men.

“We provide employment with a fair wage and training in recycling. We also offer the workers the opportunity to take English lessons” says Capucine Paour, volunteer at the Foundation.

The enterprise has a vehicle to go and pick up plastics in the locality of Ranong, including Khao Niwet school where a waste bank was opened in August 2019 with the Foundation support. The young students of the school can thus bring recyclable materials from their home. We held a workshop last November with all the students. We are in the process of creating educational kits and a second workshop to sensitize them more to ocean pollution and recycling.

“To free the oceans from plastic trash means to sensitize. Plastic has a value. Let’s make recycling fun” says the former school director, Mrs. Phranee Sophaphun.

Dr. Michel Pardos, who develops this pilot study for the Foundation, expressed: “As the traditional plastic recycling market is not profitable under current conditions, the main challenge of this social project is to find a way to make it profitable and sustainable. Our goal was to find different stakeholders with a common interest, supporting a social and fair business approach. In our case, putting together Caudalie Paris, #Tide Ocean Material and the Jan & Oscar Foundation expertise is the perfect team!”

So far, the project is on track to deliver committed outputs and outcomes. But other questions have emerged which push us to pursue certain aspects further. The next steps are firstly to develop plastic reclaiming on the surrounding islands, spending more time to build community projects on the fieldwork. The second step would be to involve the young Moken working at the recycling centre in management tasks through training. We also want to implement strict procedures and controls to monitor the social enterprise activity in order to get B-corp and Zero Plastic Ocean certifications. This would allow us to further control the

social impact of the project, and to certify the social benefits and traceability of the plastic collected to our partners.

### **About Moken Guardians of the Sea**

Eight million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the oceans every year, and many countries lack effective collection and recycling systems. There is a strong need to develop local and sustainable solutions to address the problem in the long term. The “Moken Guardians of the Sea” project has been selected in 2019 as the winning project for Thailand by the International Union for Conservation of Nature for its Marine Plastic and Coastal Communities project (MARPLASTICCs), supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).