



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2017/0073, 2 March 2017

Proposed ban on microbeads

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This House of Commons Library debate pack has been produced ahead of the debate on the proposed ban on microbeads.

The debate will be held in Westminster Hall at 2.30-4pm on Wednesday 8 March 2017.

The Member in charge is Rebecca Pow MP.

Debate packs are intended to provide useful information for Members, including press and parliamentary material, on issues relating to the debate.

House of Commons Library Briefing Paper:

[Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products](#)

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

David Hirst
Jacqueline Baker

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Background

In December 2016, the [Government published a consultation](#) on proposals to ban the manufacture and sale of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads in all of the UK by October 2017. The consultation closed on 28 February 2017.

What are microbeads and microplastics?

Microbeads and other microplastics are used in a variety of cosmetic and personal care products such as scrubs, soaps, lotions and toothpastes. They are added to these products for a number of purposes, such as to make the product more abrasive or for decoration.

These particles of plastic can enter the environment when consumers rinse them down the drain. The plastic can then subsequently be released into rivers and the sea with waste water outflows.

The scale of the issue: marine microplastic pollution

Microplastic debris in marine environments is growing in volume. It comes from a number of sources, such as the breakdown of larger pieces of plastic over time and industrial scrubbers used to blast-clean surfaces.

Microbeads and other microplastics from cosmetics make up a small proportion of. Studies have calculated that 0.1% to 4.1% of marine microplastic pollution in Europe was from cosmetic product sources. 4.1% equates to between 2,400-8,600 tonnes of plastic entering the marine environment per year.

Impacts of microplastics

Microplastics are likely to have environmental impacts. Studies have shown they can be ingested by marine animals leading to physical harm and reproductive or toxic effects.

There is evidence to suggest that microplastics are entering the human food chain. On the basis of current evidence microplastics in seafood are not currently thought to represent a human health risk, although uncertainties remain. The Government has said that the Chief Medical Officer will review their impact on human health.

Cosmetic microplastic ban

A number of companies are voluntarily phasing out some types of microplastic in cosmetic products in the EU. The voluntary measures taken by industry could reduce cosmetic microplastic use by almost 50% by 2020.

In the USA a ban on microbeads in cosmetic and personal care products will be phased in over the next few years. There have been calls for a similar ban in the UK and EU to address what is perceived to be an unnecessary source of microplastic pollution.

In September 2016, the UK Government committed to banning the manufacture and sale of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads in all of the UK by October 2017. In December 2016, the Government published a consultation document, which closes on 28 February 2017.

News of the Government's proposed ban was welcomed by the Marine Conservation Society. However, some in the industry question the proportionality of a ban given the success of voluntary efforts and the relatively small contribution that cosmetic products make to marine pollution. A recent research report commissioned by the European Union recommended that more information be collected to help determine whether a ban is required or whether the industry is responding adequately to the issue.

For further information on the use of microplastics and microbeads and plans to ban their use in the UK, please see the Library, [*Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products*](#).

1. Parliamentary material

1.1 Parliamentary questions

[DEFRA: Topical Questions Microbeads](#)

02 March 2017

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con)

What steps she is taking to deal with the effects of microbeads in products not included within the scope of her Department's proposed ban. [908998]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey)

We ran a consultation between 20 December and 28 February on proposals to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. The consultation also sought evidence on the extent of the environmental impact of microplastics found in other products. We are now reviewing the responses to the consultation and any new evidence will be used to inform future UK actions to protect the marine environment.

Questions on microbeads continued:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-02/debates/FE31CA3C-70C9-496B-B5B5-8960FCD508B6/Microbeads>

[Prime Minister's Question Time](#) extract

1 March 2017

CH Vol 622 col297-98

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) Conservative Party

Shower gel products containing microbeads can result in 100,000 microbeads or microplastics being washed down the drain every time we use them—into the water system, and then into the marine environment, damaging these precious habitats. Would the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the steps this Government are taking to introduce a ban on microbeads used in cosmetics and personal care products, with the consultation ending just a few days ago?

The Prime Minister

[...]My hon. Friend has raised a very important point. It is completely unnecessary to add plastics to products like face washes and body scrub, where harmless alternatives can be used. As she said at the end of her question, our consultation to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products closed recently. We are aiming to change legislation by October 2017, and we also ask for evidence of what more can be done in future to prevent other sources of plastic from entering the marine environment, because we are committed to being the first generation ever to leave the environment in a better state than when it

was inherited. I am sure that, together, we can all work to bring an end to these harmful plastics clogging up our oceans.

[Topical Questions](#) microbeads

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) Conservative Party

Following the success of the charge for plastic bags in reducing the amount of plastic going into our seas, and the welcome announcement on limiting the use of microbeads, the next big issue we need to address is single-use plastic bottles. Can the Secretary of State update the House on what plans she has to cut the number of plastic bottles polluting our seas and beaches?

Dr Coffey | Conservative Party | **Department:** Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

My hon. Friend is right to point out that the consultation on microbeads is out there. It contains a call for wider evidence on the need to tackle other plastics. We are developing a new litter strategy, which may well address this issue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is personally interested in the matter and intends to set up an innovation fund that may explore new ideas to tackle it.

19 Jan 2017 | Topical questions - 1st Supplementary | House of Commons chamber | 619 c1058

[Microplastics](#)

Anne Marie Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies on the planned ban of microbeads.

Dr Thérèse Coffey | **Department:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs We are currently running a consultation on our proposals to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products in preparation for the consultation which Defra carried out an assessment on the impacts of a ban. This concluded that a ban of this kind would help improve the state of the marine environment and address public concerns relating to consumer confidence in UK cosmetics. The impact on industry was considered to be low given that many companies had already committed to discontinuing their use.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65429

[Microplastics](#)

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether officials from her Department have met officials from the World Health Organisation to discuss a ban on the use of microbead products.

Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra has not met with the World Health Organisation to discuss microplastics.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65358

[Microplastics: USA](#)

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether officials from her Department met counterparts from the Environmental Protection Agency in the US to discuss that country's ban on the production of personal care products and cosmetics which contain plastic microbeads.

Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra officials have been in discussions with the US Food & Drug Administration to help develop aspects of the UK approach on which we are currently consulting.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65353

[Microplastics: USA](#)

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if her Department will monitor the effectiveness of the US ban on microbeads which is due to come into effect in July 2017.

Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Yes.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65352

[Microplastics](#)

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if her Department will conduct an assessment of the potential biological effects of microbead products including those not in her Department's proposed ban.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65332

Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra funded a study on micro plastics that was published last year and which has contributed to our knowledge base in formulating the consultation.

[Microplastics: USA](#)

Sarah Olney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the decision to ban microbeads by the US.

Answered by: Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The US ban has not yet come into force but we will continue to monitor its progress

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 65314

[Marine Environment: Microplastics](#)

Sarah Olney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of the effect of microbeads used in industrial processes on marine wildlife.

28 Feb 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 65312

Answered by: Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Our consultation on banning the use of microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products asks for evidence on the extent of the environmental impacts of microplastics, including microbeads, found in other products and processes. This includes whether microbeads are used in industrial processes and whether they end up in the marine environment. If they do we will use this information to inform future UK actions to protect the marine environment.

[Microplastics](#)

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate she has made of the total reduction in the mass of microbeads released into the environment in the UK as a consequence of the forthcoming ban on microbeads in household products.

Dr Thérèse Coffey | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The proposals set out in the current consultation are for a ban on the use of microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products that cause harm to the marine environment. Microbeads from these products are estimated to make up between 0.01% and 4.1% of the total of microplastics entering the marine environment. The estimated use of microbeads associated with skin cleansing products in the UK alone is 680 tonnes per year^[1]. Our proposals will ensure that these microbeads and those contained in other cosmetics and personal care products no longer enter the marine environment.

[1] T Gouin *et al*, *SOFW-Journal*, 2015, **141** (3), 40 (bit.ly/2fTx5xs, pdf)

27 Feb 2017 | Written questions | | House of Commons | 65236

[Microplastics: Seas and Oceans](#)

Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the food chain of microplastics in the sea.

Answered by: Nicola Blackwood | Department of Health

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has been monitoring the scientific evidence concerning the occurrence and effects of microplastics in seafood. On the basis of current information, the FSA considers it is unlikely that the presence of the low levels of microplastic particles that have been reported to occur in certain types of seafood would cause harm to consumers. The FSA will continue to monitor and assess emerging information concerning microplastics in food.

01 Feb 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 61296

1.2 Early Day Motion 1202

[BAN ON MICROBEADS](#)

That this House notes with concern the biological and toxicological harm caused by microbeads, tiny plastic particles used as exfoliating agents in a variety of cosmetic products such as scrubs, soaps and toothpaste; further notes that in the US a ban on microbeads in cosmetic and personal care products will be in place by April 2017; considers the Government's plan to work with the cosmetics industry towards a voluntary phase-out by 2020 to be inadequate given that non-plastic, environmentally-friendly alternatives to microbeads are readily available now; and calls on the Government to follow the example of the US administration, and work with EU partners to introduce an EU-wide ban without delay.

07 Mar 2016 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1202 (session 2015-16)

Primary sponsor: Lucas, Caroline | Green Party

Other sponsors: Durkan, Mark · Ritchie, Margaret · Debonnaire, Thangam · McDonald, Stuart · Saville Roberts, Liz

Number of signatures: 84

1.3 Ministerial Statements

[Environment Council](#) (June) (including call for EU action on microbeads):

Council Conclusions on Closing the Loop: Circular Economy

The Council adopted by consensus Conclusions which responded to the Commission Communication on an EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy. The UK welcomed the conclusions and, in particular, the call

for EU action on microbeads which was supported by several other Member States.

Rory Stewart

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

07 Jul 2016 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS68

1.4 Environmental Audit Select Committee

Environmental impact of microplastics inquiry – evidence taken on microplastics and report.

[Environmental impact of microplastics](#)

29 Jun 2016 | Parliamentary committees - House of Commons papers - Select Committee oral evidence | HC 179 2016-17

3. DEFRA

3.1 Consultation

Proposals to ban the use of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products in the UK and call for evidence on other sources of microplastics entering the marine environment.

Consultation closed and feedback being analysed.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/microbead-ban-proposals/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-the-use-of-microbeads-in-cosmetics-and-personal-care-products>

Overview

Defra, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland are seeking views on the UK's proposed ban on the use of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on our proposals to ban the manufacture and sale of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads which may harm the marine environment. The consultation also seeks to gather evidence on the extent of the environmental impacts of further sources of potential marine plastic pollution, to inform future UK actions to protect the marine environment.

The Environmental Audit Committee recently undertook an inquiry on the environmental impact of microplastics in the marine environment. Its report included a number of recommendations for the UK Government to address key sources of microplastic pollution.

Microbeads (small particles of plastic) are a common ingredient in many cosmetics and personal care products such as face scrubs and toothpastes, and may be used in other products and processes including industrial blasting where abrasive materials are propelled under high pressure to remove surface deposits such as paint. They are washed down the drain but are too small to be completely filtered out in sewage treatment systems so a proportion is washed out into the marine environment.

Government action will create a level playing field for industry, tackle inconsistency, provide consumer confidence and stop new products containing tiny pieces of plastic ending up in the marine environment. This will contribute to the UK government and devolved administrations' vision of "clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas" as set out in the UK Marine Policy Statement.

The consultation should be of particular interest to businesses involved in the manufacture and sale of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads, their trade associations/bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned about the status of the marine environment.

DEFRA News

3 September 2016

Government announces plans to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products

[Microbead ban announced to protect sealife](#)

2. News Items

Daily Telegraph

One shower releases 100,000 microbeads into the ocean, MPs warn

24 August 2016

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/23/one-shower-releases-100000-microbeads-into-the-ocean-mps-warn-as/>

BBC News

Plastic microbeads to be banned by 2017, UK government pledges

3 September 2016

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37263087>

Independent

Ban on harmful microbeads could be in breach of EU free trade law, government warned

7 January 2017

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/ban-harmful-microbeads-microplastics-could-be-breach-eu-free-trade-law-government-environment-a7514716.html>

Guardian

From sea to plate: how plastic got into our fish

14 February 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/feb/14/sea-to-plate-plastic-got-into-fish>

3. Press releases

DEFRA Press release

20 December 2016

[Government sets out next steps to ban microbeads](#)

Government announces consultation to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products.

Institute for European Environmental Policy

Tackling marine litter with the circular economy and the EU Plastics Strategy

24 October 2016

<http://www.ieep.eu/work-areas/water-marine-and-fisheries/2016/10/tackling-marine-litter-with-the-circular-economy-and-the-eu-plastics-strategy>

Ban on microbeads Scottish Government

Response to UK announcement on use of microbeads in cosmetics

21 December 2016

<http://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Ban+on+microbeads+21122016080500?open>

It's 'make or break time for the microbeads ban', say campaigners

Greenpeace

28 February 2017

<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/press-releases/it%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98make-or-break-time-microbeads-ban%E2%80%99-say-campaigners-20170228>

Waitrose to be first supermarket to announce cut in plastics in key beauty products

http://waitrose.pressarea.com/pressrelease/details/78/NEWS_13/6496

13 July 2016

4. Further reading and useful links

House of Commons Library Briefing

[Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products](#)

04 Jan 2017 | Commons Briefing papers | CBP-7510

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology POST Notes

[Marine Microplastic Pollution](#) 05 Jun 2016 | POSTnotes 0528

[Trends in the Environment](#) 05 Jan 2016 | POSTnotes 0516

Environmental Audit Select Committee

[Environmental impact of microplastics](#) - inquiry 2016

Environmental Audit Select Committee Report and Government Response.

EU Action Plan for Circular Economy

Circular Economy Strategy

Implementation of the Circular Economy Action Plan

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm

Plastic pollution in our oceans: what we know, what we don't and what we can do

Inside Track -Blog on environmental policy and politics, hosted by Green Alliance

15 August 2016

<https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/?s=microbeads+>

Rethinking the Future of Plastics

21 January 2016

Ellen Macarthur Foundation

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/EllenMac>

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