



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Selaine Saxby MP
House of Commons
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1 April 2021

Dear Selaine,

Thank you for your letter of 26 November to the Secretary of State about plastics produced by period products littering our beaches. I am replying as the Minister responsible for environmental issues. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

Please let me assure your constituent that the Government is committed to achieving a clean, healthy, safe, biologically diverse and productive ocean. Science estimates that between 4.8 and 12.7 million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean globally every year. This is why we are focusing our efforts on turning off the tap of plastic pollution at its source.

We have made significant progress, by introducing one of the world's toughest bans on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products. This will help to stop billions of these tiny plastic pieces from entering the ocean and being eaten by marine wildlife. We have also reduced the use of single-use carrier bags by the main supermarket retailers by 95% since 2014 with our 5p charge and there has been a reduction of plastic bags found on our beaches and the seafloor. Following a consultation, it was announced on 31 August 2020 on GOV.UK that the Government has stepped up its fight against single-use plastics by confirming that the minimum plastic carrier bag charge will be increased to 10p and will be extended to all retailers from spring 2021.

The Government funds the Marine Conservation Society to record litter from sections of our coasts which helps us monitor the levels and trends of plastic pollution across several years. This data is used in combination with other monitoring data to inform our decisions about how to tackle marine litter. We welcome these efforts which provide valuable citizen science data and, encourage more people to become stewards of the marine environment.

As plastic pollution in the ocean is a global problem, we meet and work with other countries and organisations around the world to address it. In 2018, the UK and Vanuatu launched the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (CCOA). This Alliance has grown to a community of 34 countries, over half the Commonwealth, all committed to taking action to reduce plastic pollution in the ocean.

We are also an active member of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, a group that works hard to prevent lost and discarded fishing gear from harming marine animals.

We recognise the need to address the issues associated with the environmental impact of absorbent hygiene products (AHPs). In line with the Resources and Waste Strategy published in December 2018, we are considering the best approach for a range of products. There are a number of policy measures available to us, including standards and consumer information, and we believe the right approach for each product requires careful consideration taking account of various factors, for example, waste benefits versus energy usage. Therefore, we are carrying out new research into the impacts of reusable and disposable AHPs, which will inform future action.

We are also seeking new powers in our landmark Environment Bill to drive the market towards more sustainable products. These measures form a package of powers that will help incentivise and shift the market towards more reusable alternatives.

However, plastic has an important role to play in many products due to its strength and sterility. We must therefore think carefully about how we solve the problems arising from plastic waste in order to avoid unintended consequences.

Our Resources and Waste Strategy (RWS) explains how we will do this, through moving towards a more circular economy. For the most problematic plastics we are going faster – that is why we are committed to working towards all plastic packaging being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025: www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-and-waste-strategy-for-england.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.



REBECCA POW MP