

Speech: Penny Mordaunt doubles support for plastic recycling

Thank you to all of you for being here particularly to my parliamentary colleagues and Sir David Attenborough. There will be many things and many legacies you would have left, but I think awareness on this issue is top of the list for me. It was really game-changing what the Blue Planet did, really getting the public engagement we need on this issue so thank you for all you've done on that programme.

After the programme, my department got 5,000 letters and as colleagues will know it's really important to me that the people who are providing my budget – the British taxpayer – really approve of what we are doing with that money and I can think of no better initiative to provide some ODA spend on.

This makes complete sense for both national and global perspectives for our aid budget to confront environmental challenge and issues like climate change.

The mismanagement of plastic waste on land accounts for most of the plastic pollution in our waters. Around two billion people lack access to basic waste collection services.

This has a ruinous impact on their health and leads to disaster in our oceans. We urgently need to find ways of reducing the use of plastics and improving how waste is managed in poorer countries.

I just want to give you a quick update on what's happened to date and also, you won't be disappointed here, say some things about the future.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Prime Minister launched the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and called on other countries to help tackle the problem of marine plastic. Last year we provided £66.4 million from DFID, BEIS and Defra's budget to tackle this issue specifically.

Since then, my department has been working to deploy these resources on various projects.

Just recently as well, through UK aid match we agreed to double the donations raised by Tearfund's plastics appeal and we set aside £2 million for that.

But thanks to the generous donations made by the British public, we are upping that amount and we will match their funds to the tune of £3 million because it is a really popular appeal. And the funds will set up vital recycling hubs across Pakistan and preventing approximately 150 million plastic bottles and other things from entering the ocean each year.

We have also committed £10 million to assist the 19 developing countries that have signed up the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. These countries and the UK have all made substantive commitments, such as restricting plastic bag

use and banning plastic microbeads in personal care products. UK support, and sharing experience with countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, will see the Commonwealth leading the way in taking practical steps to reduce pollution of our oceans.

We're also making available up to £3 million for pilot projects in Ghana, Bangladesh and Uganda to trial ways to increase plastic recycling, with a view to scaling those up. These projects will work with local operations of major corporations such as Coca-Cola and Unilever, governments, and local waste collectors to increase the amount of plastic waste collected and reused locally. This is a win-win, because it is helping the environment but it's also creating new jobs.

The Ghana pilot started in December and it's focused on improving waste management and increasing recycling by leveraging in private sector investment and gathering evidence on what works.

It is led by the Association of Ghana Industries, which is made up of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Ghana, Dow Chemical West Africa Limited, Fan Milk Ghana Limited, Guinness Ghana Breweries Limited, Nestlé Ghana, PZ Cussons Ghana Limited, Unilever Ghana and Voltic (GH) Limited.

Last December we also started the pilot in Bangladesh. The estimated total demand for resin in Bangladesh is around 540,000 tonnes per year. And only 10 per cent is made up of recycled resins, with the rest imported from petrochemical sources.

They will work with industry to increase the quality and volume of local plastic recycle and the percentage of locally recycled plastic used by industry, particularly in garment manufacturing.

The Uganda pilot is yet begin, but imminent and is also very promising. Kampala generates 42,000 tonnes of plastic waste each year yet recycling capacity across the whole country is under 9,000 tonnes. We have a partnership between key businesses including Coca-Cola Beverages Africa, government, and civil society to increase the proportion of plastic bottles recovered and recycled locally.

Interestingly, with my other hat on, 80 per cent of Kampala's 6,000 waste collectors are women. The opportunity to support jobs while improving the environment made an overwhelming case for doubling funding for these initiatives.

Furthermore, the Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution programme that we are funding in Africa and South Asia will reduce pollution from plastic waste. And ocean protection and addressing plastic pollution are major themes of the Global Environmental Facility, to which the government has committed £250 million from last year and 2022.

BEIS and Defra are also tackling this issue. For example, BEIS has announced support through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to establish the UK as the world's leading innovator in smart sustainable plastic packaging. Defra,

with our support, is funding the World Economic Forum Global Plastic Action Partnership to work with Governments and multinational corporations to fast-track a circular economy for plastics.

And I know that many businesses want to see a better, cleaner world, and are determined to use their organisational and financial muscle. It is fantastic to see representatives from industry here today including Diageo, Marks and Spencer and H&M.

I want to build a Great Partnership with business like that. There will be many opportunities for us to work in concert.

I've just bored Mary upstairs with two initiatives I just want to quickly mention that my department is doing.

First of all, a new initiative to increase the number of partnerships that we are doing, and who we are working with, leveraging technical expertise and really helping businesses that haven't engaged on this agenda to do so and deliver the global goals.

Secondly, the national conversation we're having at the moment to close the financing gap to deliver the global goals. To do what we need to do to tackle this issue we need a lot more money.

My budget's big as I'm always told, but it's not that big, so we need much more money, so we're talking to investors, pension funds and the British public about how we can use their savings, pensions but also investment money to help this agenda. For example, I think we could encourage a lot more young people to save if we had global goal ISA's if they knew their savings were also helping on issues like this.

And I want to not disappoint Theo so I'm going to make not one, but three announcements today.

The first is that in the coming weeks I will co-host with The Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the World Economic Forum's Global Plastics Action Partnership a meeting with major brands, waste management companies and investors. We are going to be discussing about how we can put the global plastic supply chain on a more sustainable footing. This is going to take work that we have done today and really look how we can scale it and deliver it on the scale we need it.

We really want to hear from other companies that want to be involved in that.

Secondly, I can commit today to a doubling of the budget for those waste pilot projects that I started. This is not actually a full delivery of a service we hope to set up, but they are testing projects in different nations to find out what is actually going to work. So we're doubling that up to £6 million.

We will reduce plastic pollution and improve livelihoods through work with business to take very practical steps in developing countries to set up those waste collections and recycle schemes.

The third announcement isn't really an announcement, but more of a cry for help. Obviously, we have to stop plastic from getting into the supply chain that's absolutely the way to crack this, but I also think we need to be looking at ways to clean up what's out there. When I look at where there are clusters of plastic in the ocean, I think the biggest floating island is just off Pitcairn Island. It cannot be beyond the wit of us to find ways of doing this. I've read a lot, I've look at the technology that's out there I know this is tricky stuff, but I think we ought to be perusing that agenda.

I don't have the answers yet, but I want to get to them and if we find answers I want to fund them, so my third point is if anyone has any ideas then send them our way because we are interested in that.

The conversation with businesses will be a chance to gather what insights we can and what projects we could help get off the ground and how we can use UK aid to best support them which is what the British public wants us to do. We all have a duty to the poorest in the world, to our planet and to future generations. I think this is an incredibly important issue and it is also an urgent one.

Thank you to all of those businesses, sorry I had to namecheck them all, because they are doing sterling work, and all of those who are working in partnership with us for really keeping the agenda going without whom none of this would have been possible today.

Thank you.