

Press release: FCO reaches major milestone in plastic elimination campaign

The Foreign Office Minister of State Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon has today (Tuesday 27 November) announced a huge drop in single-use plastics being used by Foreign Office staff in the UK.

This announcement coincides with Lord Ahmad's attendance at the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Kenya, and the first ministerial meeting of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance, which has made eliminating plastic pollution from oceans its top priority.

Since February, the Foreign Office has successfully eliminated 97% of single-use plastics (SUPs). This means that around 1.56 million pieces of plastic have been removed from the UK estate annually. Per person, this means a drop in avoidable single use plastics from 310 to 10 in just 10 months.

Foreign Office Minister Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Plastic waste is a global problem that threatens ocean life and endangers whole ecosystems.

Every one of us has the power to make choices which can reduce our own plastic use. As we take our message around the world and call on other countries to take action, it is only right we strive to eliminate all avoidable single-use plastic here in the UK and it is fantastic to see the Foreign Office leading the way.

Eliminating plastic pollution was top of the agenda at the Sustainable Blue Economy conference in Nairobi today, where Ministers and High Commissioners from Commonwealth countries, including Canada and Kenya, have shared the ambitions and expertise they have in marine protection.

The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance (CCOA), announced by the Prime Minister during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London (16-18 April), aims to unite countries around the Commonwealth so they can work together to turn the tide on plastic entering the marine environment.

Each country has pledged to take action, such as banning microbeads, committing to cutting down on single use plastic bags, and other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

Background

- Over half a million disposable plastic coffee cups have been completely removed from the FCO's UK Estate since the introduction of a 50p levy in April. Biodegradable coffee cups are now provided as an alternative, but staff are encouraged to use their own mugs. This is a significant change from last year, when hot beverage cups accounted for 48% of plastic waste in FCO catering.
- To cut other catering-related waste at the UK Estate, the FCO has removed plastic cups, take-away cutlery, food containers, and drinks bottles. These have been entirely replaced with vegware biodegradable alternatives
- The remaining 3% of plastic waste still produced is currently unavoidable, since it is within the supply chain. The FCO is committed to working with its partners and implementing the necessary changes as they become possible within the industry.
- The FCO is the leading government department in plastic waste reduction and is sharing its experience across Whitehall and internationally. Looking to the future, it will continue to champion the elimination of avoidable SUPs from all its overseas estates by the end of 2020. It will also launch the #FuturePerfect programme which aims to save £20 million from the FCO's energy bills by 2025.
- Through CCOA, there is assistance available from the UK through the £66.4million Commonwealth Oceans Plastic Package, supporting Commonwealth countries to improve waste management systems, implement other initiatives to reduce plastics waste and help them to deliver their ambitions under the Alliance.
- Included in the package is a £25million Marine Plastics Research and Innovation Framework, to help researchers approach the scourge of marine plastic waste from a scientific, technical, economic and social perspective.
- The UK has also launched the Commonwealth Litter Programme, with the UK working with partners across the Commonwealth to share expertise and find solutions to the environmental and socio-economic problems caused by litter in the marine environment.

Further information