

Tackling Plastic Waste and Protecting Our Environment

David Attenborough's Blue Planet II has done much to focus public attention on the estimated 1 million birds, and 100,000 other sea mammals and turtles which die every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

In the UK alone, during its recent Great British Beach Clean Up, the Marine Conservation Society found 718 pieces of litter for every 100 metre stretch of beach surveyed, and of this rubbish from food and drink made up at least one fifth.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan addresses this most pressing problem. The measures include extending the 5p carrier bag charge to all retailers, working with supermarkets to encourage them to introduce plastic-free aisles in which all the food is loose, and investing new money in plastics innovation.

The Government will also encourage manufacturers to take responsibility for the impacts of their products and rationalise the number of different types of plastics they use.

Indeed, one major supermarket chain has just announced it will go plastic-free within five years. The current plastic packaging would be replaced with paper and pulp trays and paper bags, which would be recyclable through domestic waste collections or in-store recycling facilities. It can only be a matter of time before other supermarket chains follow suit.

However, the Government recognises that tackling the use of plastic cannot be done in isolation. The sustainable development of our oceans will be on the agenda when it hosts the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April. It will work to create a Commonwealth Blue Charter and push for strong action to reduce plastic waste in the ocean.

In addition, the Government will direct its development spending to help developing nations reduce plastic waste, increase our own marine protected areas at home, and establish new Blue Belt protections in our Overseas Territories.

The solution to this global problem will require change and effort from all countries around the world, which the UK will work to achieve.