

# DEFRA: CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON COMMONLY LITTERED AND PROBLEMATIC PLASTIC ITEMS

Response from Humanist Climate Action,  
February 2022



## ABOUT HUMANIST CLIMATE ACTION

Humanist Climate Action is a volunteer-led network of Humanists UK members and supporters committed to redefining lifestyles and campaigning for policies that promote low-carbon, ethical, and sustainable living in the light of the degeneration of the Earth's climate and biodiversity. We bring humanists together to facilitate individual and collective action on these issues. Humanists are guided by reason and science and recognise a moral duty towards the welfare of our fellow beings and the natural world. Humanists seek to engage in dialogue and debate rationally, intelligently, and with evidence, and promote the belief that humans are part of a wider natural world which must be treated sustainably for the sake of current and future generations.

## ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At Humanists UK, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by 100,000 members and supporters and over 100 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group.

## RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### Wet wipes

#### 1. Would you support a ban on wet wipes containing plastic?

Yes.

#### 2. In the case of a ban on wet wipes containing plastic, would you support there being some exemptions for wipes used for medical purposes? Medical uses of wet wipes include patient care, spill absorption, and to clean equipment and surfaces.

No. If alternatives that do not contain plastic (such as wet wipes made from bamboo) are available and are appropriate for medical purposes these should be used instead of wipes containing plastic.

#### 3. As well as wipes used for medical purposes, are you aware of any uses or situations in which the use of wet wipes containing plastic is essential and could be considered for any exemptions in future legislation?

No.

#### 4. Are you aware of the water industry's Fine to Flush standard?

Yes.

#### 5. If you answered yes to question 4, do you think the current water industry 'Fine-to-Flush' standard is effective in reducing sewer blockages caused by wet wipes?

No. Though the "fine to flush" standard was introduced in 2019, blockages in sewers continue to be reported by water companies. It is possible that a public awareness campaign is needed to highlight the standard and the certification mark so consumers can identify products more easily.



**6. Do you support a mandatory 'flushability' standard for wet wipe products placed on the market to indicate more clearly which wipe products are truly flushable?**

Yes.

**7. Do you support mandatory labelling on packaging about disposal and the impact of wet wipe products on the environment?**

Yes.

**8. Would you support an extended producer responsibility scheme for wipes containing plastic? If so, how might this operate?**

Yes.

**9. What alternatives are there to single-use plastic wet wipes, including wipes made from non-plastic materials? We would welcome evidence on the cost of these alternatives, their environmental impact and any issues that could be caused by increased use of them.**

Yes. There are various alternatives available to single-use plastic wet wipes, for example 100% biodegradable bamboo wipes, and reusable/washable items such as reusable kitchen towels or cotton makeup remover pads. While the upfront cost of some reusable items can be prohibitive, there can be a monetary saving over time as the product is reused.

#### **Tobacco filters**

**10. Do you support the government taking regulatory action to tackle littering of tobacco filters?**

Yes.

**11. If the government takes forward an extended producer responsibility (EPR) scheme to tackle cigarette littering, which of the following costs related to managing littered tobacco filters, if any, do you think should be covered by producers?**

- a. campaigns aimed at promoting responsible disposal
- b. provision of bins and management of binned filters
- c. clearing up ground litter and subsequent treatment
- d. data gathering and reporting

Producer responsibility means that manufacturers are responsible for the entire lifecycle of a product, including the end of life impacts of that product. As such, producers need to ensure that consumers know the appropriate methods of disposal and have access to those methods. If someone that just brought their product does not dispose of it correctly, this should also be the producers responsibility as that is still a part of the product's lifecycle.

#### **Question 12-16**

No answer.

#### **Single-use plastic sachets**

**17. What environmental impacts do single-use plastic sachets have? What is the evidence in support of your view?**



According to A Plastic Planet 855 billion sachets are used annually around the world.<sup>1</sup> As single-use plastic sachets are extremely difficult to recycle they are therefore a major contributor to plastic waste and pollution.

**18. Are you aware of any alternatives to single-use plastic sachets? Do you have any evidence to support that these alternatives are more environmentally friendly than single-use plastic sachets?**

For sachets that contain dry materials, alternatives that are fully compostable are available. For example, many florists now use compostable flower food sachets which are industrially compostable. Other alternatives include refillable and resealable containers with corresponding refill stations and the use of materials that are recyclable such as mono-material.

**19. Do you support consulting on introducing a ban of single-use plastic sachets used for:**

- Food and drink: permanent food outlets including restaurants and cafes, and sachets provided with ready meals
- Food and drink: mobile outlets including trains, airplanes, food trucks
- Beauty industry: providing free samples at the point of sale or single-use quantities provided within a multipack

Yes - Support all of the above

**20. Do you support consulting on introducing a charge on single-use plastic sachets used for:**

- Food and drink: stationary outlets including restaurants and cafes
- Food and drink: mobile outlets including trains, airplanes, mobile food vendors
- Beauty industry: providing free samples at the point of sale

Yes - Support all of the above

**21. Are you aware of any other uses of single-use plastic sachets that could be considered for banning or introducing a charge on?**

Yes - flower food sachets, samples of laundry products, hand wipes.

**22. Are you aware of any uses or situations in which the use of sachets is essential and could be considered for exemptions in any future legislation? What is the evidence in support of your view?**

No.

**Single-use cups**

**23. Would you support the government consulting on a proposal to introduce a charge for single-use cups?**

Yes.

**24. Do you think this charge should be for both hot and cold drinks?**

Yes.

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<sup>1</sup> A Plastic Planet, *Campaigns*, <https://aplasticplanet.com/inspiring-change/campaigns/>



**25. Do you think this charge should apply to businesses of all sizes?**

Yes.

**26. Are you aware of any situations where the use of a single-use cup is essential and could be considered for exemptions from the charge in the future? E.g., because of business location, business type, type of product in the cup. Please give reasons and supporting evidence.**

No.

**Additional items**

**24. Please state any further single-use plastic items that you think should be considered for targeted future policy actions, and your reasons for this.**

Water bottles and other food packaging. The large carbon footprint and plastic pollution caused by these items could be cut down by removing unnecessary packaging, using alternative types of packaging, promoting refill stations and making them easier to use and encouraging the use of reusable water bottles and food containers.

**25. Regarding any additional items that you have provided, are you aware of any environmentally friendly alternatives that could be used instead?**

While it is useful to explore environmentally friendly packaging alternatives as there are some items that would not be able to travel without packaging, it is also important to remove as much packaging from the supply chain as possible to limit the issue at source. For example, having refill stations that are easily accessible will encourage consumers to eschew packaging altogether.

**Re-use and refill**

**26. What are the barriers to reuse and how could they be addressed? Please provide any supporting evidence.**

In order to reuse an item safely the original product must be of good quality but also affordable to consumers. Companies should be encouraged to produce high quality long-lasting products that can also be repaired.

**27. What are the barriers to refill and how could they be addressed? Please provide any supporting evidence.**

Currently the ability to access refill stations (for many types of product) is very limited. The majority of mainstream supermarkets for instance do not offer refills goods. Additionally, many manufacturers have not explored refill solutions for their products. This is something that could be incentivised by the government.

**28. How can the government incentivise increased reuse and refill?**

- Support businesses to phase out single-use packaging and innovate to find new ways of offering products.

**29. How could businesses incentivise customers to support reuse and refill?**

Loyalty reward schemes, points systems, affordable repair services and deposit return schemes could all be used to encourage customers to support reuse and refill.

**30. Please provide information about any successful case studies of reuse and refill.**



N/A

**31. Would you support the government consulting on regulating that restaurants cannot provide customers with any single-use products in eat-in settings? The existing exemption for straws would remain.**

Yes.

**For more details, information, and evidence, contact Humanist Climate Action:**

Lori Marriott

Humanist Climate Action Coordinator

[lori.marriott@humanism.org.uk](mailto:lori.marriott@humanism.org.uk)

[humanists.uk](http://humanists.uk)

