

Ban single use plastic milk bottles in schools

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 9 Mehefin 2020
Petitions Committee | 9 June 2020

Reference: RS20/12392-1

Petition Number P-05-953

Petition title: Ban Single Use Plastic Milk Bottles in schools

Text of petition: We, children of St Aidan's Church in Wales VA School, call on the National Assembly of Wales to change the way we use plastic milk bottles in schools. Each day in Wales we use approximately 300kg of plastic milk bottles which are used as part of the free milk scheme in schools. We think it is portraying a negative view towards sustainability, because more people are buying more plastic. The amount of plastic bottles we use is outrageous.

Plastic is made out of natural gas, crude oil and coal. We are using about 4,000 plastic bottles nearly every year for this free milk scheme. We want you to ban single use plastic milk bottles in school. We suggest that all schools in Wales purchase big bottles of milk and pour it in plastic cups which we can use again. We are using the fossil fuels faster than we can develop it. Thank you for reading this petition and for hopefully helping the country sort this mass of waste.



1. 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. 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 [2019 Great British Beach Clean Report](#) showed "plastic and polystyrene pieces [are] the most common litter items found" on UK beaches.

A 2018 report by Eunomia, commissioned by the Welsh Government, [Options for Extended Producer Responsibility in Wales](#), found that plastic bottles make up 4.2% (by weight) of all litter in Wales. The report modelled estimated waste flows for beverage containers, estimating the waste generated from plastic bottles at 29,629 tonnes, with an estimated recycling rate of 64.8%.

[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 the product's collection, sorting, treatment, disposal etc.. Applying an EPR approach to school milk supply would involve encouraging producers to minimise waste in packaging design.

A 2019 study undertaken by WRAP Cymru, [comparing milk packaging options for primary schools](#), investigated the environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and costs associated with the different packaging types for milk being supplied to schools in a pilot area in Pembrokeshire. The packaging types investigated were:

- a plastic bottle (the current packaging format that acted as a baseline);
- a glass bottle alternative; and
- a pergal alternative (bulk storage of milk in a container that fits in a refrigerated dispenser).

The study found:

... that both glass bottles and pergals have the potential to deliver cost savings in the region of 15-20% over the current plastic bottle used, with pergals offering the greatest cost-saving opportunity.

When looking at the environmental impact of the different packaging types, the study found that the 'proximity of the supply chain had a significant influence', concluding that:

Where the impacts of supply chain logistics are the same then pergalas, followed by glass bottles, offer lower environmental impacts, potentially leading to a 25-30% reduction of GHG emissions.

Mechanism in Schools

Local authorities are responsible for procuring milk (and its packaging) for schools from suppliers.

Schools participating in the free school milk scheme can offer free milk to Foundation Phase children and subsidised milk to learners in Key Stage 2. At Foundation Phase, the European Community pays a subsidy and the Welsh Government pays a top-up subsidy. For pupils at Key Stage 2, the Welsh Government subsidises the cost of school milk alongside the European Community. Schools, local authorities, suppliers or other organisations can claim the subsidy. Eligible pupils may receive up to 250ml of subsidised milk products each school day.

School milk suppliers may provide milk to schools in large bottles which the school would then distribute to pupils (in beakers), or it may be provided in individual portions which may be packaged in cartons which often have a straw, in a plastic sleeve, attached, or straws may be provided separately by the supplier.

2. Welsh Government action

In a [written statement](#) on 27 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'.

In a Welsh Government statement delivered in Plenary on [8 May 2018](#), the then Minister for the Environment, Hannah Blythyn AM, announced 'that the Welsh Government has signed up to [WRAP UK's Plastics Pact](#)', which aims to eliminate single use packaging by 2025.

On 18 March 2020 the Welsh Government [announced its intention to ban single use plastics](#) in Wales, as 'part of a wider, integrated approach to address the problems created by excess plastic and litter in communities'. The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn AM, confirmed that a consultation on the proposals will take place 'in the coming months', with 'restrictions due to come into force in the first half of 2021'.

Alongside this announcement, the Welsh Government is [currently consulting on 'Beyond Recycling'](#); a circular economy strategy setting out proposals that include a 'move towards zero waste by 2050'. The [consultation](#) was launched on 19 December 2019, and is due to close on 24 April 2020.

The UK Government has introduced the [Environment Bill 2020-21](#), which legislates in a number of areas within the competence of the National Assembly for Wales. These include provisions to introduce a revised EPR scheme; powers to regulate for eco-design standards and resource efficiency information across a wider range of products; and provides a framework for a deposit return scheme (DRS).

The Welsh Government laid the [Legislative Consent Memorandum \(LCM\) for the Bill](#) before the National Assembly on 26 February 2020. In relation to the provisions being made for EPR waste management and single use plastics, the Welsh Government views the Bill as a 'timely opportunity to progress key features of its circular economy strategy'.

In her [response to this petition](#), the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government said that the Welsh Government:

... have been speaking to children and young people from across Wales as part of the consultation and the issue of how we use plastic is an important theme that has arisen across the country.

She highlighted that the Welsh Government has been working with WRAP Cymru on the 2019 study [comparing milk packaging options for primary schools](#) (discussed above), and encouraged the petitioners to raise their concerns with Pembrokeshire County Council 'who are responsible for deciding how services in their area are delivered'.

3. National Assembly for Wales action

The [Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee](#) briefly discussed replacing plastic milk bottles with glass as part of the Committee's inquiry into [reducing plastic waste](#). The Committee Chair, Mike Hedges AM, highlighted the '[huge movement away from glass to plastic](#)' and asked whether this was a problem. Giving evidence, David Jones from [Just One Ocean](#), drew attention to [how plastic has 'enhanced our lives as well as' having done harm](#), stressing how a balance is needed:

If you were to weigh up the cost of replacing all our plastic bottles with glass, you then have an increase in transportation of that product because of the increased weight. That's going to increase the amount of fuel you use and that's more emissions into the atmosphere

The Petitions Committee has considered a similar petition - [P-05-822 Ban plastic straws \(when drinking milk\) in our schools](#). The petition was closed in February 2020 following

correspondence from WRAP Cymru highlighting the Welsh Government's intention to eliminate the use of plastic straws by 2020.

In addition, the Committee has previously considered and completed the following related petitions, aimed at reducing plastic waste:

- 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; and
- P-05-847 Create water fountains in the centre of cities and towns to eliminate plastic waste.

The Committee is currently considering related petition P-05-803 Our natural world is being poisoned by single use plastics..it's time to introduce a tax!

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