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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1357
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/02776/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee

22 November 2023

Dear Jack Sargeant,

Thank you for your letter of 6 October regarding Petition P-06-1357 which asks whether the Welsh Government plan to work with relevant organisations and experts to draw up a Microplastics Action Plan for Wales, and also consider the establishment of an expert group to advise on the issue of microplastics.

I am equally concerned about the impact microplastics are having on our environment, health, and biodiversity. As explained in my previous response, we are fully committed to tackling plastic pollution and we're proud of the measures we have in place, such as our Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023, and also some of the newer measures we have on the horizon such as the Workplace Recycling Regulations which will come into force in April 2024, and the work we are continuing to do to introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers.

As you are aware from my previous response, we have also worked across governments to develop a British Standard to prevent the loss of plastic pellets to the environment during the production and transport phase of the plastics lifecycle, and we continue to work with the UK and Devolved Governments to develop a microplastics indicator for our seas. Additionally, we are also looking for opportunities to influence the negotiations taking place at the United Nations to develop a global treaty on plastics.

I appreciate that my previous response was limited to the actions within my Ministerial portfolio. I am pleased to now give you an update on activities across the Welsh Government. For ease of reference, there are listed in the order they appeared in the petitioner's correspondence:

Microplastic pollution of farmland

The Welsh Government is working with the other governments of the United Kingdom on the development of a revised fertilisers regulatory regime, which will give consideration to controls on microplastics in materials which are to be applied to land. This work is being carried out under the Fertilisers Common Framework. The Fertilisers Common Framework was drafted to support the effective regulation of fertilisers across the UK following the

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Notably it supports the functioning of retained EU legislation, domestic legislation, as well as communication and decision-making processes between the four governments of the UK in relation to fertilisers. This work includes but is not limited to consideration of the controls introduced in the European Union in relation to plastics with materials applied to land, including Regulation (EU) 2019/1009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 laying down rules on the making available on the market of EU fertilising products.

Lack of testing for microplastics in Wales

Microplastics have an eco-toxicological impact on aquatic life and they also negatively impact on the wider environment. Understanding the presence of microplastics in potable water is a concern and it is considered in policy development by the Welsh Government. The most comprehensive UK report on microplastics in drinking water was published by the UK Water Industry Research (UKWIR) in 2019 and is available to view at [https://ukwir.org/view/\\$NvDnwfm](https://ukwir.org/view/$NvDnwfm). The UKWIR research found that more than 99.9% of microplastics are removed from drinking water and waste water through water company treatment processes. Nevertheless, we recognise that more research is needed to understand the full impact of plastic pollution on human health and the environment.

There is currently no statutory requirement to test microplastics in waterbodies in Wales. However, the Emerging Chemical Threats to Water Quality group, managed by Welsh Government, is considering the role of microplastics as part of their wider objective to identify chemical substances and associated issues which present a threat to water quality in Wales.

Washing machines

Any decision to follow France and legislate on the production of washing machines with microplastic filters would rest with the UK Government.

Education sector

The Welsh Government statutory guidance provides that all schools should ensure that arrangements are in place so that second-hand school uniforms are available for pupils to acquire. Second-hand uniforms can benefit all parents, particularly those on low incomes. In addition, by extending the life of garments, schools can encourage sustainability and its wider benefits.

Schools should promote the sustainability and environmental benefits of recycling uniform items when advertising their second-hand uniform arrangements.

We recently held a consultation on school uniform policy regarding proposed changes to our statutory guidance here in Wales. The consultation received an extremely high number of responses from stakeholders.

Responses from the consultation showed a considerable call for uniforms to be retained as school uniform can provide a sense of identity, community and cohesion within the school. However, the majority of those who responded to the consultation agreed that logos should not be required. Nearly 90% of respondents also felt that schools should avoid single supplier agreements; and there was almost universal consensus that schools should operate uniform exchange or recycling schemes.

Community enterprises

Re-use and repair has an important role to play in achieving our zero waste ambitions as outlined in our circular economy strategy [Beyond Recycling](#), with the potential for saving hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste.

We have also set up a re-use and repair programme, through which the Welsh Government is working to support the development of a universal culture of re-use, repair and remanufacture within our communities and town centres.

Through this programme we support a number of initiatives that enable local communities to repair, recycle, re-purpose, and rent items to keep them in use for as long as possible, as such as Repair Cafes, re-use facilities and Libraries of Things. This reduces the volume of raw materials and energy needed to manufacture new products and hence carbon emissions, while also building skills, strengthening community resilience, and helping to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Business support and alternative materials

Business Wales offers a wide range of advice and support on green policies, practices and resource efficiency as well as workshops. [Decarbonisation](#) Advisers are available to support businesses to adopt or improve environmental strategies, and work with businesses towards creating a resource efficient and resilient business. The [Green Growth Pledge](#) is part of the specialist sustainability support available through Business Wales and is open to all Welsh SMEs regardless of their industry sector. It provides a practical way for businesses to demonstrate their positive impact on the people and places around them and join a growing community of forward-thinking organisations.

The Business Wales Green Ambition campaign helps businesses to improve their knowledge and understanding of resource efficiency. The [campaign](#) encourages businesses to take action to mitigate their impact on climate change and supports the Welsh Government ambition towards net zero economy. It provides a practical way for businesses to demonstrate their positive impact on the people and places around them and join a growing community of forward-thinking organisations. A [cost of doing business zone](#) on the Business Wales website brings together existing content and tools available to support businesses to reduce their use of resources and costs. This zone will act as the focal point for any future advice and support for businesses.

Other sources of plastic

Microplastics can arise from a variety of sources, including from the breakdown of larger products. To tackle this, on 30 October 2023, bans on commonly littered single-use plastic products are scheduled to come into effect including:

- Single-use plastic cutlery
- Single-use plastic plates
- Single-use plastic stirrers
- Single-use plastic drinking straws – this product has an exemption for health needs
- Single-use plastic stemmed cotton buds
- Single-use plastic balloon sticks
- Expanded and foamed extruded polystyrene fast-food containers
- Expanded and foamed extruded polystyrene cups.

This is the first stage of our plans to tackle plastic pollution by phasing out unnecessary single-use plastic products.

We are currently seeking views on proposals to introduce similar bans for wet wipes with plastic content in a UK-wide public consultation. This is due to close on 25 November 2023.

We are also planning to introduce bans on polystyrene lids for cups and fast-food containers, thin plastic single-use carrier bags and products made of oxo-degradable plastic by spring 2026.

We are also working with governments across the UK to develop an environmental policy on disposable vapes, which are also frequently littered.

Marine plastic

The Welsh Government are working with UK Government to develop a microplastics indicator for the marine environment which will be the first of its kind. This indicator will form part of our assessment for marine litter levels in the marine environment and our ability to achieve Good Environmental Status.

Wales was the first country in the UK to introduce an end-of-life fishing gear recycling scheme which now operates at a number of ports. This scheme allows for fishers to sustainably dispose of their gear and any ghost gear which may have been collected at sea. This reduces the risk of gear being lost and abandoned at sea resulting in the further breakdown of gear into smaller parts or microplastics.

Finally, I acknowledge and understand the petitioner feels there are more things we need to consider to tackle the issue of microplastics. I agree that a call for evidence could be useful to identify the various sources of microplastic pollution and to help propose solutions and remedies.

The Welsh Government is committed to taking a focussed and evidence-based approach to the problem. At this time, I believe that continuing to focus on delivering practical action, as set out in this letter, will have more tangible impact than developing an Action Plan. I have asked my officials to arrange a meeting with the petitioner to discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely,



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