

Single use plastic packaging on TFW services

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 07 Mai 2019

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-874

Petition title: Ban the sale of goods packaged in single use plastics on Transport for Wales services

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ban the sale of goods which are packaged using single use plastics on Transport for Wales services. As stated by the Welsh Government: "Transport for Wales exists to drive forward the Welsh Government's vision of a high quality, safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network that the people of Wales are proud of." We feel that banning the sale of single use plastics which are damaging our natural environment would be a significant step in reaching this objective and demonstrating the Welsh Government's commitment to providing a fairer and safer future for the citizens of Wales.

Background

Single use plastics, or disposable plastics, are designed to be used once and thrown away or recycled. They are typically items such as plastic bottles, drinking straws, coffee cups and take-away food packaging. Recent media coverage, notably the [BBC Blue Planet II](#) series, has highlighted the scale of plastic debris in our oceans as a result of our 'throw-away' culture. The impact of single use plastic on the marine environment is evidenced by its prevalence in beach litter surveys. The [Marine Conservation Society's](#) 2017 [Beachwatch](#) Report showed "tiny bits of plastic were the most commonly found item" on beaches across the UK.

A 2017 report [Single Use Plastic and the Marine Environment](#) by [Eunomia](#) for [Seas at Risk](#), calculated the quantity of 'on-the-go' single use plastic waste "as these are most likely to escape normal waste collection systems". Key findings from the research include conclusions that:

- many of these items either do not need to be made from plastic (e.g. glass and paper alternatives exist), while others are used unnecessarily e.g. drinking straws;

- measures to reduce plastic consumption enjoy a high level of public support, which increases after the measures are implemented;
- solutions to reduce consumption of single-use plastics exist, and have been running in multiple places around the world; and
- drastically reducing consumption of key single-use plastic items would effectively eliminate a major source of marine pollution in all of Europe's seas.

A 2018 report by Eunomia, commissioned by the Welsh Government, [Options for Extended Producer Responsibility in Wales](#), estimated that “around 950 tonnes of takeaway food packaging waste are generated in Wales each year”, and it is estimated that “only 8.5% is recycled.” It continued:

While accounting for less than 0.06% by weight of Welsh municipal waste arisings, takeaway food packaging is a highly visible component of litter. We estimate that takeaway food packaging waste (which includes expanded polystyrene (EPS) containers) accounts for 1.6% of litter by weight on the ground and in litter bins, but accounts for a larger proportion overall by volume.

The report recommends that the Welsh Government should:

Conduct trials of reusable take-away packaging, perhaps within specific areas such as covered, permanent markets in the first instance, in order to better understand consumer acceptance. Examples already exist of reusable tiffins for some food types, and innovation, and expanded uptake should be encouraged in this area across the whole range of takeaway food types.

[Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#), as introduced by the [EU Waste Framework Directive](#), is a way of encouraging producers to consider the post-consumer phase of a product's lifecycle by giving them responsibility for it. Applying an EPR approach to goods sold through Transport for Wales services would involve encouraging producers to minimise waste in packaging design.

Transport for Wales Procurement

[Transport for Wales \(TfW\)](#) was established in 2015 as a wholly Welsh Government owned not-for-profit company. Its initial purpose was to procure and develop/manage the new Welsh rail franchise and Metro services on the valleys lines on behalf of the Welsh Government using executive powers devolved in 2018.

The Welsh Government's ambition is that TfW will become its transport delivery company. A business case is currently being developed to consider how this wider role might develop. This means that TfW may become responsible for further services in future, for example including certain bus services. However, in the short term it is primarily responsible for oversight of rail services.

The new franchise was awarded to KeolisAmey in May 2018. KeolisAmey began operating rail services in October 2018 as [TfWRail](#).

TfW and TfWRail are separate organisations. While TfW is a wholly Welsh Government owned not-for-profit company, TfWRail (KeolisAmey) is a commercial rail services and infrastructure company. However, they are adopting a “partnership” approach to rail service delivery.

While TfWRail is a commercial company, the Welsh Government has committed to procure as many rail related services as possible on a not-for-profit basis. In [evidence to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee in November 2018](#) the Chief Executive of TfW said that this would include “things like catering, cleaning, ticket sales, marketing, [and car parking]”. He continued to say that “at seat catering” would be the first service TfW will procure on this basis and that a full business case would be prepared.

The letter from the Minister for Economy and Transport to the Petitions Committee responding to this petition makes no direct commitment to ban single use plastic packaging. However, he refers to:

- TfW’s “Sustainable Development Plan”, suggesting that through this TfW will “help to deliver and support a sustainable future for Wales that is fully in line with the goals and ways of working, set out in the Welsh Government’s Future Generations Act”; and
- TfW’s “Waste Management Plan” which “implements the principles of the European Waste Hierarchy through eliminating, reducing, reusing, recycling and recovering waste”. He provides a commitment to reduce the use of plastic drinks bottles as an example.

At time of writing neither document has been published on the TfW website.

Welsh Government action

In a written statement on [28 September 2017](#), the then Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, stated that “as a Government we accept more needs to be done to improve our recycling rate still further and tackle litter and the issues associated with a ‘throw away’ society and ‘disposable’ culture”. She suggested that, in order to address this issue, the aim should be to “prevent litter entering the environment in the first place”, and “to value the resources we all too often take for granted”. She announced the Eunomia study into EPR (above) to assess possible options, saying:

I have commissioned a study to assess possible interventions to increase waste prevention, increase recycling and reduce land and marine based litter. Producer responsibility schemes such as the current schemes in place in the UK will be included in the research. Deposit Return Schemes will also be included. The research will also assess the likely environmental, economic and social impacts of potential extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, including any potential unintended consequences

In a Welsh Government Plenary statement on [27 February 2018](#), the then Minister for the Environment, Hannah Blythyn AM, discussed the Welsh Government’s action on single use plastics:

And we have secured Wales' involvement in the UK Government's call for evidence about how it will address the issue of single use plastics, including through the use of tax.

Alongside this, we will continue to work on a potential standalone disposable plastics tax for Wales.

In a Welsh Government Plenary statement on [8 May 2018](#), the then Minister for the Environment announced the outcomes of the EPR study. She said:

I am considering amendments to the Producer Responsibility Obligations Regulations so that producers and retailers pay a larger share of waste management costs.

... We continue to work with HM Treasury on a UK single-use plastics tax.

...I can announce that the Welsh Government has signed up to WRAP UK's Plastics Pact.

She also announced ways in which the Welsh Government is working to "practice what we preach":

I am committed to ensuring Welsh Government offices are single-use plastic free by the end of this Assembly term...

...We do not use plastic straws, stirrers or cutlery in our canteens. In addition, Welsh Government will continue to influence the broader public sector in Wales - for example through 'catering disposables' procurement contracts across the Welsh Government estate, working with Value Wales.

In Plenary on [13 June 2018](#), in response to a question from the Conservative Party spokesperson David Melding AM, the then Minister for the Environment said the Welsh Government was looking at how to:

... use public procurement ... particularly in the public sector, and with any contracts and supply chains, and how we apply green public procurement. And, particularly within my own portfolio, we're looking at actually how, working alongside the National Procurement Service, alongside WRAP, and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales's office, to develop a range of measures that allow us to identify trends and actions to help reduce the use of plastics.

On Monday [18 February 2019](#), the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn AM released a written statement announcing [three consultations that are aiming to tackle plastic and packaging waste](#).

She has urged the Welsh public to have their say on the joint proposals, launched by the UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The proposals include [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#) for packaging (that will apply to the UK as a whole), and a [Deposit Return Scheme \(DRS\)](#) for drinks containers applying to Wales, England and Northern Ireland (the Scottish Government [consulted on DRS](#) proposals last year).

A third UK-wide consultation, published by HM Treasury, is seeking views on a proposed [tax on the production and importation of plastic packaging](#) containing less than 30% recycled content.

National Assembly for Wales action

The Fourth Assembly's Petitions Committee considered a [previous petition](#) on banning polystyrene packaging between 2014 and 2016. Following the response from the then Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, the Committee agreed that there was there was little more it could do to take the issue forward and the petition was closed.

The Fifth Assembly's [Petitions Committee](#) is currently considering the following related petitions, aimed at reducing plastic waste:

- [P-05-750 For single use items: introduce a Deposit Return System for drink containers and make fast food containers and utensils compostable;](#)
- [P-05-803 Our natural world is being poisoned by single use plastics...it's time to introduce a tax!;](#)
- [P-05-822 Ban plastic straws \(when drinking milk\) in our schools;](#)
- [P-05-829 Ban Single Use Plastic Items in Wales; and](#)
- [P-05-847 Create water fountains in the centre of cities and towns to eliminate plastic waste.](#)

The [Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee](#) has recently undertaken an [inquiry](#) into microplastic pollution in welsh rivers. The report has not yet been published.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.