

Press release: UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste with ambitious plan to end sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds

The Government has announced the end to the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds at the start of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit.

The Prime Minister will also call on all other Commonwealth countries to join in the fight against plastic pollution.

Subject to the consultation, which the Environment Secretary will launch later this year, the Government is prepared to ban the sale of these items in England under plans to protect our rivers and seas and meet our 25 Year Environment Plan ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. This forms part of the wider government waste strategy – including the government's current call for evidence on how we can use the tax system to address single use plastics waste.

In order to eliminate these items from use the Government will work with industry to develop alternatives and ensure there is sufficient time to adapt. It will also propose excluding plastic straws for medical reasons.

Single-use plastic items such as straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds have a significant impact on our environment, both on land and in our seas and rivers when they are either littered or discarded incorrectly after use – with a recent study showing 8.5 billion plastic straws are thrown away each year in the UK.

The announcement comes as the Prime Minister has urged all Commonwealth countries to sign-up to the newly-formed [Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance](#) and take action, be this by a ban on microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

To drive this forward the UK government has committed a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Plastic waste is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world, which is why protecting the marine environment is central to our agenda at the Commonwealth Heads of Government

Meeting.

The UK government is a world leader on this issue, and the British public have shown passion and energy embracing our plastic bag charge and microbead ban, and today we have put forward ambitious plans to further reduce plastic waste from straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

Alongside our domestic action, this week we are rallying Commonwealth countries to join us in the fight against marine plastics, with £61.4million funding for global research and to improve waste management in developing countries.

The Commonwealth is a unique organisation, with a huge diversity of wildlife, environments and coastlines. Together we can effect real changes so that future generations can enjoy a natural environment that is healthier than we currently find it.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Single-use plastics are a scourge on our seas and lethal to our precious environment and wildlife so it is vital we act now. We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use, and now we want to take action on straws, stirrers and cotton buds to help protect our marine life.

We've already seen a number of retailers, bars and restaurants stepping up to the plate and cutting plastic use, however it's only through government, businesses and the public working together that we will protect our environment for the next generation – we all have a role to play in turning the tide on plastic.

There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic [microbeads ban](#) hailed as one of the world's strongest bans, the 5p plastic bag charge – [which has led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed](#), and last month's pledge to introduce a [deposit return scheme](#), or DRS, for single use drinks containers, including bottles and cans.

It sits alongside the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitment to eliminate

avoidable plastic waste. The Treasury has also launched a call for evidence on how charges and changes to the tax system could be used to reduce single use plastics.

Final warnings to Exxonmobil Chemical and Shell for environmental non-compliance

✘ 19 April 2018

Petrochemical companies ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Limited have been served with Final Warning Letters by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) following an enhanced unplanned flaring event at the Mossmorran complex in Fife, during June 2017.

- Final warning letters served by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) to two of the nation's largest industrial operators served for environmental non-compliance.
- Full review commissioned of environmental permits to operate for both Mossmorran sites.
- Enhanced programme of air quality monitoring announced.
- SEPA Chief Executive tells senior ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Limited executives "environmental compliance is non-negotiable."

In addition to Final Warning Letters, the environmental watchdog has commissioned a full review of the environmental permits to operate both sites, with a view to strengthening environmental compliance and reducing the impact of flaring on local communities. An enhanced programme of air quality monitoring has also been announced by the regulator, to inform relevant public agencies.

Following an intensive investigation by SEPA, which included formal statements from local residents, the regulator found that whilst flaring is an important safety feature in the event of a process fault, a series of maintenance failures led to elevated levels of unplanned flaring in breach of environmental controls between 12 and 18 June, following the breakdown of a condensate pump.

SEPA found residents were subject to considerable disturbance in their homes from noise, vibration and black smoke over the seven-day period in Summer 2017, during which a total of 74 complaints were received by the agency.

SEPA's Chief Executive, Terry A'Hearn met senior ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Limited executives directly on site and was clear that "environmental compliance is non-negotiable."

Terry A'Hearn, SEPA's Chief Executive Officer, said:

"Every day, SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment and compliance with Scotland's environmental rules is simply non-negotiable.

"The impact of unplanned flaring from Mossmorran last year was both preventable and unacceptable. We're disappointed that both ExxonMobil Chemical and Shell UK caused an environmental impact on local communities which is why we've issued formal Final Warning Letters, have commissioned a full review of environmental permits to operate and an enhanced programme of air quality monitoring.

"It's clear that further actions are required by ExxonMobil Chemical and Shell UK to ensure the frequency and impact of flaring is reduced, but we're encouraged by how both companies have responded, committing to respond positively to a strengthening of environmental controls. We'll be working with the Health and Safety Executive, public health partners and communities to together both strengthen environmental controls and deliver powerful transparency over site operations."

While the Final Warning Letters brings to a close SEPA's regulatory investigation for June 2017, unplanned flaring events which took place in October 2017 and March 2018 are still under investigation.

ENDS

[Press release: UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste](#)

Updated: Updated version

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Press release: Shropshire farmer fined £16,000 for environmental offences

On 16 April 2018, Telford Magistrates' Court fined the 55 year-old £16,000 and ordered him to pay £20,000 in costs, along with a £170 victim surcharge.

The charges were brought by the Environment Agency under the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2008 and Sections 24(1) and (4) of the Water Resources Act 1991.

The Environment Agency discovered that between May 2015 and April 2017, the Defendant had abstracted on average over 20,000 litres of water per day from a borehole on the farmland without an abstraction licence.

Between October 2016 and April 2017, Mr Fair was abstracting an average of 67,000 litres of water per day, more than three times the legal limit. This water was being used in farming activities but was also being supplied to eight nearby tenanted properties.

Evidence gathered by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council between December 2014 and May 2016 revealed that the water supplied to these properties was failing quality standards for nitrates.

A formal notice was served on Mr Fair on 13 October 2015, requiring him to notify the residents of the supplied properties advising them that the water

was not fit for consumption due to high nitrate levels. The notice was withdrawn in May 2016, as a result of improvements made to the supply infrastructure by Mr Fair, including installation of a chlorination dosing pump.

Mr Fair's farm lies in an area designated a nitrate vulnerable zone. Farmers practising within these zones are required to plan and record their farming activities, including the application of manures and fertilisers, in a manner prescribed under the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2008. The purpose of these Regulations is to protect the environment by reducing nitrate pollution.

In April 2015, the Environment Agency carried out an inspection of farming activities at Peatswood Farm. Mr Fair failed to produce records showing that in 2014 he had carried out the necessary planning and recording of his farming activities under the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2008.

As a result of his failure to comply with the Regulations, Mr Fair was reported to the Rural Payments Agency and received a 28% reduction in his Single Farm Payment for the year 2014. The Single Farm Payment is a subsidy designed to help farmers to meet their environmental, public, animal and plant health standards.

In mitigation, Mr Fair's barrister stated that Mr Fair had no previous convictions and was a man of previous good character. He admitted that Mr Fair had failed in his obligations under the legislation but that he had sought out new professional advice and was working to improve his farming practices. Mr Fair's barrister stated that the high nitrate levels in drinking water had been caused in-part by his tenants removing nitrate filters installed within the properties because they caused a reduction in water pressure. He further stated that Mr Fair had suffered family bereavements in 2015 and 2016.

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