

UK leads the way on ending plastic pollution

The Environment Secretary has today started talks with businesses, environmental groups, scientists and civil society on shaping a legally-binding global treaty that aims to end plastic pollution by 2040.

Plastic pollution is one of the greatest global environmental challenges we currently face and it is predicted that unless action is taken there will be a threefold increase in the amount of plastic flowing into the ocean between 2016 and 2040.

In partnership with the Ocean Plastics Leadership Network – an organisation comprised of industry, scientists and activists – the UK Government is running a series of dialogue meetings, which will be key in strengthening the UK's leading voice at the treaty negotiations.

At the first meeting, stakeholders including Tesco, Sainsburys, Coca Cola, Nestle, H&M and Greenpeace came together to provide their views on how UK businesses can contribute towards bringing an end to plastic pollution, and inform the UK's negotiating position for a far-reaching treaty.

The international treaty will set obligations on countries to reduce pollution across the whole plastics lifecycle – from production and consumption to disposal and waste management. The first formal negotiations will take place on 28 November to 2 December 2022 in Uruguay and will be facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme.

Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey said:

“Plastic pollution has a direct and deadly effect on our wildlife, polluting our ocean and damaging our planet.

“Our laws are already helping to cut waste domestically, and international action is needed to end plastic pollution by 2040.

“Today's meeting was important in bringing together government, business and environmental organisations on this issue – it's vital for us all to work together if we are to make progress in tackling plastic pollution globally.”

Dave Ford, Founder, Ocean Plastics Leadership Network said:

“We are honoured to collaborate with the UK Government on the UK Plastics Treaty Dialogues.

“Our objective with the series is to build knowledge and understanding of the UN Global Treaty process and various solutions, to help unite the myriad of stakeholders in working together in efforts to solve the plastics crisis.

“We aim to expand this effort to 20 countries worldwide.”

Current commitments around the world will only reduce the annual discharge of plastic into the ocean by 7% by 2040, according to the [Breaking the Plastic Wave report](#) published by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The only way to achieve a significant reduction in the flow of plastic into the environment is by taking action across the whole lifecycle of plastic, reducing our consumption of plastic, re-using plastic products and improving waste management systems.

The UK has been a leading voice in attempts to tackle marine plastic pollution, [co-sponsoring the proposal to prepare a new treaty](#) and being a founding member of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, a group of more than 30 countries calling for a target under the treaty to stop plastic from flowing into our lands and ocean by 2040.

This builds on the UK's world-leading efforts to tackle plastic pollution at home. We have so far introduced a plastic packaging tax on packaging that contains less than 30% recycled plastic, a ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products, and measures to restrict the supply of plastic straws, plastic drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds.

Our carrier bag charge has reduced the use of single-use carrier bags in the main supermarkets by over 95%. We plan to go even further through our Environment Act, which enables us to change the way we manage our waste. Through the introduction of extended producer responsibility for packaging, we will ensure producers cover the costs of collecting and managing plastic waste.

The Environment Act also gives us powers to introduce deposit return schemes, establish greater consistency in the recycling system, better control the export of plastic waste and introduce charges for single-use items.