



DEBATE PACK

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Government policy on reducing plastic waste in the maritime environment

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Summary

This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Wednesday 2 May 2018 from 2.30 – 4pm. The Member opening the debate is Mr Alistair Carmichael.

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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.

1. Summary

The scale of the marine plastic problem

A [study published in Science in 2015](#) estimated that around 8 million tonnes of plastic is released into the ocean each year. There is some uncertainty around this estimate: authors report that the figure is likely to be between 4.8 and 12.7 million tonnes. The [UN Environment Programme](#) has estimated that plastics make up as much as 95 percent of the marine litter found on coastlines, sea surface, and the ocean floor.

Recent Government policies and initiatives

Over recent years several UK Government policies have been put forward to address problems with plastic waste. A four point plan to reduce levels of plastic waste was set out in the Government's January 2018 publication [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#). The UK and devolved Governments have each introduced plastic bag charges to reduce the number of carrier bags in circulation.

Forthcoming initiatives for deposit return schemes for drinks containers, including plastic bottles, have been confirmed by the UK and Scottish Governments, subject to future consultation. The Welsh Government is also reported to be considering such a scheme.

Most recently, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in April 2018 the [Government announced](#) its intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England. The Welsh Government has indicated that it would be interested in collaborating on the ban. On 27 April 2018 the Scottish Government published a consultation on [a proposal to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stemmed cotton buds in Scotland](#).

European Strategy for plastics in a circular economy

As part of its work towards moving towards a circular economy, (where the value of resources are maintained for as long as possible), a [European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy](#) was adopted by the European Commission on 16 January 2018. The aim of the strategy is that "all plastic packaging on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030, the consumption of single-use plastics will be reduced and the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted." The Commission is [expected](#) to present a formal proposal on single-use plastics later in 2018. The implications of this for the UK will depend on the speed at which the Circular Economy Package progresses through the European institutions and the outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

UN resolution on marine litter and microplastics

In December 2017 the UK was one of the 193 UN member states to sign a resolution, [Marine Litter and Microplastics](#) (UNEP/EA.3/Res.7), at the United Nations Environment Assembly to help reduce the amount of

plastic in the world's seas. Under the agreement, an international taskforce will advise how to combat marine litter.

The UK “plastic pact”

On 26 April 2018 a number of UK supermarkets, food companies and plastics industry members launched a new voluntary pledge, a “plastic pact” to cut plastic packaging. It includes an aspiration that by 2025 all plastic packaging can be reused, recycled or composted. Information about the pact and who has signed it is available from the [WRAP website](#). There has been some criticism of the pact in the press that it is a voluntary measure, with no enforcement mechanisms.¹

Stakeholder views on plastics policies

The Government’s policies to reduce plastic waste have been broadly welcomed. For example, the coalition of 31 organisations represented by Wildlife and Countryside Link welcomed the 25 Year Environment Plan commitments on waste reduction and single-use plastics.² The Campaign to Protect Rural England welcomed the proposal to introduce a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, saying that it was “thrilled” and that it would set “a strong precedent for other schemes where the polluter pays.”³

There has been some criticism however, particularly in respect of the timing of when these policies would be introduced. The charity the [Marine Conservation Society](#) commented on the marine plastic approach set out in the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, calling it “not sufficient”, and said it was disappointed by “the lack of commitment to take action now to address existing problems.”

The [Environmental Audit Committee](#) expressed concern in its 2017 report that the Government will miss the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”, by 2025. The Committee recommended that a timeline should be established for publishing more accurate data on marine litter.

The industry body, the [British Plastics Federation](#), states that any ban of plastic products will not solve the problem of reducing marine litter.⁴ It believes that the Government needs to increase recycling rates in the UK that further investment should be made in recycling infrastructure.

¹ See for example, “UK supermarkets launch voluntary pledge to cut plastic packaging” [The Guardian](#), 26 April 2018

² Wildlife and Countryside Link press release, [Environment charities welcome 25 Year Environment Plan, but an Environment Act needs to secure its success](#), 11 January 2018

³ “Drinks bottles and can deposit return scheme proposed” [BBC News](#), 28 March 2018

⁴ British Plastics Federation website, [Marine Litter](#) [downloaded on 30 April 2018]

1.1 Statistics on marine plastic waste

Plastic in the ocean

A [study published in Science in 2015](#) estimated that around 8 million tonnes of plastic is released into the ocean each year. There is some uncertainty around this estimate: authors report that the figure is likely to be between 4.8 and 12.7 million tonnes.⁵

The BBC [reported on the study in 2017](#) and published a map, available online, showing which nations contribute the most plastic waste. The map also shows the location of gyres: areas of the ocean with circular currents that trap floating debris. The study estimated that Asian countries including China, Indonesia and the Philippines are some of the biggest contributors.

Beach and marine litter

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) carries out an annual '[Great British Beach Clean](#)' and reports on the amount of litter found.

The MCS reports finding an average of 718 litter items per 100 metres (m) on beaches across the UK in 2017, an increase of 10% compared to 2016. The report also categorises and ranks the types of items found. Many of the ten most common types of item contain plastic:

- Plastic / polystyrene pieces (225.3 per 100 m)
- Packets (42.3 per 100m)
- Glass (40.4 per 100m)
- Cigarette stubs (32.9 per 100m)
- Caps and lids (32.9 per 100m)
- String / cord (31 per 100m)
- Wet wipes (27.4 per 100m)
- Cotton bud sticks (26.9 per 100m)
- Fishing line (18 per 100m)
- Cutlery / trays / straws (15.1 per 100m)

The European Environment Agency (EEA) runs Marine LitterWatch, an app that lets volunteer groups record the results of beach clean-up and monitoring events across Europe. The EEA publish a [results summary on its website](#), which shows the distribution of types of litter found across Europe and on specific beaches in the UK and other EU countries. 81% of materials found across all these events were plastic. Figures on the site should be treated with caution as there is no quality control after members of the public enter data into the database.

[Litterbase](#) is a website that brings together findings from scientific studies on marine litter. It includes a chart summarising [different types of marine litter](#), and states that plastic accounts for 60-85% of litter in most parts of the ocean.

⁵ Jambeck et al (2015), *Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean*. Science 347 (6223), 768-771

The UN Environment Programme has estimated that plastics make up as much as 95 percent of the marine litter found on coastlines, sea surface, and the ocean floor.⁶

Effects on marine life

Plastic and other forms of litter can be harmful to marine life. The main threats come from marine creature becoming entangled in litter or ingesting it. A [review of the literature](#) from Plymouth University⁷ found that:

- Plastic accounted for 92% of encounters between litter and marine life reported in the literature.
- At least 17% of species threatened by entanglement or ingestion of marine litter were listed as threatened or near-threatened species.

The durability of plastic poses a particular problem. When littered, it can last centuries in the natural environment, where wildlife can become entangled in plastic or ingest small pieces of it.⁸ Plastics can eventually degrade into micro-plastics, which enter the food chain. A recent Government press release stated that there are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and that every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.⁹

1.2 Government policies

Proposed ban on single use plastic

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in April 2018 the Government announced its intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England.¹⁰ The Government has said that in order to eliminate these items from use, it will work with industry to develop alternatives and to ensure there is sufficient time to adapt. Proposals about how the ban of these products might work in practice are expected to be put forward for consultation later this year.¹¹

A BBC News article following this announcement reported that the Welsh Government said it would "welcome collaboration with the UK government" on the idea.¹²

⁶ UN Environment Programme, [Marine Litter Legislation: A Toolkit for Policymakers](#), 2016, p2

⁷ Gall, S. C. & Thompson, R. C. (2015), *The impact of debris on marine life*. Marine Pollution Bulletin 92, 170-179

⁸ HM Government, [Tackling the plastic problem: using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste](#), March 2013, p8-9

⁹ HM Government press release, [UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste](#), 18 April 2018

¹⁰ HM Government press release, [UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste](#), 18 April 2018

¹¹ HM Government press release, [UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste](#), 18 April 2018

¹² BBC News "[Plastic straws: Welsh Government would 'welcome collaboration' on ban](#)" 19 April 2018

On 27 April 2018 the Scottish Government published a consultation on [a proposal to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stemmed cotton buds in Scotland](#). Press reports have indicated that the Scottish Government may also consider a ban of plastic straws by the end of 2019.¹³ Further information about the Scottish Government's position was set out on 7 February 2018 in Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham's [address to the Scottish Parliament on the use and waste of plastic](#).

25 year environment plan policies

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), published on 11 January 2018, sets out the Government's intention to achieve "zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042." The term "avoidable" is defined as what is technically, environmentally and economically practicable.¹⁴

In order to stem the flow of plastics into the natural environment, including into the seas, the Government set out a four point plan aimed at taking action at each stage of the product lifecycle – production, consumption and end of life. Some of the key policies from the four point plan included:

- Creating a better market for recycled plastic;
- Launching a call for evidence in 2018 seeking views on how the tax system or charges could reduce the amount of single use plastics waste;
- Extending uptake of the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers, initially through voluntary agreement;
- Working with retailers and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to explore introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles in which all the food is loose;
- Consideration of advice from the Voluntary & Economic Incentives Working group (set up under the Litter Strategy), which is currently looking at measures to reduce littering and promote recycling of drinks containers;
- More to help developing nations tackle pollution and reduce plastic waste.
- Work through the UN, G7 and G20 to tackle marine plastics pollution at an international level.

The commitment to plastics reduction sits alongside the Government's ambition, which was framed in the October 2017 [Clean Growth Strategy](#), for "zero avoidable waste by 2050".¹⁵ The Plan also reiterated the Government's intention to publish a new Resources and Waste strategy later in 2018.¹⁶

On 13 March 2018 the Government published the call for evidence mentioned in the 25 Year Plan, [Tackling the plastic problem: using the](#)

¹³ See for example, [Resouce.co](#), "Scotland proposes plastic straw ban by end of 2019" 14 February 2018

¹⁴ HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, page 29

¹⁵ HM Government, [The Clean Growth Strategy](#), October 2017, page 16

¹⁶ HM Government, [The Clean Growth Strategy](#), October 2017, page 16

[tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste.](#) The call for evidence is open until 18 May 2018.

Deposit return scheme for drinks containers

In April 2017 the UK Government published a [Litter Strategy for England](#), which included a commitment to establish a working group to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different types of deposit and reward and return schemes for drinks containers. On 2 October 2017 the government [invited views](#) on how reward and return schemes for drinks containers could work in England by issuing a call for evidence.

On 28 March the Government [confirmed](#) it will introduce a deposit return scheme in England for single use drinks containers (including plastic, glass and metal), subject to consultation later this year. The consultation will look at the details of how such a scheme would work. Alongside this announcement the Government published the report of the Voluntary & Economics Incentives Working Group: [Voluntary and economic incentives to reduce littering of drinks containers and promote recycling](#).

The Scottish Government has said that it will develop a deposit return scheme¹⁷ and has recently asked Zero Waste Scotland to model a deposit return system to help it assess impacts and benefits.¹⁸

In March 2018 BBC News reported comments from Wales' Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn who said that consultants were considering deposit-return systems in Wales.¹⁹

Press reports have highlighted opposition party support for such a scheme:

Sue Hayman, Labour's shadow environment secretary, urged the government to take swift action. "A deposit return scheme would have widespread public support and would go a long way to ensuring that we recycle as much of our waste as possible," she said.

Kate Parminter, environment spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, said momentum was growing behind calls for a deposit return scheme. "Earlier this year, Coca-Cola said to the Scottish parliament they would back a well-designed deposit return scheme," she said. "Now that industry are backing this scheme, it is high time the UK government began to throw their weight behind it."²⁰

Single use carrier bags charge

A five pence charge came into effect on single use carrier bags in England on 5 October 2015. The charge in England, which is paid by

¹⁷ Scottish Government, [A Nation With Ambition: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2017-18](#), September 2017, p41

¹⁸ "Scotland plans deposit return scheme for bottles and cans" [The Guardian](#), 5 September 2017

¹⁹ "Bottle deposit scheme: Welsh ministers 'already working' on plan" [BBC News](#), 28 March 2018

²⁰ "Tackle UK's plastic bottle problem with money-back scheme, ministers told" [The Guardian](#), 4 July 2017

customers to retailers, follows the introduction of similar levies in other parts of the UK. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland introduced a 5p levy on single use carrier bags in 2011, 2013 and 2014 respectively. The purpose of each single use carrier bag charge is to reduce the number of bags given out, increase their re-use and reduce litter. The *Climate Change Act 2008* and the *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009* provide the legislative framework for the single use carrier bag charge.

Government analysis of the scheme in July 2017 indicated that since the introduction of the scheme, the number of bags used has gone down by more than 80 percent in England. This means that more than nine billion fewer plastic bags have been used since the scheme was introduced.²¹

For further information about the scheme see Library briefing paper, [Plastic bags – the single use carrier bag charge](#).

Microbeads ban

A [joint-UK consultation](#) was completed in February 2017 to investigate a ban on the use of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products in the UK, and called for evidence on other sources of microplastics entering the marine environment.

On 9 January 2018 the Government introduced a ban on the manufacture of products containing microbeads.²² A ban on the sale of products containing microbeads is expected to follow later in the year.²³

Litter Strategy

In April 2017 the UK Government published a [Litter Strategy for England](#), which contained a section called Litter in Context – Aquatic and Marine Litter, which set out a number of Government, business and community initiatives to tackle issues to do with marine litter. In particular, it highlighted Defra's role in microplastic research:

Defra plays an active role in advising and influencing marine litter and microplastics research, and is a member of the Marine Litter Action Network, which works with stakeholders from various sectors to raise awareness of the sources and problems associated with marine litter. We endorse and support a range of initiatives such as the MARLISCO project, the Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme and Operation Clean Sweep to improve education around marine litter.²⁴

The Scottish Government published [A Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland](#) in August 2014. The aim of the strategy is to help realise the vision of "clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse marine and coastal environment that meets the long term needs of people and nature".²⁵ [Scotland's National Marine Plan](#) underpins this Strategy and includes marine planning policy to ensure measures are taken to address marine litter.

²¹ Gov.uk website, [Carrier bags: why there's a charge](#), Updated 31 July 2017

²² HM Government, [World-leading microbeads ban takes effect](#), 9 January 2018

²³ HM Government, [World-leading microbeads ban takes effect](#), 9 January 2018

²⁴ HM Government, [Litter Strategy for England](#), April 2017

²⁵ Scottish Government, [A Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland](#) in August 2014, p2

Marine strategy

The UK Government's December 2015 [Marine Strategy Part Three: UK programme of measures](#) (published in conjunction with the devolved Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), was published to outline the measures that contribute to the achievement and maintenance of Good Environmental Status (GES) in UK seas by 2020, as required by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.²⁶

provides a table on pages 144-151 sets out a number of initiatives that the Government was/is involved in which were designed to address and reduce marine litter issues.

1.3 European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy

As part of its work towards moving towards a circular economy, (where the value of resources are maintained for as long as possible), a [European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy](#) was adopted by the European Commission on 16 January 2018. The aim of the strategy is for "all plastic packaging on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030, the consumption of single-use plastics will be reduced and the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted."²⁷ A full list of measures and their timelines are provided in [Annex](#) to the Plastics Strategy. The Commission is expected to present a formal proposal on single-use plastics later in 2018.²⁸

The implications of this for the UK will depend on the speed at which the Circular Economy Package progresses through the European institutions and the outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

1.4 International cooperation

The Government is also involved at an international level with a number of initiatives to tackle ocean plastics. The sections below highlight examples of some of these international agreements and policies. The aim of many of these is to raise awareness and commit other countries to taking action to reduce plastic waste. Many of the UK's actions to meet these international agreements are through the policies outlined in the sections above.

Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance

Most recently the issue of ocean plastic was raised at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London last week. The Government issued a [press release](#), on 18 April 2018, to report that:

²⁶ [Directive 2008/56/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

²⁷ EU Commission, [Plastic Waste: a European strategy to protect the planet, defend our citizens and empower our industries](#), 16 January 2018

²⁸ EU Commission, [Plastic Waste: a European strategy to protect the planet, defend our citizens and empower our industries](#), 16 January 2018

...the Prime Minister has urged all Commonwealth countries to sign-up to the newly-formed Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and take action, be this by a ban microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

Further information about the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance is available from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) website, [Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance Supports SDG 14 Achievement](#), 17 April 2018. This article highlights how the initiative supports other international agreements:

The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance represents an agreement among the UK, Ghana, Sri Lanka, New Zealand and Vanuatu to jointly tackle marine plastic. The countries have pledged to ban microbeads in personal care products and rinse-off cosmetics and to cut plastic bag use by 2021. The Alliance aims to drive action on SDG 14 (life below water) and to encourage other Commonwealth countries to sign up to and implement international agreements to protect the ocean, including the UN Clean Seas campaign, the Global Ghost Gear Initiative and the London Protocol.

UN Sustainable Development Goal 14

The [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” consisting of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. [UN Sustainable Development Goal \(SDGs\) 14](#) aims to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. In September 2015, 193 Member States, including the UK, adopted this Agenda and committed themselves to working “tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030”.

SDG14 includes the target of:

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

Further information about SDG 14 and progress on it can be found on the [UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform](#). In December 2017 the UK Government published a report, [Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals](#), which provides further information about the ways that the Government is supporting the delivery of the SDGs (including SDG 14).

UN Clean Seas Campaign and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) [#CleanSeas Campaign](#) was launched in February 2017 with the aim of “engaging governments, the general public, civil society and the private sector in the fight against marine plastic litter.” The [UK Government](#) has signed up to this campaign.

The campaign contributes to the goals of the [Global Partnership on Marine Litter](#) (GPA) a voluntary open-ended partnership for international agencies, governments, businesses, academia, local authorities and non-

governmental organisations hosted by UN Environment. The UNEP website summarises:

The GPA is the only global intergovernmental mechanism directly addressing the connectivity between terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems.

It aims to be a source of conceptual and practical guidance to be drawn upon by national and/or regional authorities for devising and implementing sustained action to prevent, reduce, control and/or eliminate marine degradation from land-based activities.

UNEP hosts the GPA Coordinating Unit and coordinates some activities in support of the programme. Intergovernmental Review Meetings are organized every 5 years to review the progress made by countries in the implementation of the GPA through their respective National Action Plans.

It was created in 1995 when over 108 governments declared “their commitment to protect and preserve the marine environment from the impacts of land-based activities, through the Washington Declaration. Setting as their common goal sustained and effective action to deal with all land-based impacts upon the marine environment, specifically those resulting from sewage, persistent organic pollutants, radioactive substances, heavy metals, oils (hydrocarbons), nutrients, sediment mobilization, litter, and physical alteration and destruction of habitat.

The full text of the [Washington Declaration](#), on Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities, of 1 November 1995, which created the GPA, is available online.

UN resolution on marine litter and microplastics

In December 2017 the UK Government reported that the UK was one of the 193 UN member states to sign a resolution, [Marine Litter and Microplastics](#) (UNEP/EA.3/Res.7), at the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session held in Nairobi, to help reduce the amount of plastic in the world's seas.²⁹ Under the agreement, an international taskforce will advise how to combat marine litter. Among other things, the Resolution:

- Stresses the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics;
- Urges all actors to step up actions to “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”;
- Encourages all member States, based on best available knowledge of sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, to prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment;

²⁹ HM Government news story, [Global commitment at United Nations Assembly to reduce pollution](#), 7 December 2017

The resolution also decides to establish an "ad hoc expert group to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources", and also decides to "to convene at least one meeting, but no more than two meetings, before the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, including enabling the participation of developing countries". The fourth session is expected to take place from 11-15 March 2019.

An article from the Independent reported that there had been dissent from some countries to putting specific reduction targets into the resolution:

A United Nations agreement that would have called for specific, internationally-agreed goals to tackle plastic waste in our oceans has been rejected by the US.

Several countries, including China and India, also refused to include in the resolution a call on nations to adopt any reduction targets, but US officials "were clearly leading the discussion on this", a source at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi told The Independent.

Countries did agree that the world needs to stop plastics from entering the sea, but the final resolution published on Wednesday has no timetable and is not legally binding.³⁰

Following the session the Government issued a press release to welcome the resolution:

Environment Minister Therese Coffey said:

"Countries around the world need to take urgent action to stop plastic entering our oceans and I am delighted that today's UN agreement clearly demonstrates our shared commitment.

"At home, the UK continues to be a world leader in tackling this issue – taking nine billion plastic bags out of circulation with our 5p carrier bag charge and drawing up one of the world's toughest bans on microbeads."³¹

The IMO "London Protocol"

The "Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972", the "London Convention", was one of the first global conventions to protect the marine environment from human activities and has been in force since 1975. According to the [International Maritime Organization \(IMO\) website](#), 87 States are Parties to this Convention. In 1996, the "London Protocol" was agreed to further modernise the Convention and, eventually, replace it. Under the Protocol all dumping is prohibited, except for possibly acceptable wastes on the so-called "reverse list". The Protocol entered into force on 24 March 2006 and there are currently 50 Parties to the Protocol.

The objective of the London Convention and Protocol is to promote the effective control of all sources of marine pollution. Contracting Parties

³⁰ The Independent "[UN resolution calling for targets to tackle ocean plastic waste rejected by US, China and India](#)", 7 December 2017

³¹ Gov.uk press release, [Global commitment at United Nations Assembly to reduce pollution](#), 7 December 2017

“shall take effective measures to prevent pollution of the marine environment caused by dumping at sea” (see articles I and II of the Convention and article 2 of the Protocol).

Further information about the London Protocol is available on the [IMO website](#).

OSPAR Regional Action Plan on marine litter

The UK is an active participant in OSPAR (the Oslo and Paris Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic). This is a collaborative effort with neighbouring countries to address marine litter.

The OSPAR objective with regard to marine litter is “to substantially reduce marine litter in the OSPAR maritime area to levels where properties and quantities do not cause harm to the marine environment” by 2020. To fulfil this objective OSPAR 2014 agreed a [Regional Action Plan \(RAP\) for Marine Litter](#) for the period 2014-2021. The RAP contains 55 collective and national actions which aim to address both land based and sea based sources, as well as education and outreach and removal actions.

Further information is available on the OSPAR Commission website on [Marine Litter](#).

1.5 The UK “plastic pact”

On 26 April 2018 a number of UK supermarkets, food companies, and plastics industry members signed a new voluntary pledge, a “plastic pact” to cut plastic packaging. It includes an aspiration that by 2025 all plastic packaging can be reused, recycled or composted. The WRAP website summarises the aims of the pact and its immediate focus:

The Pact will stimulate innovative new business models to reduce the total amount of plastic packaging. It will also help build a stronger recycling system, where we take more responsibility for our own waste, and ensure plastic packaging can be effectively recycled and made into new products and packaging and, with the support of governments, ensure consistent UK recycling is met.

The immediate focus will be on identifying the priority projects that will deliver greatest impacts in the short and long term, such as overcoming barriers to increasing the amount of recycled content used in new packaging, developing reusable packaging and working with partners to overcome the issue of un-recyclable black plastic.³²

Further Information about the pact and who has signed it is available from the [WRAP website](#).

There has been some criticism of the pact in the press that it is a voluntary measure, with no enforcement mechanisms.³³

³² WRAP website, [What is the UK plastics pact?](#) [downloaded on 30 April 2018]

³³ See for example, “UK supermarkets launch voluntary pledge to cut plastic packaging” [The Guardian](#), 26 April 2018

1.6 Comment on the Government's approach

The Government's policies to reduce plastic waste have been broadly welcomed. For example, the coalition of 31 organisations represented by Wildlife and Countryside Link welcomed the 25 Year Environment Plan commitments on waste reduction and single-use plastics.³⁴ The Campaign to Protect Rural England welcomed the proposal to introduce a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, saying that it was "thrilled" and that it would set "a strong precedent for other schemes where the polluter pays."³⁵

Environmental Audit Committee

In its December 2017 report, *Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide*, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee expressed concern that the Government will miss the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 to "prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution", by 2025. The Committee recommended that a timeline should be established for publishing more accurate data and analysis on marine litter.³⁶

The Government's response set out how it will assess the state of UK marine waters in 2018:

We disagree with the Committee's conclusions on the marine litter analysis in the UK Marine Strategy Part Three. Plastic's persistence means that the amount of litter already in the marine environment is significant, so the effectiveness of any measures will be slow to realise. It is also a transboundary problem with litter from many international sources transported to UK waters by ocean currents, wind drift and storms.

In 2018 the Government will report on the next assessment of the state of UK marine waters, including the extent that Good Environmental Status for UK seas has been achieved under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The assessment will give us a comprehensive evaluation of UK seas, including whether there have been improvements since 2012. It will tell us the current state of the condition of marine habitats; and other marine biodiversity; and whether pollution, including marine litter is still harmful to sea life. Importantly it will provide evidence of whether or not the policies and programme of measures that we have in place are working and allow us to modify them if necessary.³⁷

Marine Conservation Society

³⁴ Wildlife and Countryside Link press release, [Environment charities welcome 25 Year Environment Plan, but an Environment Act needs to secure its success](#), 11 January 2018

³⁵ "Drinks bottles and can deposit return scheme proposed" [BBC News](#), 28 March 2018

³⁶ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, [Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide](#), First Report of Session 2017–19, HC 339, 22 December 2017, p12

³⁷ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, *Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide: Government Response* to the Committee's First Report Fourth Special Report of Session 2017–19, 26 February 2018, p2-3

The marine charity, the Marine Conservation Society commented on the marine plastic approach set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, calling it "not sufficient":

Twenty five years is a very long time. We are disappointed by the lack of commitment to take action now to address existing problems. We urgently need to see much more done to stop the tide of plastic entering our oceans, and an aspiration to eliminate "avoidable" plastic waste by 2042 is just not sufficient. In particular, deposit return schemes on containers, and levies on items such as coffee cups, bans on plastic straws are all simple things that could be done immediately without the need for prolonged consultation. Our beach survey data has shown a shocking rise in the amount of litter in our oceans and we urgently need to tackle single-use plastic as a first step."³⁸

Green Alliance

The charity and think tank Green Alliance called some of the Government's recent actions a "step forwards". It highlighted how other policies might make more of a difference, some of which (such as a deposit return scheme) have now been taken on board by the Government:

Green Alliance said Gove's announcement that microbeads will be banned from rinse-off products later this year is a step forward, but it will tackle less than 1% of the problem. The government's plastic bag charge also addresses 1% of the plastic that enters the sea.

The think tank said other well publicised methods, which use buoys to remove litter from the open oceans, only tackle floating debris and so could only remove 2% of the plastic that gets into the sea. This is because most plastic sinks below the ocean surface or is ingested by animals. According to Green Alliance analysis the single most effective action would be to stop plastic bottles getting into the sea through a deposit return scheme (DRS). The largest proportion (33%) of plastic litter comes from plastic bottles, and this problem is likely to escalate as global bottle production is forecast to jump by 20 per cent by 2021.

Alongside a deposit return scheme, Green Alliance believes four other actions would reduce the UK's contribution to plastic pollution in the sea by nearly two thirds in total:

- enforce Operation Clean Sweep to cut pollution from plastic pellets or 'nurdles' used as raw material in industrial processes (9% of plastic pollution);
- enforce existing maritime waste dumping bans, using techniques similar to those used by Norway to enforce its fish discards ban (11% of plastic pollution);
- upgrade wastewater treatment plants with sand filters to retain the microplastic fibres shed from synthetic clothes when they are washed (9% of plastic pollution); and

³⁸ Marine Conservation Society, [UK Government's plan for nature fails to deliver](#), 11 January 2018

- expand the UK's ban on microbeads to all products, not just rinse-off products (1% of plastic pollution).³⁹

British Plastics Federation

The industry body, the British Plastics Federation, states that a ban of plastic products will not solve the problem or reducing marine litter.⁴⁰ It believes that better waste management is a critical factor in reducing marine litter. It has called for the following:

- There is a need for more support and investment in waste management infrastructure, with a focus on Southeast Asia.
- Current evidence suggests that the best way of reducing littering in the UK is to mount public information campaigns to discourage littering.
- To further increase recycling rates in the UK, the government should work with industry to improve and simplify the waste management infrastructure, as well as exploring behaviour change campaigns for those who do not recycle.
- Further investment should be made in the recycling infrastructure in the UK to develop a circular economy, ensuring that plastics can be recycled as close to market as possible and remain within a well-developed waste management infrastructure.
- The shipping industry and fishing industry should continue work to minimise plastic waste entering the sea from ships and shipping containers.
- The UK plastics industry should continue to play its part by signing up to the principles of industry-led schemes such as Operation Clean Sweep® and PIRAP as well as continue to support anti-littering campaigns and relevant education initiatives.
- Microbeads should not be used in cosmetic products.⁴¹

³⁹ "Green Alliance: 'Five simple actions' to tackle marine litter" [Packaging News](#), 4 August 2017

⁴⁰ British Plastics Federation website, [Marine Litter](#) [downloaded on 30 April 2018]

⁴¹ British Plastics Federation website, [Marine Litter](#) [downloaded on 30 April 2018]

2. News articles

Times [subs]

24 April 2018

[Arctic Ocean ice has 12,000 bits of plastic per litre](#)

Independent

26 April 2018

[UK supermarkets launch voluntary pledge to cut plastic packaging](#)

FT [subs]

21 April 2018

[Banning straws not enough to solve plastic pollution, May warned](#)

Daily Telegraph

4 April 2018

[Plastic stirrers, straws and cotton wool buds could be banned in England as early as next year](#)

Guardian

27 March 2018

[Bottle and can deposit return scheme gets green light in England](#)

Times [subs]

23 March 2018

[Pacific's plastic waste zone is twice as large as France](#)

Independent

21 March 2018

[Plastic pollution in sea set to treble in a decade, warn government scientists](#)

The Times [subs]

2 February 2018

['Bury plastic in landfill until science progresses'](#)

Guardian

23 January 2018

[New fountains and bottle-refill points to tackle London's plastic waste](#)

FT [subs]

10 January 2018

[Theresa May targets plastics in war on 'throwaway culture'](#)

BBC online

9 January 2018

[Plastic microbead ban: What impact will it have?](#)

Times [subs]

12 December 2017

[Ten rivers carry 90% of plastic found in oceans](#)

3. Press releases

UN Environment

30 April 2018

One year after the launch of #CleanSeas, the tide is turning

Do you feel uneasy when you buy a coffee in a takeaway plastic cup? Perhaps you feel awkward buying that bottle of water?

We hope so, because raising awareness of what plastic waste is doing to our oceans, our wildlife and ourselves is what UN Environment's #CleanSeas campaign has been all about since its launch in February 2017.

We've given ourselves five years to build a global movement to tackle the excessive use of single-use plastics and get rid of dangerous microplastics in our toiletries and cosmetics.

The tide is already beginning to turn. Just over a year since the launch, 42 governments – accounting for more than half the world's coastline – have signed up to the #CleanSeas campaign with many making specific commitments to protect oceans, encourage recycling and cut back on single-use plastics.

Across the world, individuals have been inspired by #CleanSeas to re-evaluate their use of plastic and they are now pushing their governments and the private sector to deliver bold pollution-beating policies.

Nearly 80,000 people have taken the #CleanSeas pledge to eradicate single-use plastics and microbeads from their lives. From Bali to Panama, they are cleaning beaches, cataloguing what they find, and changing their own behaviour by, for example, using cloth bags and carrying steel cups or cutlery with them, refusing plastic straws and demanding the removal of plastic cups or single-use bottles from their offices.

The scale of the problem demands a global response. Every year, around 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans, poisoning our fish, birds and other sea creatures. That's the equivalent of one garbage truck of litter being dumped into the sea every minute. In April, a sperm whale was found dead on the southern coast of Spain and an autopsy revealed that it was killed by the 29 kilos of plastic found in its stomach. This, unfortunately, is not a unique case.

#CleanSeas first priority was to highlight the scale of the problem and the message has been heard loud and clear.

Tens of thousands of people have visited our website cleanseas.org to learn more, while thousands of people are using #CleanSeas and #beatpollution on Twitter and Instagram to tag pictures of beach clean-ups and to urge their friends and followers to join the fight against marine litter.

The incredible team of the Turn the Tide on Plastic yacht, which is competing in the round-the-world Volvo Ocean Race, is also spreading

the message as it battles its way through this difficult course. Sailed by the youngest and only mixed-gender crew ever to compete in the race's 45-year history, Turn the Tide on Plastic is battling it out against six other boats across four of the world's five oceans.

And in Kenya, the Flipflop Project is building a 60-foot traditional dhow from plastic waste collected on the beaches of Lamu Island to raise awareness along Africa's eastern coast.

The global conversation we need is underway but there is much more to do. Over the next five years, #CleanSeas aims to create an unstoppable momentum towards a truly circular global economy. That means valuing what we use and thinking harder about how we use, and reuse, products.

"Our aim is to redefine the world's relationship with plastics because that is the only way to save our seas. Only by fundamentally transforming the way we consume can we secure the oceans that sustain human life," said Erik Solheim, UN Environment's Executive Director. "What we need is a revolution."

By the end of March, 42 countries from Brazil to Belgium and from the Maldives to Iceland had signed up to the #CleanSeas campaign, with many making firm commitments on everything from creating marine reserves to adopting national plans on recycling and waste management.

Here are some of the pledges that have already been made:

- Belgium, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Panama and the Philippines are drawing up or adopting national plans and legislation to combat marine litter.
- Canada, which has the world's longest coastline, is funding community-based programmes, like beach clean-ups, and continuing critical research into the impact of microplastics. It is also drawing up regulations to ban the manufacture and sale of toiletries containing microbeads.
- Indonesia has committed to reduce plastic waste by 70 per cent by 2030
- Kenya, Jordan, Madagascar, Chile and France have banned or pledged to ban single-use or non-biodegradable plastic bags.
- Israel aims to have 70 per cent of its beaches clean 70 per cent of the time this year and is implementing a ban on certain types of plastic bags.
- Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden have committed to implement the "Nordic programme" on a sustainable approach to plastics by preventing plastic waste, encouraging recycling and promoting a circular economy
- New Zealand has committed to ban products containing plastic microbeads from June and is developing options to get rid of single-use plastic bags.

The #CleanSeas campaign will monitor these promises and look to get more countries to commit to action. But governments cannot fight this battle alone.

Businesses are acutely aware of the popular awakening over plastics and they are responding: European retailers have committed to plastic-free aisles and products while some restaurants have pledged to phase out plastic straws.

The private sector is key to success. It is home to the innovators, cutting-edge designers and thought leaders who can effect long-lasting, tangible change in consumer habits and product design.

DELL has teamed up with advocacy foundation Lonely Whale and others to form an open-source initiative to look at developing the first commercial-scale, ocean-bound plastics supply chain. Dell itself is using plastics collected from beaches, waterways and coastal areas to create packaging for its laptops.

Over the next year, #CleanSeas will be reinforcing its key business and institutional partnerships with DELL, the Volvo Ocean Race, the 11th Hour Project, Musto, Lonely Whale, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Phuket Hotels Association. We will reach out to more companies to harness their expertise in our bid to promote a sustainable, circular global economy.

“It is beyond time to permanently decouple economic development from environmental degradation and we want to work with the brightest minds in industry and business to achieve that,” said Solheim. “The next few years will decide who are the global leaders in new technology and materials. This is a great opportunity for those who dare to dream.”

Learn more about UN Environment’s [Clean Seas campaign](#).

Here are the countries that had joined the campaign as of April 2018: Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, France, Grenada, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, the Maldives, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, United Kingdom, Uruguay

Department for International Development

UK increases commitment to protect oceans from plastics and fight illegal wildlife trade

26 April 2018

At the Global Environment Facility conference, the UK joined 29 other international donors to recommit for a further four years to help developing countries tackle global environmental degradation.

The UK is stepping up its support to fight global environmental challenges, with a greater focus on protecting the world’s oceans and tackling the illegal wildlife trade, International Development Secretary

Penny Mordaunt and Environment Secretary Michael Gove have announced today (Thursday 26th April).

At the Global Environment Facility conference in Stockholm, the UK joined 29 other international donors to recommit for a further four years to help developing countries tackle global environmental degradation.

Following pressure from the UK, this year's Global Environment Facility replenishment will result in more funding to protect the marine environment, including from plastic waste pollution, and to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

With this seventh round of support, the GEF is planning to protect around 600 million hectares of land and marine habitats – an area equivalent to 24 times the size of the UK – and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 1600 million metric tonnes – the equivalent of an average car driving 4 million miles.

The UK's commitment of up to £250 million over the next four years is an increase on the last pledge of £210 million from 2014-2018, and maintains the UK's leadership on tackling environmental challenges that threaten global stability and security. Twenty per cent of the UK's support is also conditional on GEF making continual improvements to achieve maximum impact.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

The world's poorest communities are often the worst affected by environmental change. Extreme climates cause devastating drought and hunger, while deforestation and pollution destroy people's livelihoods and health.

The UK's long-running partnership with the Global Environment Facility has already achieved great change – cutting greenhouse gas emissions and protecting land – and now, we're working with our international partners to do more so that together we can clean our oceans of plastic waste and fight the illegal wildlife trade.

This will help developing nations, but, as we are all affected by the environment, it is a win for us in the UK too.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Environmental challenges do not respect borders. It is only through co-ordinated international action that we can clean up our oceans and protect wildlife. Our funding to the Global Environment Facility makes a vital difference.

The 25 Year Environment Plan demonstrates a commitment to global leadership. It makes clear our priorities of ending the illegal trade in wildlife and reducing plastic waste. These efforts will prevent damage to our seas and the wider natural environment.

Notes to editors

- The UK Government – through the Department for International Development (DFID) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) - has pledged £250 million to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for its seventh replenishment.

- The UK's commitment of up to £250m over 2018-2022 is an increase on the last pledge of £210m for the 2014-2018 replenishment, and maintains the UK's leadership on tackling global environmental challenges and our position as the fourth largest contributor to the fund.
- To incentivise GEF to achieve the targets, we are making 20% of our overall replenishment funding contingent on GEF's continual improvement and achieving maximum impact.
- The UK has sought and successfully achieved a substantial increase in GEF funding for a range of priority topics, including:
 - an increase for the Global Wildlife Programme tackling the illegal wildlife trade;
 - increases for managing chemicals and waste - including plastic;
 - an increase for international waters in recognition of pressures on the marine environment.
- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was set up in 1991, and supports developing countries to tackle major environmental challenges including wildlife loss, land degradation, deforestation, chemical pollution, marine and freshwater degradation, and climate change.
- Since its inception in 1991 the Global Environment Fund has successfully protected 860 million hectares of land – an area larger than Brazil – and contributed to 2.7 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emission reductions through 760 climate change protection projects.

General media queries

Email mediateam@dfid.gov.uk

WRAP

UK businesses make world-leading pact to tackle plastic pollution

26 April 2018

Unnecessary single-use plastic packaging will be a thing of the past as businesses sign up to a world-first pact, which aims to transform the plastic packaging system in the UK and keep plastic in the economy and out of the ocean.

The UK Plastics Pact, launched today by sustainability experts WRAP, is a unique collaboration which brings together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain with UK governments and NGOs to tackle the scourge of plastic waste.

Today 42 businesses*, including major food, drink and non-food brands, manufacturers and retailers right through to plastic reprocessors and packaging suppliers have made their commitment to the Pact. These Pact members are responsible for over 80% of the plastic packaging on products sold through UK supermarkets**. In addition, 15 other organisations have also shown their commitment to the Pact.

This powerful collective has committed to hit a series of ambitious targets by 2025:

- Eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use plastic packaging through redesign, innovation or alternative (re-use) delivery models.
- 100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- 70% of plastic packaging effectively recycled or composted.
- 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging.

The UK Plastics Pact is the first of its kind in the world. It will be replicated in other countries to form a powerful global movement for change as part of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy initiative. It is being led by WRAP, the sustainability experts.

The Secretary of State for the Environment Rt. Hon Michael Gove will be speaking at the launch event this evening in London, which is being hosted by WRAP. Mr Gove will be joined by Dame Ellen MacArthur, Founder of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, and WRAP CEO Marcus Gover, to officially unveil the Pact and start the journey to transforming the UK plastics system***.

WRAP CEO, Marcus Gover, said:

Together, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink and reshape the future of plastic so that we retain its value, and curtail the damage plastic waste wreaks on our planet. This requires a wholesale transformation of the plastics system and can only be achieved by bringing together all links in the chain under a shared commitment to act. That is what makes the UK Plastics Pact unique. It unites every body, business and organisation with a will to act on plastic pollution. We will never have a better time to act, and together we can.

Ellen MacArthur, founder of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, said:

We are delighted to launch this pioneering national implementation initiative with WRAP in the UK. This bold new pact will bring together businesses, policymakers and the public to create a circular economy for plastics that tackles the causes of plastics waste and pollution, not just the symptoms. Focussing on innovation, better packaging design and end-of-use systems will not only generate long-term benefits for the environment, but is also a huge economic opportunity. We encourage others around the world to help drive this momentum towards finding global solutions to what is a global problem.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, said:

Our ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste will only be realised if government, businesses and the public work together. Industry action can prevent excess plastic reaching our supermarket shelves in the first place.

I am delighted to see so many businesses sign up to this pact and I hope others will soon follow suit.

Minister for Clean Energy, Claire Perry said;

Momentum is gathering around this crucial mission and it is fantastic to see WRAP leading on this world-first pact to reduce

plastic pollution. Last week, we committed £61.4m to boost global research to help Commonwealth countries reduce plastic usage and prevent plastic waste from ending up in our seas. Today's commitment is another vital step towards achieving a plastic past and looking towards a cleaner future.

Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Roseanna Cunningham, said:

I believe that we all need to take action to address the scourge of plastic littering our countryside and seas. Businesses have an important role to play and I am pleased to see so many engaging with the Plastics Pact and its vision of a world where plastic never becomes waste.

"The Scottish Government has already introduced the household recycling charter to simplify recycling, committed to introducing a deposit return scheme and will shortly be consulting on proposals to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stemmed cotton buds in Scotland. Today we further build on that action as Pact signatories by looking to review the use of plastics across the public sector in Scotland.

Welsh Government Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, said:

"We welcome businesses taking a proactive approach to tackling plastic pollution, which is a step towards achieving our target of Wales becoming a zero-waste nation by 2050.

"In Wales, we will shortly be publishing our research into extending producer responsibility for food and drink packaging waste, while exploring options such as a UK-wide deposit return scheme."

Zero Waste Scotland, Chief Executive, Iain Gulland, said:

"We welcome the strong commitment shown by these leading businesses and representative bodies to tackle the issues associated with single-use plastics.

"Scotland is already leading the way with action on cotton buds, straws, microbeads and plastic packaging, including being the first part of the UK to commit to a deposit return scheme, which we are currently designing for the Scottish Government.

"We look forward to working with those signed up to the Plastic Pact to achieve our ambitions for cleaner seas, streets and countryside and for a more circular economy."

British Plastics Federation, Director of Plastics and Flexible Packaging, Barry Turner, said:

"The British Plastics Federation is delighted to support The UK Plastics Pact. We are committed to playing our part in leaving the environment in a better state for future generations. We look forward to providing industry expertise while continuing to develop the BPF's Marine Litter Platform, with its objective of stopping plastic waste entering our oceans."

Common Seas, Sea Champion and Founder, Jo Royle, said:

"Common Seas is pleased to support The UK Plastics Pact by working with the network to design scalable and investable innovations in materials and systems to be demonstrated at a local level that work towards eliminating plastic pollution in oceans."

In the UK the Pact will stimulate innovative new business models to reduce the total amount of plastic packaging. It will also help build a stronger recycling system, where we take more responsibility for our own waste and ensure plastic packaging can be effectively recycled and made into new products and packaging and, with the support of governments, ensure consistent UK recycling is met.

The immediate focus will be on identifying the priority projects that will deliver greatest impacts in the short and long term, such as overcoming barriers to increasing the amount of recycled content used in new packaging, developing reusable packaging and working with partners to overcome the issue of un-recyclable black plastic.

We all have a role to play. For the Pact to truly be holistic and involve everyone, WRAP will be launching a campaign in summer to engage citizens and help us all take action.

If you want your business to be a leader in the transition to a circular economy for plastics, contact ukplasticspact@wrap.org.uk and join the Pact. For more information see www.wrap.org.uk/UKplasticspact

NOTES TO EDITOR:

Footnotes:

**List of Pact members – see separate sheet for full list of organisations*

*** Based on WRAP estimates by weights and market share, using Valpak data*

**** This evening's launch event will be attended by founding members, supporters and media who'll hear from the Secretary of State for the Environment Rt. Hon Michael Gove and Dame Ellen MacArthur as well as WRAP CEO, Marcus Gover. There will also be a panel discussion with Mike Barry – M&S, Sebastian Munden – Unilever, Dan Cooke – Viridor, Louise Edge – Greenpeace and Sandar Defruyt – Ellen MacArthur Foundation.*

For more information on The UK Plastics Pact see www.wrap.org.uk/UKplasticspact

About WRAP

- First established in 2000, WRAP is a not for profit organisation which works with governments, businesses and citizens to create a world in which we source and use resources sustainably.*
- Our impact spans the entire life-cycle of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the products we buy, from production to consumption and beyond.*

THE PLASTICS PACT

The global plastics crisis requires a global solution. This is why the Ellen MacArthur Foundation is launching The Plastics Pact – a unique international network of national and regional initiatives.

The UK Plastics Pact is the first of these initiatives, and Chile will follow later this year. Each initiative will work towards a shared global vision of a circular economy for plastics – in which plastics stay in the economy

and out of the environment – set out by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy initiative.

Each Plastics Pact initiative will bring together local stakeholders, including businesses, policy-makers and NGOs, to set ambitious, time-bound, targets to eliminate unnecessary and problematic single-use plastic packaging through redesign, innovation or alternatives; ensure all plastic packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable; improve the collection and recycling of plastic packaging; and increase the recycled content used in plastic packaging to drive demand for recycled materials.

THE ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation ('the Foundation') was established in 2010 with the aim of accelerating the transition to the circular economy. Since its creation, the charity has emerged as a global thought leader, putting the circular economy on the agenda of decision makers across businesses, governments, and academia. The charity's work focuses on five interlinking areas: insight and analysis; education and training; business and government; systemic initiatives; and communications. Further information: ellenmacarthurfoundation.org / @circulareconomy

THE NEW PLASTICS ECONOMY

The New Plastics Economy is an ambitious, three-year initiative to build momentum towards a plastics system that works. Applying the principles of the circular economy, it brings together key stakeholders to rethink and redesign the future of plastics, starting with packaging. The initiative is led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with a broad group of leading companies, cities, philanthropists, governments, academics, students, NGOs, and citizens.

Further information: newplasticseconomy.org / @newplasticsecon

UN Environment Programme

Single-use plastic has reached the world's deepest ocean trench

20 April 2018

A new study has revealed that human activities are affecting the deepest part of the ocean, more than 1,000 kilometers from the mainland.

Plastic pollution is emerging as one of the most serious threats to ocean ecosystems. World leaders, scientists and communities recognize the urgent need for action, but the impacts of plastic pollution are not well understood.

To raise awareness of the far-reaching effects of plastic pollution, ocean scientists - including those from UN Environment's [World Conservation Monitoring Centre](http://www.unep.org/monitoring-centre) - crunched numbers from the [Deep-sea Debris Database](http://www.jamstec.go.jp/frc/research/Deep-sea%20Debris%20Database/). The Global Oceanographic Data Centre of the Japan Agency

for Marine-Earth Science and Technology launched this database for public use in 2017. It contains over 30 years of photos and videos of debris that have been collected by deep-sea submersibles and remotely operated vehicles.

The data revealed that, from 5,010 dives, more than 3,000 pieces of manmade debris – including plastic, metal, rubber and fishing gear – were counted. Over a third of debris found was macro-plastic, 89 per cent of which was single-use products. In areas deeper than 6000m, over half of debris was plastic, almost all of which was single-use.

The study - [Human footprint in the abyss: 30 year records of deep-sea plastic debris](#) - also reveals that single-use plastic has reached the world's deepest ocean trench - a plastic bag was found in the Mariana Trench, 10,898m below the surface. The ubiquitous distribution of single-use plastic, even to the greatest depths of the ocean, reveal a clear link between daily human activities and the remotest of environments.

Once in the deep-sea, plastic can persist for thousands of years. Deep-sea ecosystems are highly endemic and have a very slow growth rate, so the potential threats from plastic pollution are concerning. There is growing concern that deep-sea ecosystems are already being damaged by direct exploitation of both biological and non-biological resources – through deep-sea trawling, mining and infrastructure development, for example. The results of this study show that deep-sea ecosystems are also being affected indirectly by human activities.

Reducing the production of plastic waste seems to be the only solution to the problem of deep-sea plastic pollution. A global monitoring network is needed to share the limited data on deep-sea plastic pollution, and impact assessment surveys should be prioritised for biologically and ecologically important areas with high concentrations of plastic debris, and to use ocean circulation models to identify how plastic is travelling from land to the deep-sea.

#BeatPlasticPollution is the theme of [World Environment Day 2018](#).

Learn more about our work on [oceans and seas](#).

This article was originally published by [UNEP-WCMC](#).

GOV.UK

UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste

18 April 2018

The UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste, leading by example with ambitious plans to end sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

The Government has announced its intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds at the start of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit.

The Prime Minister will also call on all other Commonwealth countries to join in the fight against plastic pollution.

Subject to the consultation, which the Environment Secretary will launch later this year, the Government will ban the sale of these items in England under plans to protect our rivers and seas and meet our 25 Year Environment Plan ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. This forms part of the wider government waste strategy - including the government's current call for evidence on how we can use the tax system to address single use plastics waste.

In order to eliminate these items from use the Government will work with industry to develop alternatives and ensure there is sufficient time to adapt. It will also propose excluding plastic straws for medical reasons.

Single-use plastic items such as straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds have a significant impact on our environment, both on land and in our seas and rivers when they are either littered or discarded incorrectly after use - with a recent study showing 8.5 billion plastic straws are thrown away each year in the UK.

The announcement comes as the Prime Minister has urged all Commonwealth countries to sign-up to the newly-formed Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and take action, be this by a ban microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

To drive this forward the UK government has committed a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Plastic waste is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world, which is why protecting the marine environment is central to our agenda at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The UK government is a world leader on this issue, and the British public have shown passion and energy embracing our plastic bag charge and microbead ban, and today we have put forward ambitious plans to further reduce plastic waste from straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

Alongside our domestic action, this week we are rallying Commonwealth countries to join us in the fight against marine plastics, with £61.4million funding for global research and to improve waste management in developing countries.

The Commonwealth is a unique organisation, with a huge diversity of wildlife, environments and coastlines. Together we can effect real change so that future generations can enjoy a natural environment that is healthier than we currently find it.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Single-use plastics are a scourge on our seas and lethal to our precious environment and wildlife so it is vital we act now. We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use,

and now we want to take action on straws, stirrers and cotton buds to help protect our marine life.

We've already seen a number of retailers, bars and restaurants stepping up to the plate and cutting plastic use, however it's only through government, businesses and the public working together that we will protect our environment for the next generation - we all have a role to play in turning the tide on plastic.

There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic microbeads ban hailed as one of the world's strongest bans, the 5p plastic bag charge - which has led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed, and last month's pledge to introduce a deposit return scheme, or DRS, for single use drinks containers, including bottles and cans. It sits alongside the 25 Year Environment Plan commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. The Treasury has also launched a call for evidence on how charges and changes to the tax system could be used to reduce single use plastics.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Deposit return scheme in fight against plastic

28 March 2018

The government has announced plans for a deposit return scheme to crack down on plastic pollution.

A deposit return scheme to increase recycling rates and slash the amount of waste polluting our land and seas will be introduced subject to consultation later this year, it was confirmed today.

UK consumers go through an estimated 13 billion plastic drinks bottles a year, but more than three billion are incinerated, sent to landfill or left to pollute our streets, countryside and marine environment.

To tackle this blight, the government has confirmed it will introduce a deposit return scheme in England for single use drinks containers (whether plastic, glass or metal), subject to consultation later this year. The consultation will look at the details of how such a scheme would work, alongside other measures to increase recycling rates. We hope to talk to the devolved administrations about the scope for working together on this important issue.

Similar schemes already operate in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany. A deposit return scheme sees consumers pay an up-front deposit when they buy a drink, ranging from 8p in Sweden to 22p in Germany, which is redeemed on return of the empty drink container. Possible variants of a deposit return scheme include cash rewards for returning drinks containers without an upfront deposit.

This is often done through a network of 'reverse vending machines', where you insert your plastic or glass bottle or can and the machine returns your money. Once a bottle is returned, businesses are then

responsible for making sure they are effectively recycled – a move that has led to a 97% recycling rate in Germany.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We can be in no doubt that plastic is wreaking havoc on our marine environment – killing dolphins, choking turtles and degrading our most precious habitats. It is absolutely vital we act now to tackle this threat and curb the millions of plastic bottles a day that go unrecycled.

We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use, and now we want to take action on plastic bottles to help clean up our oceans.

Following receipt of the [Voluntary and Economics Incentives Working Group report](#) on single use drinks containers, Defra is now developing plans for a deposit return scheme for consultation later this year.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic [microbeads ban](#) hailed as one of the world's strongest bans and the 5p plastic bag charge – which has [led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed](#). It sits alongside the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

The consultation will follow the recent [call for evidence](#) by HM Treasury on taxes and charges to reduce waste from single-use plastics, so that all relevant findings can be fed into the proposals.

Plastic bottles and drinks containers have a significant impact on the environment, with discarded food and drink containers making up at least a fifth of rubbish on beaches. There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Author Bill Bryson, a former president of Campaign to Protect Rural England, said:

Future generations will look back on this decision as a piece of supremely enlightened policymaking, and one that raises the prospect of the world's most beautiful country becoming free from drinks container litter at last.

The consultation will take into account views from producers, suppliers and consumers to ensure that any system introduced works across the country. The consultation will sit alongside a package of wider reforms of the current packaging waste system, which will incentivise producers to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products and to increase the amount of packaging they recycle.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, where member states will gather in London and agree measures to protect our oceans.

Prime Minister launches 25 Year Environment Plan

Prime Minister Theresa May will pledge to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste within a quarter of a century.

10 January 2018

Launching the 25 Year Environment Plan, the PM will set out the government's determination to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

She will outline steps for a cleaner, greener Britain – with avoidable plastic waste eliminated by the end of 2042.

To help achieve this, the government will extend the 5p carrier bag charge to all retailers in England. To date, we have used nine billion fewer plastic bags as a direct consequence of introducing the charge.

The government will also work with supermarkets to encourage them to introduce plastic-free aisles in which all the food is loose.

This will give consumers the choice to make greener decisions and promote the use of less damaging plastic packaging.

To encourage industry to take more responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products and make them easier to recycle, the government will also look at how the tax system or charges could further reduce the amount of waste we create. A call for evidence on how to reduce the use of single-use plastics will begin next month.

In addition we will inject new funding into plastics innovation through a bid into the government's £7 billion research and development pot.

It is estimated that 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced since the 1950s.

Research indicates that without urgent action to cut demand this is likely to be 34 billion tonnes by 2050.

In the UK alone, during its recent Great British Beach Clean Up, the Marine Conservation Society found 718 pieces of litter for every 100 metre stretch of beach surveyed, and of this rubbish from food and drink made up at least one fifth.

In a speech, Theresa May is expected to say:

We look back in horror at some of the damage done to our environment in the past and wonder how anyone could have thought that, for example, dumping toxic chemicals, untreated, into rivers was ever the right thing to do.

In years to come, I think people will be shocked at how today we allow so much plastic to be produced needlessly.

In the UK alone, the amount of single-use plastic wasted every year would fill 1,000 Royal Albert Halls.

This plastic is ingested by dozens of species of marine mammals and over 100 species of sea birds, causing immense suffering to individual creatures and degrading vital habitats. 1 million birds, and over 100,000 other sea mammals and turtles die every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste. One in three fish caught in the English Channel contains pieces of plastic.

This truly is one of the great environmental scourges of our time.

Today I can confirm that the UK will demonstrate global leadership. We must reduce the demand for plastic, reduce the number of plastics in circulation and improve our recycling rates. To tackle it we will take action at every stage of the production and consumption of plastic.

Demonstrating global leadership the UK will also do more to help developing nations tackle pollution and reduce plastic waste, including through UK aid.

Mrs May is expected to add:

I want the Britain of the future to be a truly Global Britain, which is a force for good in the world. Steadfast in upholding our values – not least our fierce commitment to protecting the natural environment.

When we host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April we will put the sustainable development of our oceans firmly on the agenda.

We will work with our partners to create a Commonwealth Blue Charter and push for strong action to reduce plastic waste in the ocean.

We will direct our development spending to help developing nations reduce plastic waste, increase our own marine protected areas at home, and establish new Blue Belt protections in our Overseas Territories.

The Prime Minister will also announce plans to help more children engage with the environment. This will be delivered through £10m for school visits and a Nature Friendly Schools programme to create school grounds which allow young people to learn more about the natural world, targeting schools in disadvantaged areas first.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

World-leading microbeads ban takes effect

9 January 2018

Today the government's ban on microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products comes into effect.

A ban on the manufacture of products containing microbeads has come into force today – a landmark step in the introduction of one of the world's toughest bans on these harmful pieces of plastic.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has announced that manufacturers of cosmetics and personal care products will no longer be able to add tiny pieces of plastic known as 'microbeads' to rinse-off products such as face scrubs, toothpastes and shower gels.

These damaging beads can cause serious harm to marine life, but the UK's ban – praised by campaigners as one of the toughest in the world – will help to stop billions of microbeads ending up in the ocean every year. Alongside the success of the government's 5p plastic bag charge – which has taken nine billion bags out of circulation – the ban puts the UK at the forefront of international efforts to crack down on plastic pollution.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The world's seas and oceans are some of our most valuable natural assets and I am determined we act now to tackle the plastic that devastates our precious marine life.

Microbeads are entirely unnecessary when there are so many natural alternatives available, and I am delighted that from today cosmetics manufacturers will no longer be able to add this harmful plastic to their rinse-off products.

Now we have reached this important milestone, we will explore how we can build on our world-leading ban and tackle other forms of plastic waste.

Dilyana Mihaylova, Marine Plastics Projects Manager at Fauna & Flora International, said:

Fauna & Flora International has been working to address the issue of plastic microbead pollution since 2009, and we are delighted that the Government took such a clear stand on this issue and that a robust UK microbeads ban comes into force today.

We hope this ban signals the dawn of a new era in the fight for cleaner, healthier oceans, with the UK leading the way and supporting other countries to ensure that plastic will no longer reach the environment.

Dr Sue Kinsey, Senior Pollution Officer at the Marine Conservation Society, said:

We are delighted that such a robust microbead ban has come into force. This is the strongest and most comprehensive ban to be enacted in the world and will help to stem the flow of micro plastics into our oceans.

We believe that this signals a real commitment on the part of this Government to clean up our seas and beaches and hope this is a first step on this road before we see further actions to combat plastic waste.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the government's upcoming 25 Year Environment Plan, which will set out how we will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it and create clean, healthy and productive oceans.

A ban on the sale of products containing microbeads will follow later in the year.

British Plastics Federation

Marine Litter

June 2017

Plastics should not end up in the aquatic environment, where they may cause harm to wildlife. In the UK we have a well-established recycling collection infrastructure in place that allows us to turn post-consumer plastics into new products.

Consumers, government and industry all have a part to play in protecting the environment and ensuring that the plastic we use to protect products and ensure safety, convenience and hygiene is easily

recovered for re-use, recycling or to be converted into fuels, chemical feedstocks and other useful petroleum-based goods.

How does it get there?

- Inadequate waste management, primarily in rapidly developing economies (only 2% of ocean litter comes from Europe and the US).
- Inappropriate items being flushed into the sewage system.
- Waste being illegally dumped at sea.
- Containers carrying plastic pellets (nurdles) or plastic products toppling off container ships in bad weather.
- Poor housekeeping in factories, where plastic pellets may end up in drains.
- Poor waste management practices.
- Used articles carelessly discarded on beaches as well as other littering on both land and sea.
- Microbeads, which may be present in some cosmetic products (although their use is being outlawed in the UK in 2017).

The BPF believes...

Plastics are durable and they are recyclable so we all need to ensure they are reclaimed for reprocessing rather than irresponsibly discarded.

- Waste management is a critical factor in reducing marine litter. Bans of plastic products will not solve the problem.
- There is a need for more support and investment in waste management infrastructure, with a focus on Southeast Asia.
- Current evidence suggests that the best way of reducing littering in the UK is to mount public information campaigns to discourage littering.
- To further increase recycling rates in the UK, the government should work with industry to improve and simplify the waste management infrastructure, as well as exploring behaviour change campaigns for those who do not recycle.
- Further investment should be made in the recycling infrastructure in the UK to develop a circular economy, ensuring that plastics can be recycled as close to market as possible and remain within a well-developed waste management infrastructure.
- The shipping industry and fishing industry should continue work to minimise plastic waste entering the sea from ships and shipping containers.
- The UK plastics industry should continue to play its part by signing up to the principles of industry-led schemes such as [Operation Clean Sweep®](#) and [PIRAP](#) as well as continue to support anti-littering campaigns and relevant education initiatives.
- Microbeads should not be used in cosmetic products.

4. Parliamentary material

Written statements

Member: Mrs Theresa May

Department: Prime Minister

[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)

Last week I hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (19 - 20 April) – the largest summit of its kind in our country's history. Leaders from 53 countries gathered together with over 15,000 delegates, including at 90 side events, demonstrating that the Commonwealth is united not only by a common history, but by a common future.

We put young people at the heart of the summit, recognising the need to ensure the actions we took would renew the Commonwealth and promote its relevance to its people, 60% of whom are under 30.

We agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth which is fairer, more sustainable, more secure and more prosperous. These commitments were captured in a Communiqué and accompanying Leaders' Statement. I have placed a copy of both in the House of Commons Library.

A central theme of our leaders' meeting was our resolve to stand together in defence of the rules based international system.

To build a more secure future, we expressed our unanimous opposition to the use of chemical weapons, and committed to strengthen the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We also agreed the 'Commonwealth Cyber Declaration,' the world's largest and most geographically diverse intergovernmental commitment on cyber-security co-operation and capacity building, helping to protect our people and businesses from ever-more sophisticated digital threats. The UK has committed £15 million to help member states boost their cyber-security capabilities.

To build a more sustainable future, we celebrated every nation of the Commonwealth having now ratified the Paris Agreement, and recommitted to pursuing efforts to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. We also took specific action to protect our oceans and launched the 'Commonwealth Blue Charter', supported by the UK and Vanuatu's 'Clean Oceans Alliance.' A number of Commonwealth countries have made a series of commitments to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution, including Papua New Guinea, which has banned plastic bags; Belize, which has banned plastic bags, forks and other single-use items by 2019; and New Zealand, which has announced a ban on microbeads. The UK pledged to ban plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds, as well as announcing funding for research into tackling marine litter. With over 90% of Commonwealth citizens living in

malaria-affected countries, leaders pledged to halve malaria across the Commonwealth by 2023.

To build a more prosperous future, we made a unanimous statement on the need to fight protectionism – the first Commonwealth summit to do so. We launched initiatives to break down barriers to trade through the promotion of common standards across the Commonwealth, to address systemic barriers to women’s full and equal participation in the economy, and to boost youth employment through a new Commonwealth apprenticeships programme. We also pledged to ensure that all girls and boys across the Commonwealth will be able to access at least 12 years of quality education and learning by 2030. The UK has committed a further £212 million to ensure no child is left behind.

To build a fairer future, we agreed the critical importance of the full social, economic and political participation of all our citizens for democracy and sustainable development to thrive. In my speech to the Joint Forum Plenary on Tuesday 17 April, I set out that nobody should face persecution or discrimination because of who they are or who they love, and announced a programme of support for any Commonwealth member wanting to reform outdated legislation that permits discrimination, including against same-sex relations.

The week also provided the opportunity for bilateral meetings with Commonwealth leaders. I met Caribbean leaders on Tuesday 17 April and gave an absolute commitment that the Government will do whatever it takes - including, where appropriate, payment of compensation - to resolve the anxieties and problems which some of the Windrush generation have suffered. My Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary will be providing a further update in Parliament later today.

We expressed deep gratitude for everything that Her Majesty The Queen has done to nurture this remarkable organisation, and agreed that the next Head of the Commonwealth shall be His Royal Highness Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales.

As we begin the UK’s two-year Chair in Office, I look forward to working with all our Commonwealth partners in fulfilling the commitments we have made, and preparing for the next meeting in Rwanda, in 2020.

HC Deb 23 Apr 2018 | HCWS634

[show related items](#) (1)

[The United Nations Ocean Conference](#)

Member: Dr Thérèse Coffey

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

I would like to update the House on the recent United Nations Ocean Conference, held in New York from 5th – 9th June. Although I was

unable to attend due to the pre-election period Defra's Deputy Director for Marine policy led the United Kingdom delegation. I wish to convey to the House the global importance of the conference and summarise its key outcomes.

The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, commonly referred to as SDGs or the UN 2030 Agenda, are a collection of 17 Goals that set the global environment and development agenda from 2016 to 2030. They cut across all areas of Government, from ending poverty and achieving gender equality through to tackling climate change and using resources sustainably.

The Conference was an attempt to galvanise international action on the implementation of SDG 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*. This SDG tackles a range of marine issues such as marine pollution and ocean acidification.

It produced two major outcomes: a Call for Action and a registry of over 1300 voluntary commitments made by the global community to support the implementation of SDG14.

I am pleased to report that, through its statement to the conference, the UK Government was able to demonstrate its continued support for the SDG process. We recognised the delivery of SDG 14 has a particular significance for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries and that we would continue to support the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, in developing sustainable ocean economies, alleviating poverty, and mitigating the effects of climate change and environmental threats.

The UK Government statement noted that climate change and ocean acidification continue to be significant threats to the long term health of our oceans. We highlighted the major role the UK played in securing the Paris Agreement and reiterated our commitment to its implementation.

I am also pleased to report that, recognising the need to take action on pollution from land-based sources, including the increasing amount of plastics and micro-plastics, the UK was able to sign up to the UN Environment Clean Seas Campaign.

The expertise of our marine science industry was demonstrated through the successful ocean acidification event led by the UK.

The UK also made four voluntary commitments to support the implementation of SDG14, highlighting our work on Marine Protected Areas, including in the Overseas Territories; marine science; marine litter and the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme. These can be viewed on the conference website at <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>

The Call for Action was agreed by consensus at the conference although the United States dissociated itself from the language on the WTO and recalled the US administration position on the Paris Agreement. The Call highlights particular action to be taken on a number of issues including: the need to increase scientific knowledge,

prevention of pollution, in particular from plastics; delivering sustainable fisheries and improving access to market for small scale artisanal fisheries in developing countries; concluding negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on fishery subsidies; and encouraging active engagement in the discussions on the development of an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Call for Action is available at <https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction>

HC Deb 13 Jul 2017 | HCWS44

PQs

[Plastics: Seas and Oceans](#)

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government when, and how, they intend to respond to the projection by the Government Office for Science that plastic in the ocean is set to treble by 2025.

Answering member: Lord Gardiner of Kimble | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Future of the Sea report shows that tough global action is needed to protect our oceans and marine life, and the UK is leading the way by tackling plastic waste. That's why our 25 Year Environment Plan stated our ambition to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. We want to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

We have recently introduced one of the world's strongest bans on harmful microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, and have now commissioned the Hazardous Substances Advisory Committee to review the evidence on microplastics in leave-on cosmetics and domestic cleaning products, and their chances of reaching our seas and causing harm to marine life. We will review our position in light of their advice.

Our 5p carrier bag charge has taken nine billion bags out of circulation. A beach clean survey in 2016 reported a 40% reduction in the number of plastic bags found. We will consider extending this charge to small retailers, exploring whether compulsory options are needed if voluntary agreements prove ineffective.

Single use items are a major issue for marine litter and frequently in the top 10 of items found during beach cleans. In his Spring Statement, the Chancellor launched a call for evidence seeking views on how the tax system or charges could reduce the waste from single use plastics.

We will introduce a deposit return scheme to increase recycling rates and slash the amount of waste polluting our land and seas, subject to consultation later this year.

As marine litter is a transboundary problem we also work productively with other countries to address it, particularly through the Oslo and Paris Conventions for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the

North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), G7, G20 and the UN Environment Programme.

HL Deb 04 Apr 2018 | HL6530W

[Microplastics: Marine Environment](#)

Asked by: Sturdy, Julian

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of microplastic fibres on the world's oceans.

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

It is clear that microplastics in various forms, including microfibres, are a significant and prevalent source of marine litter around the world.

As part of the enhanced chemicals programme the Environment Agency will look more at the contribution of sewage treatment to microplastic. As with many chemicals the most effective solution is to reduce the sources of plastic getting into drainage systems in the first place.

HC Deb 27 Feb 2018 | PQ128842

[Plastics: Bottles](#)

Asked by: McCabe, Steve

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that fewer plastic bottles (a) are incinerated, (b) go to landfill and (c) littered on land or at sea.

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

As part of the Litter Strategy for England, the Government has established the independent Voluntary and Economic Incentives working group. In autumn last year this working group held a call for evidence on measures to reduce littering of drinks containers and promote recycling. This included seeking evidence on the costs, benefits and impacts of deposit and reward and return schemes. The working group analysed responses to this call for evidence and provided advice to Ministers on potential incentives for drinks containers, including plastic bottles this month., Ministers are now considering the working group's report.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme and industry led Consistency Framework has a vision that all households in England are able to recycle the same core set of materials, including plastic bottles. The waste hierarchy places prevention at the top as it offers the best outcome for the environment, followed by preparing for reuse, recycling, other recovery (which includes energy from waste, via incineration) and then disposal. Landfill should only be considered as a last resort.

The Litter Strategy sets out our aim to clean up the country and deliver a substantial reduction in litter and littering within a generation. The Litter Strategy brings together communities, businesses, charities and schools to bring about real change by focusing on three key themes: education and awareness, improving enforcement, and better cleaning and access to bins. A copy of the Litter Strategy can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/litter-strategy-for-england.

As marine litter is a transboundary problem we work with other countries to address it, particularly through the Oslo and Paris Conventions for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, G7, G20 and the UN Environment Programme.

HC Deb 26 Feb 2018 | PQ127500

[Plastics: Seas and Oceans](#)

Asked by: Carmichael, Mr Alistair

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help reduce rising levels of plastic in the oceans.

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

We are taking a series of steps to deal with ocean plastics, including our ban on microbeads. Microbeads used in rinse off products end up in the marine environment and damage the marine life. While some countries have opted to ban only those plastic particles added for exfoliating and cleansing purposes, our ban covers all microplastic particles in rinse-off personal care products. It is one of the toughest bans in the world. The ban on the manufacture of rinse-off personal care products containing microbeads will begin on the 9th of January 2018, and the ban on sale will follow six months later

From 2 October to 20 November an independent working group set up under the Litter Strategy for England held a call for evidence on measures to reduce littering of drinks containers and promote recycling. This included seeking evidence on the costs, benefits and impacts of deposit and reward and return schemes. The Working Group is due to provide advice to Ministers on potential incentives for drinks containers early in 2018. Any decisions on suitable measures to then take forward will rest with Ministers.

In the autumn Budget the Government also announced a call for evidence in 2018, seeking views on how taxing and charging the most environmentally damaging single use plastics could help reduce waste.

Since the introduction of the Single Use Carrier bag charge in October 2015, we have seen a drop of around 83% in the consumption of single-use carrier bags with the seven major retailers distributing around 9 billion fewer single-use plastic bags, compared with pre-charge levels. The charge has generated approximately £95 million from retailers towards good causes since it was introduced.

In addition, the Government is developing a renewed strategy on resources and waste that looks ahead at opportunities outside the EU. This will set out the detail of how we will meet the ambitions for resources and waste that are set out in the Clean Growth Strategy, Industrial Strategy and the forthcoming 25 Year Environment Plan.

HC Deb 22 Dec 2017 | PQ119839

[Business of the House](#)

Member: Andrea Leadsom

Answering: [Louise Haigh \(Sheffield, Heeley\) \(Lab\)](#)

I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. I, too, was glued to “Blue Planet” and the issues that it raised. As Environment Secretary, I was delighted to be able to announce the litter strategy, looking at how we can reduce the plastics in our seas. The current Environment Secretary has just now signed the commitment to banning microbeads from face washes and other products. This Government have done more than any other to try to clamp down on waste plastics getting into our marine areas, and we will continue to do everything possible.

HC Deb 21 Dec 2017 | vol633 c1291

[Plastics: Pollution](#)

Asked by: Lynch, Holly

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the primary routes by which single-use plastics enter UK seas and rivers.

Answering member: Dr Thérèse Coffey | **Department:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

A study in 2016 showed that of the estimated 12.2 million tonnes of plastic entering the global marine environment every year, 9.5 million tonnes (over 80%) came from land based sources. The report identified larger plastic litter, including single use plastics such as drinks bottles, and other types of plastic packaging as the main source of plastics entering the seas. Much of this plastic will have been washed into the seas down rivers. The conclusions of this report are consistent with the findings of UK marine litter monitoring supported by Defra.

The two reports can be found at:

<http://www.eunomia.co.uk/reports-tools/plastics-in-the-marine-environment/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-strategy-part-three-uk-programme-of-measures>

HC Deb 05 Dec 2017 | PQ115824

[Plastics: Seas and Oceans](#)

Asked by: Coaker, Vernon

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress the Government has made on international steps to tackle plastic pollution in the oceans; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Dr Thérèse Coffey | **Department:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

At the recent Our Ocean conference the UK made several voluntary commitments to help tackle marine plastic pollution. These included signing up to the UN's Clean Seas campaign, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the Global Ghost Gear Initiative. These programmes aim to transform habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to reduce marine plastic pollution and the harm it causes.

HC Deb 18 Oct 2017 | PQ 07387

[Marine Environment: Developing Countries](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what voluntary initiatives his Department has implemented under the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Answering member: Dr Thérèse Coffey | **Department:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The United Kingdom has made four voluntary commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the following topics:

- **Marine science.** The UK has pledged to work actively with international partners in a range of major issues such as strengthening global ocean observations, world ocean assessments and data sharing.
- **Marine Litter.** The UK has committed to several actions in order to combat marine litter. These include reducing the volume of single use plastic bags, the introduction of national litter strategies and banning microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. The UK has also signed up to the UN Clean Seas Initiative.
- **Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) Programme.** The UK has committed to delivering a package of measures that will help to provide Commonwealth Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions with accurate hydrographic and scientific data relating to their marine environment. The UK will also provide training and capacity building for national bodies involved in the research and management of marine resources, to enable them to use the data to promote economic growth and development.
- **Marine Protected Areas in the UK and our Overseas Territories.** The UK has committed to ensuring that UK waters are managed and used in a sustainable way, including by working internationally with our Overseas

Territories in order to protect the globally significant biodiversity found in their waters

A more detailed summary of the commitments of the United Kingdom and other States and organisations is at

<https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>

HC Deb 04 Sep 2017 | PQ 4888

[Marine Environment: Plastics](#)

Asked by: Lord Hylton

Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the UN Oceans Conference on 5–9 June and the Council of the European Union Environment Council on 19 June, what plans they have to reduce, and if possible eliminate, the pollution of oceans, seas and beaches by plastic materials.

Answering member: Lord Gardiner of Kimble | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

At the recent UN Oceans Conference the UK made several voluntary commitments, including signing up to the UN's CleanSeas campaign. This programme aims to transform habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to dramatically reduce marine litter and the harm it causes.

The UK Government has undertaken several key actions to protect the marine environment from marine litter which are set out in the Marine Strategy Part Three. Recent additional actions include the publication of the National Litter Strategy for England and our plans to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. We also work with neighbouring countries to address this issue, particularly through the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on marine litter.

HC Deb 20 Jul 2017 | HL670

**Debates:
House of Commons**

Oral Questions: Single-use plastic bottles

[HC Deb 26 April 2018 Vol 639 c994](#)

Oral Questions: Plastic Waste

[HC Deb 26 April 2018 Vol 639 c1000](#)

Marine Environment

[HC Deb 14 November 2017 Col 85WH](#)

House of Lords

Environment: 25-year Plan

[HL Deb 29 January 2018 Vol 788 c1291](#)

Environmental Protection (Microbeads) (England) Regulations 2017

[HL Deb 18 December 2017 Vol 787 c1843](#)

Air and Water Pollution: Impact

[HL Deb 26 October 2017 Vol 785 c1044](#)

EDMs

[CAMBRIAN BEACH GUARDIANS](#)

of Wales; celebrates its commitment to recycling *marine litter* and to promoting the use of biodegradable ... materials rather than *plastics*; supports its involvement in the National Beach Cleans organised by *Sea* ... the release of party balloons to prevent them from polluting the *sea*; notes the hazards posed by balloons

22 Feb 2018 | EDMs | 968 (session 2017-19)

Primary sponsor: Saville Roberts, Liz

5. Useful links and further reading

House of Commons Library briefing papers:

- [Plastic bags – the single use carrier bag charge](#), 22 June 2017
- [Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products](#), 4 January 2017
- [UK Household recycling](#), 24 October 2016
- [Litter](#), 21 July 2017
- POST Note on [Designing a Circular Economy](#) 26 September 2016
- POST Note [Marine Microplastic Pollution](#) 05 June 2016
- POST Note [Maximising the Value of Recycled Materials](#) January 2013

House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee reports:

- [Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide, 22 December 2017, HC339](#) and Government response, [Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide: Government Response to the Committee's First Report, 26 February 2018, HC 841](#). The Committee has also commented on the Government's response: [Government dragging its feet tackling plastic waste](#).
- [Disposable Packaging: Coffee Cups, 5 January 2018, HC 657](#) and Government response, [Disposable Packaging: Coffee Cups: Government's Response to the Committee's Second Report, 09 March 2018, HC 867](#). The Committee commented on the Government's response, [Government promises no effective action on UK's mountain of coffee cup waste](#).
- [Environmental impact of microplastics, 24 August 2016, HC179](#) and Government response [Environmental impact of microplastics: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2016–17, 14 November 2016, HC802](#).

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