



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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## **WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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**TITLE**        **Plastic Waste**

**DATE**        **16 July 2019**

**BY**            **Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local  
Government**

The increasing public concern in relation to plastic waste and particularly single use plastic underlines the importance of tackling this issue. As a Government we, therefore, welcome the recent report by the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee which identified a number of key areas where there is a need for action.

As Deputy Minister for this area, I wanted to set out the action that we are taking and how we plan to build on the progress we have already made in Wales on this issue.

Firstly, I want to address the fact that the recent BBC *War on Plastic* documentary found plastic waste from Wales on an illegal waste site in Asia. This is clearly unacceptable. I am pleased the relevant local authority has acted swiftly to ensure that waste is no longer exported beyond the European Union. I will also be writing to all our other local authorities to ask them to review their arrangements to ensure that no material from elsewhere in Wales will find its way to illegal waste sites.

The longer term solution to this issue is not just about tackling the amount of plastic that ends up in landfill or polluting the world's habitats; we must reduce the amount of resources we use and keep materials in use for as long as possible. This is why our aim is to move to a circular economy. We must work to collect materials in the best way so they can be recycled and fed back into our economy.

Recycling is vital and it is important the public in Wales have confidence the material they are recycling in their homes is not simply disposed of.

As part of our success in making a transformational shift over the last 20 years, from a nation which recycled less than 5%, to a country which recycles 63% of its local authority municipal waste, we have invested significantly in our infrastructure. This means around 95% of municipal waste from Wales is processed in the UK, with the majority processed here in Wales.

Later this year, we will be consulting on our proposals to go further. For business waste, we will implement the provisions in the Environment (Wales) Act to require the separate collection of materials for recycling, to ensure materials that can be recycled are not wasted. This will include provisions which ban the disposal of food waste to sewers by businesses and the public sector.

I also recognise that in order to tackle the issue of plastic waste, we must go beyond recycling. This is why we have already committed to bringing forward a ban or restriction on the sale of commonly littered single use plastic items; including straws, stirrers and cotton buds, single use plastic cutlery and expanded polystyrene food packaging and drinks containers. We are also considering measures to help either reduce the consumption of single use plastic items or, if they are used, to ensure they are correctly disposed of.

To address the fundamental issues associated with litter, we are developing a new Litter Programme which will culminate in a new pan Wales Litter Plan. To help develop and deliver this programme, I am establishing a new group which will draw upon the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of sectors to identify long lasting, sustainable solutions to littering.

As a Government, we recognise the need to collaborate with others to bring about wider change. This is why we jointly consulted with the UK Government and other Devolved Administrations on reforms to the packaging regime. In the UK, we generate 11.6m tonnes of packaging waste annually. These proposals, to introduce Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging and make producers responsible for their packaging at the end of its life, are key to addressing the issue of packaging waste. Our aim is to not only drive an increase in recyclable packaging, but to also reduce the amount of packaging used, thereby dramatically reducing the amount of waste.

In addition, our joint consultation on a Deposit Return Scheme proposes measures to increase the collection of high quality materials including plastics via a mechanism which has been successfully used in other parts of the world to reduce litter and avoid plastic waste. We are currently considering the responses to these consultations and I will provide an update to Members in the autumn. We are also working with the UK Government on the introduction of a tax on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content whilst keeping the option open to take specific separate action in Wales.

The production of plastic will however continue and in key areas it will play an important role. I am, therefore, prioritising support to businesses and citizens to use plastic more efficiently and to reuse it wherever possible. This is a key part of the £6.5m Circular Economy Investment Fund I recently launched, which will support and incentivise businesses in Wales to innovate in order to reuse plastic waste and support the transition towards a circular economy.

In parallel, we are also continuing to deliver initiatives to avoid the use of plastic where possible. Our *Refill Nation* initiative encourages people across Wales to refill their drinks containers by making drinking water accessible and free.

As the Minister with responsibility for this area, I am determined Wales will continue to be at the forefront of action on waste. Building on our considerable achievements to date, it is important our focus is now beyond waste management and our globally recognised achievements on recycling are the basis of our drive towards a more circular economy.

I welcome the public call for accelerated action and the Committee's call for a strategic approach. I will, therefore, be developing a revamped zero waste strategy for consultation later this year to deliver our collective ambition. Our ambition to become a zero waste nation by 2050 remains undiminished.