

UK Committed to Climate Action

I'm delighted to be here at the opening of the Partners for the Environment Forum, which the British High Commission in Singapore has co-organised with the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources this year. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to everyone in attendance and in particular to our UK guests, some of whom will be speaking at the conference today:

- Ms Claire Kneller, Head of International Food at the Waste Resources and Action programme (WRAP)
- Ms Annabelle Baker, Director and Sustainability Champion for Lush Asia.

I'm also delighted to be here at the official kick-off to Singapore's Week of Climate Action, which many of you here will be involved in to varying capacities.

This is a particularly significant year for both the UK and Singapore: 200 since Raffles arrived and influenced the course of Singapore's history. And to mark its importance and celebrate the strong relationship between our two nations, we have launched a year-long Singapore UK Partnership for the Future. So while the impetus for us putting stronger focus on the UK-Singapore relationship might have been historical, this partnership is very much focused on how we can work together to build security and prosperity in our two countries and also contribute to the management or solution to global challenges. It is a dynamic partnership that can impact not just UK and Singapore, but also the region and beyond.

Under the Partnership, the UK and Singapore will continue to work together to address important global issues. We have gathered here today to address one of the most urgent challenges that will affect every human being in the next century and beyond: Climate Change.

The science is clear. The resounding message from societies across the world is clear. The message from my children – and no doubt your children – is clear. We must act now and create an ambitious and radical transformation across our economies to avoid a climate catastrophe in the next decade. This not only means transitioning from fossil fuels to green sources of energy, it also means a significant change in how businesses operate and how we go about our everyday lives, specifically the way we consume and manage waste as a society.

The UK has a strong track record of climate action:

- We were the first country to introduce legally binding, long-term emission reductions targets through the Climate Change Act in 2008. Under this framework the UK has demonstrated that climate action can be a win-

win for the environment, for the economy, and for our quality of life. And it has not come at an economic cost – between 1990 and 2017, we reduced our emissions by 42 % while growing the economy by 72 %.

- We released our Clean Growth Strategy in 2018, mapping out how we will decarbonise our economy in the UK. We now produce over 36% of the world's offshore wind and I'm pleased to share that Britain ran coal free for about 2 weeks this year – the longest period since the 1880s.
- This roadmap works alongside our UK Industrial Strategy which builds on our world leading R&D capability – we have put Clean Growth at the heart of this have made it one of our four Grand Challenges.
- We also know that clean growth and the adoption of a circular economy framework doesn't have to come at a huge cost and offers considerable economic benefits – we estimate that UK businesses could benefit by up to £23bn (around \$50bn SGD) per year through low cost or no-cost improvements in the efficient use of resources (DEFRA).

We continue to show climate leadership:

After Parliament declared a climate emergency in June, the UK government set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the UK economy by 2050. We are the first major economy in the world to legislate for such a target and are encouraging others to do the same. No doubt this is a huge challenge we have set ourselves and meeting it will require a huge acceleration of policies and practice designed to deliver it. We are clear that delivering a net zero target must be a joint endeavour, crossing political boundaries, and encompassing all parts of society.

In a similar vein to Singapore, we will run our Green is Great Britain and Northern Ireland Week on the 4th-8th November, in conjunction with our "Year of Green Action Campaign" (YOGA)

The UK's Green Finance Strategy and the City of London's Green Finance Institute (GFI) was also launched on the 2nd July – an essential part of the puzzle in order to achieve our climate commitments. The strategy ensures that financial risks and opportunities from climate and environmental factors are integrated into mainstream financial decision making.

More specifically on waste reduction and the circular economy, we recognise that plastic pollution in particular, is one of the greatest challenges facing the environment today.

I saw Sir David Attenborough speak last year: His programme, Blue Planet 2 had a profound effect across the world, waking us up to the impact of marine litter. But in many ways, he at 92, was only repeating and amplifying what our children have been saying to us too.

Addressing the crisis of ocean plastics requires a truly global approach to developing a solution. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting back in April 2018 offered a huge opportunity for us to act collectively to protect the marine environment from the extreme stress and threats our oceans are now under. As part of this summit, the UK announced a £61.4 million fund to work with Commonwealth countries to turn the tide on plastic entering the marine environment. This fund will support a number of initiatives, including; the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance and the Commonwealth Marine Plastics Research and Innovation Framework.

It seems incomprehensible that we don't yet have a clear understanding of how much plastic is actually in the ocean. Our understanding of the impact of micro plastics on human health and marine ecosystems is even more limited. This is why I'm pleased to announce that through our science and innovation network in Singapore, we have just published a joint report with the National University of Singapore, that captures the marine litter and plastics R&D landscape in Southeast Asia, I urge you all to read this report which is free and available to download on our gov.uk website.

The UK has committed itself to eliminating all avoidable plastic waste by 2042. In 2018, the UK released our landmark Resources and Waste Strategy that directly addresses waste reduction programmes while helping boost the domestic recycling market and ensuring tougher controls on waste exports. This builds on the success of 1) our 5p carrier bag charge which has taken fifteen billion plastic bags out of circulation, 2) our ban on plastic microbeads in personal rinse-off products and 3) our plans to introduce a deposit return scheme for single use drinks containers. I'm also pleased to say, that under this strategy, we recently announced that all cotton buds, plastic straws and stirrers will be banned in England from April 2020, with Wales and Scotland also taking a similar approach.

Conclusion

We look forward to working with Singapore and sharing our experience in the region, through organisations like the Waste Resource & Action Programme (WRAP), who launched their global division in 2018, and who have been integral in delivering UK policy objectives at home, including the highly successful UK Plastics PACT. And organisations like the UK's Ellen MacArthur Foundation that champion circular economy frameworks. All that is left for me to do, is to wish you all a fruitful time here at the Partners for the Environment Forum. I strongly encourage you to engage us and each other in your efforts towards a more sustainable, circular future. We look forward to working with you.