

Press release: Dissolving seaweed sauce sachets among innovative schemes to cut down on harmful plastic waste

Dissolving seaweed sauce sachets and technology inspired by a suckerfish to remove plastics from rivers are among 11 innovative projects to win the backing of a £4 million government fund to clean up the environment.

To showcase the ground-breaking research being led by UK scientists and innovators during Green GB Week, the Business Secretary Greg Clark today announced the winners of a competition to develop new products or processes to end the scourge of plastic waste.

Moving to a greener, cleaner economy which helps protect the environment is a key part of the government's modern Industrial Strategy.

Among the winners are Skipping Rocks Lab in London, whose state-of-the-art facility is working on a scheme which could make the sight of single-use condiment sachets on takeaway counters a thing of the past by replacing plastic packaging with seaweed. The material, which has successfully been used as an alternative to the plastic water bottle, biodegrades as fast as a piece of fruit and is cheaper than plastic.

Other successful companies to win government funding include:

- Ichthion: Filters out plastic clogging up the UK's waterways with a boat-mounted vacuum which mimics the way remora fish feed.
- Axion: Recycles plastics like car bumpers and motorcycle helmets, currently sent to landfill, and turns them into plastic pellets for moulding into new products such as bins or cables.
- Polymateria: Makes biodegradable plastic which lets you put packaging straight into the compost with your food waste.

Business and Energy Secretary, Greg Clark, said:

Companies are capitalising on the UK's world leading research base to develop products that tackle the global scourge of plastic waste while grasping the business opportunities found in the green economy.

When you combine Britain's leadership, innovation and determination it is an unbeatable combination – exactly what our Industrial Strategy and Green GB Week are supporting and encouraging.

Professor Duncan Wingham, Executive Chair, Natural Environment Research Council and PRIF lead for UKRI, said:

The Plastics Research Innovation Fund starts bringing the strength of UK Research and Innovation's entire portfolio, from environment to technology to business to behaviour and regulation, to bear on the pressing and very widely recognised problem of plastic waste.

The innovative businesses awarded funding today have stepped up and are bringing their creativity and entrepreneurialism to bear in finding real-world solutions to problem plastics, while at the same time aiming to create cleaner economic growth.

The Industrial Strategy has research and innovation at its heart and as part of this, the Government has committed to boost spending on research and development to 2.4% of GDP by 2027 to ensure the UK takes advantage of the economic opportunities from the move towards a cleaner, greener economy.

The competition is supported by the £20 million Plastics Research and Innovation Fund which aims to build on the UK's global leadership in the fight against waste plastic, ensuring the UK reaps the economic benefits from the transition to a low carbon economy while leaving the environment in a better place for future generations. This announcement builds on the Government's world-leading Clean Growth Strategy which sets out more than £2.5 billion in low carbon innovation.

The announcement of the winners comes during the UK's first ever Green GB Week, calling on governments, businesses and communities to renew their efforts to confront climate change head on while seizing one of the greatest industrial opportunities of our time.

Just last week the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a report stating that more rapid action is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emission to avoid devastating risks of climate change to health and global prosperity. Government support to tackle plastic waste will help the UK realise the economic benefits of this global move to tackle climate change.

The UK has already taken great strides to tackle plastic pollution with thirteen billion plastic bags taken out of circulation through our 5p carrier bag charge and a ban on microbeads in care products.