

Statement to Parliament on the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum and the 25th Anniversary of the Mabo Decision

Mr Speaker.

Yanggu gulanyin ngalawiri, dhunayi, Ngunawal dhawra. Wanggaralijinyin mariny bulan bugarabang.

I acknowledge we are on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Australians come from nearly 200 countries, of all faiths, all cultures and all backgrounds.

And yet in a world where conflict and intolerance seem more intractable than ever, we live together in peace and harmony in the midst of extraordinary diversity.

Our nation has a bright future and much to celebrate.

However, Mr Speaker, we know that we have not always treated our First Australians with the respect that they deserve.

Truth is the first step towards healing.

And this week we honour those milestones that helped our nation chart a course towards reconciliation and healing – the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, 25 years since the Mabo High Court decision, and 20 years since the Bringing Them Home report.

Fifty years ago, laws and regulations controlled where our First Australians could and couldn't move and what they could and couldn't do – lives limited, lives demeaned, lives diminished.

Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families and communities. We acknowledge that this removal separated children from their mothers and fathers, their families, their lands, their languages and cultures – cared for by their ancestors for over 50,000 years.

Indigenous Diggers, returned from war having defended our freedoms, our democracy and the rule of law, were denied the rights of citizenship for which they had so fiercely fought.

Fifty years ago our nation was given the opportunity to vote for change.

And, Mr Speaker, our nation did.

No member of this place authorised a 'no' case.

The Parliament and the community were united.

The Constitutional amendment was substantial, as it needed to be.

And the result defined our nation.

The 1967 Referendum had the highest 'Yes' vote of any Referendum before or since.

By working together as one, we voted as a nation to enable the Commonwealth to make laws relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for our First Australians, who had always been here, to finally be counted in the official population.

As the Indigenous rights campaigner, the late Chicka Dixon told his daughter Rhonda, who is here today, 'The government counted everything. They counted the cattle, the cars, the TVs, but they didn't count us. It's like we were invisible'.

A campaign badge said 'Vote Yes for Aborigines' and the Referendum was known as 'the Aboriginal question'. But this was a question about our Australian values, and the nation voted yes for Aborigines and for Australians.

And so the campaign was fought on the platform of rights and freedoms. Indigenous people wanted and demanded to enjoy the full and equal rights of the citizenship they had been granted years earlier.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in many parts of the country could still not freely attend public swimming pools, sit in the classroom at a public school without fear of exclusion, or have a drink with their mates at the local pub. And fundamentally our First Australians could not shape their own identity.

And that discrimination and exclusion diminished us all as Australians.

It did not reflect the sacrifices and the contribution our First Australians made to our nation, or indeed the humanity of all of us, all our fellow Australians.

90.77 per cent of people recognised this injustice and voted for change.

This renewed confidence inspired our first Indigenous Parliamentarian to join the Liberal Party—Neville Bonner who entered the Senate in 1971.

Pat Dodson, Malarndirri McCarthy and Jacqui Lambie serve in the Senate today as Neville Bonner did.

And Ken Wyatt was the first Aboriginal man to be elected to this House, and Linda Burney the first woman.

Ken, the Minister for Ageing and Indigenous Health is the first Indigenous Minister in a Commonwealth Government.

The 1967 Referendum provided the constitutional basis for our native title legislation and heritage protection.

And in response to the historic Mabo High Court case, which overturned the doctrine of terra nullius, the Parliament passed the Native Title Act in 1993.

Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights and interests in the land have been formally recognised in over 40 per cent of Australia's land mass.

The number of determinations under the Native Title Act now outweigh the number of claims currently registered.

The ownership and custodianship of the land has led to greater economic empowerment of communities across the country, the preservation of culture, and a network of Indigenous rangers who maintain our lands for our children and grandchildren.

And just as we could not foreshadow all the positive implications of these changes, great things can flow from amending the Constitution again.

We must not forget, Mr Speaker, that the road to the 1967 Referendum was neither short nor easy.

For more than 50 years before, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had fought to stop discrimination by governments.

There were many compromises along the way.

Building on the success of the '67 campaign, 50 years on, we now have the chance to take another step in our journey.

An important Indigenous designed and led discussion is occurring at Uluru today, as our nation considers further changes to the Constitution.

It is vitally important our First Australians consider and debate the models of recognition, free of political interference, and that the diversity of views and opinions within the Indigenous communities are discussed.

The next step in Constitutional recognition needs to be embraced by all Australians, but it needs first to be embraced by our First Australians if it is to be proposed at all.

I know I speak for the Leader of the Opposition when I say we both look forward to receiving the report from the Referendum Council.

The early campaigners who stood up for what was right, who fought to stop discrimination and whose contribution to the nation has been so remarkable should be recognised, remembered, well known.

As I was saying to some of you earlier this morning – you have written great bold chapters in our nation's history.

Campaigners like Worimi man Fred Maynard, who established Australia's first all-Aboriginal political organisation, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in New South Wales in the early 1920s. Fred wanted the right for Aboriginal people to determine their own lives, control their own land, and for the New South Wales Government to close the Aborigines Protection Board.

Campaigners like William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta man from Victoria, who tried to petition King George V seeking Aboriginal representation in the Australian Parliament. The then Government said 'no good purpose' would come of sending the petition, and they didn't – a glimpse of the political powerlessness experienced by Aboriginal people in those days. I acknowledge the presence in the House today of William Cooper's great-grandson Kevin Russell.

Jessie Street had an unwavering belief that the time was right to launch the campaign for the 1967 Referendum. Jessie said: "You can't get anywhere without a change in the Constitution and you can't get that without a referendum. You'll need a petition with 100,000 signatures. We'd better start on it at once". And together they did. We welcome Jessie's grandson, Andrew Mackay, and great grandson, Will Mackay, who are here today.

Joe McGinness brought state representative bodies together to speak with one respected voice to Government and the people of Australia. Joe is one of the great unsung leaders of our nation. Senator Pat Dodson has said that Joe was: "The inspiration to many...who have joined in the battle for justice. He has provided wisdom and advice, guidance and correction, humour and hope." We welcome his daughter Sandra McGinness, who is here with us today.

Sir Doug Nicholls was a founding member of the renamed Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, a coalition of church leaders, unionists and Indigenous activists.

Sir Doug's daughter Aunty Pam Pedersen and granddaughter Diana Travis—who were both in the campaign, Diana as a teenager—are also here today.

These are just some of the many people who brought wisdom and leadership to '67's cause.

So too did Jack and Jean Horner, Stan Davey, Shirley Andrews, Pearl Gibbs, Hannah and Emil Witton, whose daughter Heidi and granddaughter Keren Cox-Witton are with us today.

And, of course there was Faith Bandler who campaigned so hard—for 10 years—and who would help bring the Referendum home.

Faith's vision was clear—to see Aboriginal people as 'one people' with all Australians.

Hers was a message, not of assimilation, but of unity – of black people and white people working together, equally valued. Faith did not want to be singled out – in her view the Referendum outcome was the result of good

teamwork

We honour all those who stood together including those in the house with us today—Aunty Dulcie Flower, Aunty Shirley Peisley, Aunty Ruth Wallace, Uncle Bob Anderson, Uncle Gordon Briscoe, Dr Barrie Pittock and Uncle Alf Neal.

The Freedom Riders led by the young Charlie Perkins in 1965, brought racial discrimination into the minds of Australian households and appealed to a great Australian value – a fair go. Welcome Eileen Perkins, Charlie's wife, his son Adam and three grandsons.

And on the 3rd of June we will acknowledge a critical milestone in Indigenous land rights—the 25th anniversary of the historic Mabo High Court decision.

It was Eddie Mabo and the other plaintiffs, Father Dave Passi, Sam Passi, James Rice and Celuia Mapo Salee who's perseverance brought about the High Court of Australia's decision to recognise the native title rights of the Meriam people of the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait.

And they are all represented here today. I want to especially acknowledge the presence of Eddie Mabo's wife, Aunty Bonita and their daughter Gail.

Eddie Koiki Mabo was an advocate of the 1967 Referendum, fighting for equal rights including education. But despite the success of the '67 campaign, in 1972 Eddie Mabo still had to get permission from the Queensland authorities to visit his dying father on Mer Island. That permission was denied. Six weeks later his father died.

Gail wrote: "My father never forgave the government authorities for this injustice. It fuelled his determination for recognition and equality in society".

In 1982 the Mabo case began.

It was hard fought and it took its toll.

Eddie Koiki Mabo passed away on the 21st of January 1992, just months before the High Court recognised what he and his fellow plaintiffs had always known – that Mer Island belonged to the Meriam people and that Meriam customs, laws and cultures had existed for tens of thousands of years.

Mr Speaker, we were fortunate to have Eip Karem Beizam from Mer Island who performed a hymn in memory of that momentous time.

Thank you for your beautiful hymn, and for bringing the Meriam language into the parliament today.

Au Esau – thank you.

We have come a long way since the Referendum and the Mabo case, but we have not come far enough.

We have made gains in child health and infant mortality rates and in fighting

chronic disease. Native title holders are unlocking their lands for cultural protection and economic empowerment.

More Indigenous students are enrolling in university than ever before, and around two-thirds are women. For Indigenous university graduates, there are no employment gaps with the rest of the Australian population.

But the gains are not enough.

I want to ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are equally educated and equally empowered—that Australians are 'one people', as Faith Bandler and her fellow campaigners so desperately hoped and fought for.

That's why today, in furtherance of our programs and our policies and objectives we are announcing a \$138 million education package further to enable the economic and social inclusion for which the '67 campaigners fought.

As Sir Douglas Nicholls said: "All we want is to be able to think and do the same things as white people while still retaining our identity as a peoples".

For full inclusion in the economic and social life of the nation, we need our young Indigenous people to have a solid education, while keeping strong their identity.

Mr Speaker, today we reflect on the past and its impact on the present. We look forward with hope and optimism. We are joined today by 50 Indigenous Youth Parliamentarians who stand today on the shoulders of these giants.

I want to thank the '67 Referendum campaigners and thank the Mabo campaigners for the gift they gave our nation through their perseverance and dedication to their peoples and cultures.

And I thank all First Australians who preserve their ancient culture, work so hard to maintain and recover ancient languages.

Your culture defines who you are, it speaks to your country, your identity, your belonging.

And as we embrace in reconciliation your culture enriches us all.

For time out of mind, for more than 50,000 years your people and your culture have shaped and been shaped, cared for and been cared by, defined and been defined by this land, our land, Australia.

Your culture, our culture, is old and new, as dynamic as it is connected – on the highest tree top the new flower of the morning draws its being from deep and ancient roots.

Now it is up to us, together and united, to draw from the wisdom and the example of those we honour today and so inspired, bring new heights and brighter blooms to that tree of reconciliation which protects and enriches us all.

[ENDS]

Longquan celadon brings spirit of Silk Road to life

An emcee displays pieces of Longquan celadon at a press conference held in Beijing on May 23. [Photo by Li Kang/China.org.cn]

Under the theme of “Chinese celadon rekindles world attention” a press conference on the celadon items used at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation earlier in the month was held in Beijing on May 23, attracting more than 100 attendees.

The organizing committee of the China Green Industry Exposition took the opportunity to sign an agreement with Quzhou Kiln Research Institute on the selection of Longquan celadon as exhibits for a fine artworks hall.

Another agreement was signed between Green China Internet TV (GCITV) center and Longquan Banxian Hall Cultural Development Corporation to designate it as the online trading platform for celadon.

Emcees display pieces of Longquan celadon at a press conference held in Beijing on May 23. [Photo by Li Kang/China.org.cn]

Longquan celadon is a kind of green-glazed Chinese ceramic produced in kilns largely located in Lishui City in Zhejiang Province in the southeast of China. The firing techniques of Longquan celadon joined the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in 2009.

Longquan celadon has a history spanning more than 1,000 years, being shipped to the outside world through the ancient overland and maritime “silk roads.” The ceramics epitomize Chinese culture and bring the spirit of the ancient Silk Road to modern life.

Longquan celadon was used as designated wares at the APEC summit in 2014, the G20 Hangzhou summit in 2016 and the Belt and Road Forum in 2017, becoming a “living fossil” for multicultural exchanges along the Belt and Road.

An emcee displays pieces of Longquan celadon at a press conference held in Beijing on May 23. [Photo by Li Kang/China.org.cn]

Tang Wei, the founder of Quzhou Kiln Research Institute, said the craftsmen in Banxian Hall made topnotch porcelain utensils in the spirit of craftsmanship to ensure Longquan celadon was well qualified as wares to be used at the Belt and Road Forum.

“Longquan celadon is a product embodying the wisdom of Chinese people,” said Zhang Shouzhi, a professor of the Academy of Arts & Design of Tsinghua University.

The conference also exhibited a host of original celadon pieces to demonstrate the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative through unique charm of traditional Chinese culture.

An emcee displays pieces of Longquan celadon at a press conference held in Beijing on May 23. [Photo by Li Kang/China.org.cn]

[Press conference following the 2nd meeting of the Libya Quartet](#)

Brussels, 23 May 2017

Check against delivery!

First of all, it was an honour and a pleasure for me to be able to host the second Quartet meeting. We had a very fruitful first meeting in Cairo few months ago, on the 18th of March, and we used this opportunity today to assess developments in Libya since our last meeting and coordinate our work to advance the political process and assist Libya in its democratic transition.

I will present to you the main results of our Joint Communiqué being sure that you will have the full text immediately after our press conference and then I will leave to my friends and colleagues to reply to most of your questions. Since we have exchanged for several hours today on common positions, each of us can easily speak on the name of the others.

Today we committed again to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya and its institutions under the Libyan Political Agreement. We underscored the urgent need for a Libyan-led peaceful resolution of the political crisis and reiterated our rejection of the threat or use of armed forces by any Libyan party.

We strongly condemned the unprovoked attack on Brak al-Shati last week and all acts of violence. We called on all parties to refrain from further violence and any act that may undermine ongoing work to find a negotiated solution to the conflict.

We reiterated the importance we attach on consolidating stability and security along Libya’s borders. We commended the efforts by the Constitutional Drafting Assembly to finalise a draft constitution to be concluded as soon as possible and pave the way to general and presidential elections.

We encouraged all Libyan parties to engage in constructive and inclusive talks – and I will stress the word “inclusive”. We underlined during our talks today the importance of having inclusiveness at the core of this political process.

We welcomed all efforts and encouraging progress resulting from recent meetings between Libyan stakeholders and in particular between Prime Minister [of the Government of National Accord and Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya, Fayez] al-Sarraj and Field Marshal [Khalifa] Haftar in Abu Dhabi in May and between the President of the House of Representatives, Agila Saleh and the President of the High State Council, [Abdulrahman] Sewehli in Rome in April this year.

We welcomed the appointment of dialogue committees by both the House of Representatives and the High State Council and urged them to seek consensus on outstanding issues to ensure the full implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement.

We expressed our appreciation for ongoing regional efforts to support the Libyan political process, in particular the meeting of Libya’s Neighbours held in Algiers this May.

We expressed our concern about the economic situation in Libya, underlined the need for the Libyan authorities to tackle the serious and urgent fiscal and monetary challenges facing the country and we reiterated our support to the coordination role of the United Nations and encouraged the United Nations to take the lead in any effort to facilitate a limited amendment of the Libyan Political Agreement.

We exchanged in-depth about the future steps to be taken, in particular we decided that our teams will continue to work closely together on a daily basis as they have done so far. But as I told you we exchanged information, analysis, decisions on the next steps to accompany a Libyan process that will see our four organisations committed to do it in the most coordinated, united and effective manner.

We also discussed that the venue of our next meeting will be Addis Abeba, hosted by the African Union. But obviously we will take every opportunity to meet if there will be the need to do so at any earliest convenience. Our contacts and our coordination will continue to be essential for the coordination of the efforts and the work of all our Member States. Together, we can really send to all the Libyans a message of unity that can hopefully – Inch’Allah – encourage their own unity.

Thank you.

Q&A:

Q. A question to you four mainly. Mme Mogherini, the European Union is supporting Mr [Fayez al-] Sarraj government as many, as the international community, but Mr [Fayez al-] Sarraj government, or part of it, or his allies in Misrata are responsible for the military attack in the South of Libya. If there is no external military intervention in this country, is it possible to

imagine that you, as international community representatives, can take action against those militia who are responsible of putting in danger the whole political process? And I have another question, if the Arab League, the African Union, the European Union, can do something for those who are suffering in the migration camps inside Libya? And there are enough sad reports about that.

I will maybe take the last part of your question and leave the first part to my colleagues and friends.

We discussed about this at length and we agreed on the fact that it is useful for us to clarify completely that the support we give to the legitimate institutions in Tripoli and to [Fayez al-] Sarraj is not something that comes from the UN or from the EU, but from all the four of us together. It is the entire community that works with the legitimate Libyan institutions in the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement with a view of ensuring the inclusiveness of the process and the need for different parties of the country and different stakeholders to come together. And as I said, we welcomed very much the recent meetings that took place in this direction and we will encourage further steps in this direction. But maybe on this Martin Kobler can elaborate more.

On the presence of the migrants inside Libya and in particular in the detention centres, I can tell you about the work that the European Union is doing with the International Organisation for Migrations [IOM] and the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]. I met the IOM Director [General, William Lacy] Swing just the day before yesterday in Jordan. We are supporting the presence and the work of the IOM inside Libya with a very substantial financial package so that the IOM can operate inside the detention centres – guaranteeing living conditions, human rights standards at international level inside the camps in Libya. We often talk with the Libyan authorities at different levels to encourage their cooperation with the IOM and the work that the IOM is doing, is trying to do and is trying to increase inside Libya, is for us another way of saving lives. This has to be done at sea, as we are doing with our Operation Sophia. This has to be done in the desert, in particular in Niger where people and lives have to be saved before they enter Libya. But this has to be done also inside Libya and we see the IOM and the UNHCR as the key actors to guarantee the rights of the migrants, protect their lives, and also – as it is happening already – assist them if they wish to return in their countries of origin. Since the beginning of the year, the IOM, with our assistance, has already organised more returns from Libya to the countries of origin than in the entire last year. It is still not enough but the European Union and the IOM are working to try to solve this – especially for humanitarian reasons.

Q. I wanted to go back to the relationship between Prime Minister [Fayez al-] Sarraj and General [Khalifa] Haftar. Before, especially from the EU, the message was about supporting the UN recognised government. Today, Mme Mogherini, you are talking more and more about inclusiveness. Do you think we are coming to a point where politically the moment to miss building up to give General [Khalifa] Haftar a bigger role or maybe a role at part where [Fayez al-] Sarraj or any new unity – the unity government that could emerge

in Libya? Before we were more expecting him to become the Defence Minister under [Fayez al-] Sarraj. He clearly thinks he can do better or have a more prominent role. So, do you think we are in a place of political messaging changing from the outside?

On our side we have always talked about inclusiveness; we have always recognized that the Libyan Political Agreement is the framework and the legitimacy of the Libyan authorities derives from that agreement including the legitimacy of the House of Representatives – that does not recognise necessarily the legitimacy of other institutions deriving from that same agreement.

This to say that it is not for us as European Union – or I believe any of us – to determine who does what in Libya, but we are united in saying that Libya has to find an institutional setting with a legitimate basis that can allow also the international organisations and institutions to relate with the country's authorities and support the Libyan people in difficult circumstances. First of all, the fight against terrorism – let's not forget it. As Martin was saying, Libya is a rich country, Libya is a country that can easily find its own way by itself but is also facing some challenges.

Our only purpose is to accompany the Libyans along this road and to make sure that no one lives with the illusion that one side can win against the other. We have always united our voices in saying that Libya needs all Libyans and that the unity of Libya – East, South, West, different parts of the country – can together overcome the current challenges the country is facing and offer to the Libyan population a peace perspective better than the past years they have experienced.

It is not up to us to determine who does what, it is up to the Libyans to agree in which way they will share responsibilities in the framework of the legitimate internationally recognised Libyan Political Agreement with – as Martin [Kobler] said – eventual amendments to be decided among the Libyan parties.

This is the only thing we care about and you will find unity among us and unity as far as I see also among the neighbouring countries on the need for the different Libyan stakeholders to come together within the international framework that is recognised.

And this is why our joint messaging in this respect is so important because, really, the fact of us being together in passing this message of unity, our encouragement – encouragement, I would like to underline this – towards an inclusive dialogue, a constructive dialogue, we hope can really strengthen the actors that are in this moment signalling readiness to engage.

Q. I have something else for Mme Mogherini, it has nothing to do with Libya but with what happened last night in Manchester United. Are you going to take some strong actions to save your citizens since it looks like this type of attack is increasing more and more in a lot of European countries?

I will say a few words on the attack in Manchester if you allow me. This is a very sad day for Europe and for all of us. I would like to take the

opportunity also to thank our friends from the African Union, from the Arab League, from the UN for the solidarity and the condolences expressed today.

For all of us, rightly so, because we are together in this, in the suffering and in the reaction. In Europe, in the Arab world, in Africa, elsewhere in the world, terrorists attack a way of living, a way of seeing life. In this particular case, it was particularly dramatic, the fact that it was hitting a concert where teenagers or pre-teenagers were celebrating joy and their love for life. And this should stay as the main guiding value of our youth, both in the European continent but also in the Arab world, in Africa, elsewhere where the love for life should stay the core of our way of seeing and living.

On the concrete response we have put in place. I was in contact this morning with Boris Johnson [Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United-Kingdom] not only expressing solidarity but also offering all the European Union support on whatever will be considered useful and needed from the UK authorities. We have put at their disposal all our counterterrorism knowledge and competences and networks, including the external one.

I know that Commissioner King who is responsible for security in the European Commission is obviously looking at the best possible ways to coordinate our support. These are the first hours and the focus is mainly on the suffering and the thoughts to all the families and all the loved ones of those who lost their lives but also all the ones who were injured. But, the work has started immediately to offer to the UK authorities that are responsible for the investigations obviously and for the security of their citizens on their ground, to offer them all possible support and cooperation. We are united in this and all the EU instruments are at the disposal of the UK, in all ways that can be useful, and we will continue this work in the next hours.

Link to the video:

<https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I138934>

Investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The Turnbull Government will invest an additional \$138 million to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The 1967 Referendum 50th Anniversary Indigenous Education Package will support First Australians through their education and into employment.

The announcement today honours the spirit and determination of those who

campaigned for the successful 1967 referendum, and will further enable the social and economic inclusion for which they fought.

The referendum, one of Australia's greatest acts of reconciliation to date, enabled the Commonwealth to make laws relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for our First Australians, who had always been here, to finally be counted in the official population.

A key component of the Education Package is a \$25 million fund to leverage partnerships between governments, businesses, industry and philanthropic organisations to offer scholarships to First Australians to study Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

The fund will support the development of a STEM academy for girls to inspire a future generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women into STEM jobs.

The Indigenous education package offers the same level of assistance to girls and boys and builds on the Government's significant investment in Indigenous education through mentoring, scholarships and school-based academies.

A summary of the education package is available [here](#).

[Inspections of imported waste to rise](#)



Border patrol officers handle parcels of used clothes that were smuggled from Hong Kong to the Chinese mainland in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, in June last year. [File Photo/China Daily]

Legislators have vowed to increase supervision of government departments in charge of handling imported solid waste, aiming to protect the environment and ensure public health.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress will conduct inspections to ensure that the law on the prevention of solid waste pollution is being enforced.

The inspections, led by Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, will be conducted in 10 areas, including Tianjin, Jiangsu Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The inspections will last until the end of July, the committee said.

It is the first enforcement inspection since 2005, when the revised law took effect.

"Our aim is to protect the environment by rule of law, hoping supervision and inspections can be effective in ensuring residents' health and improving ecological safety," Zhang said on Monday.

“We’ll urge government departments to enforce the law, and find areas where the law needs to be improved.”

The country has drawn up a list of 66 kinds of solid waste that can be imported, including paper and plastics, to satisfy the nation’s need for raw materials for economic development, “but problems brought by illegal imports are still serious”, said Chen Jining, minister of environmental protection.

Since 2013, more than 400 cases relating to smuggling of imported solid waste have been filed at Chinese customs and nearly 800 suspects have been detained, a statement from the legislature said.

In April, for example, Shenzhen Customs in Guangdong province seized more than 1,000 metric tons of imported industrial waste in 38 containers. The goods from the Middle East were prohibited from import under the law, and smugglers attempted to transport the waste into the country as synthetic graphite.

“Some imported solid waste doesn’t meet our environmental standards, while some enterprises import banned waste by hiding it or making false reports to governments,” Chen said.

He confirmed that a few areas for recycling and reusing waste become “trafficking destinations” for imported solid waste. A campaign led by the ministry against illegally imported waste began in March.

“In addition, we’re trying to reduce the quantities and categories of imported solid waste, further reforming management in the industry,” he added.

Liu Jianguo, a professor at Tsinghua University’s School of Environment, said the utilization of solid waste comes with a higher cost to the economy and environmental protection than natural resources, warning that some recycling projects harm human health and pollute the environment.

Solid waste can have high levels of pollutants, while the reusable resources are of low quality, he was quoted as saying by Xinhua News Agency. He said there should be clear and stricter controls on the recycling of solid waste.