

Ban Polystyrene and Other Single Use Plastic

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 24 Ionawr 2022
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Petition Number: P-06-1238

Petition title: Ban Polystyrene and other single use plastics

Text of petition: On the 3rd July 2021 the European Union have banned a range of single use plastics including polystyrene, plastic cutlery, plastic plates, straws, cups and even plastic earbuds. There is a complete ban across all 27 member states. I think Wales should follow in their footsteps and we should ban these items too.

Many takeaways in Wales still use 100s of polystyrene containers daily because they are the cheapest option.

Please support this.

Additional Details:

Polystyrene cannot be recycled and has catastrophic effects on the environment; it is also toxic when left in the environment.



1. Background

It is widely recognised that there are significant environmental issues from the use and inappropriate disposal of single-use plastic items such as take away food containers. During the Marine Conservation Society's 2021 Great British Beach Clean, 75% of all litter collected was plastic or polystyrene.

A 2018 Welsh Government commissioned report, Options for Extended Producer Responsibility in Wales, estimated 'around 950 tonnes of takeaway food packaging waste are generated in Wales each year'. It estimated 'only 8.5% is recycled'. It continued:

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.

One of the most problematic non-recyclable materials is expanded polystyrene (EPS) or foam polystyrene. It is exceptionally lightweight and a good insulator, so is effective for keeping food warm. Keep Wales Tidy states that, as well as being not commonly recycled, it:

- is light and easily transported by wind and water;
- breaks into small pieces making it difficult to clean; and
- stays in the environment for a very long time.

Action outside of Wales

The EU Directive on Single-Use Plastics came into force in 2019. From July 2021 certain single-use plastics are banned from Member States market.

In May 2019, the then Environment Secretary Michael Gove confirmed a ban on plastic straws, drinks stirrers, and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England from April 2020. This was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but came into force in October 2020.

2. Welsh Government action

On 18 March 2020 the previous Welsh Government announced its intention to ban plastic straws, cutlery, polystyrene food and drink containers and a range of

other single use plastic items. A consultation on proposals to reduce single use plastic in Wales took place in 2020. Responses are currently being reviewed.

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government reiterated its intention to legislate to abolish commonly littered single use plastics.

In March 2021 the Welsh Government published its circular economy strategy, Beyond Recycling, which includes a headline action to “phase out unnecessary single-use items, especially plastic”. It also says that the Welsh Government will develop options for a tax or charge on disposable plastic cups and food containers.

The Welsh Government is delivering a number of Beyond Recycling's commitments through the UK Environment Act 2021. Including provisions relating to Extended Producer Responsibility and a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers.

In response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS reiterated the Welsh Government's “ambition to abolish the use of the most commonly littered single use plastics” and highlighted the above consultation.

The Minister draws attention to the introduction of the *Internal Market Act 2020* which has “complicated matters”, referring to uncertainties about the practicalities of a ban, as any single-use plastics banned in Wales but permitted or imported into the rest of the UK could still be sold in Wales. Raising questions over the effect of ban on Welsh businesses.

The Minster highlighted the “ongoing legal challenge” to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, clarifying that the Welsh Government is able to “ban the use of plastics in Wales, but not the sale of them”. The Minister described the position as “a nonsense”, and said there is an “ongoing conversation” on the matter. However, in response to this petition the Minister states:

...we are taking all necessary steps to introduce legislation as quickly as possible within this Senedd term, to bring forward the single use plastic bans.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Fifth Senedd's Petition Committee considered a number of petitions aimed at reducing plastic waste, including:

- P-05-874 Ban the sale of goods packaged in single use plastics on Transport for Wales services
- P-05-750 For single use items: introduce a Deposit Return System for drink containers and make fast food containers and utensils compostable;
- P-05-829 Ban Single Use Plastic Items in Wales;
- P-05-847 Create water fountains in the centre of cities and towns to eliminate plastic waste; and
- P-05-803 Our natural world is being poisoned by single use plastics...it's time to introduce a tax!

In June 2019, the then Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs (CCERA) Committee published its report following its inquiry into reducing plastic waste. This included the recommendation:

The Welsh Government should explore the potential for introducing Welsh legislation to reduce plastic waste and pollution, based on the model for emissions reduction in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation and stated it is:

... committed to implementing a range of legislative measures to help reduce, ban or restrict the sale of a number of commonly littered single use plastic items including cotton buds, cups for beverages and plastic straws.

On 9 December 2021, the Chair of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee wrote to the Minister requesting an update on progress made by the Welsh Government in taking forward proposals to ban single use plastic items.

Littering and plastic waste was one of three main issues looked at by the last Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP). It published its report in November 2020 and made a number of recommendations, including that the Welsh Government should “take significant action quickly to end the production of single-use plastics”.

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.