

PE2164: Ban all non-essential single-use plastics

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to strengthen existing regulations and ban all non-essential single use plastics in Scotland. The petitioner states that “this would include items such a silage wrapping, disposable vapes, wet wipes, crisp packets, balloons, and single-use water bottles, which are all huge polluters”.

Background – the need to tackle plastic consumption

Single-use plastic products (SUPs) are used once, or for a short period of time, before being thrown away. The negative environmental and health implications associated with plastics in general are being increasingly recognised as an urgent issue requiring more action at domestic and international scales. The [OECD states that](#) “Plastic pollution is one of the great environmental challenges of the 21st century”.

- The [majority of plastics used today are ‘virgin plastics’](#) made from crude oil or gas. ‘Secondary plastics’ made from recycled material accounted for 6% of global plastics use in 2019. A small group of ‘biobased plastics’ have similar characteristics but are derived from biomass.
- Global consumption of plastic has grown exponentially since the 1950s and is still accelerating. Over half of the plastic ever manufactured [has been produced since 2000](#). Without additional action, [the OECD projects](#) that annual plastics production and waste generation will increase by 70% in 2040 compared to 2020. In Western Europe, [the average annual plastic consumption is 150kg per person](#), over twice the global average of 60kg.
- The world produces [430 million metric tons of plastics each year](#) of which over two-thirds are estimated to be short-lived products, and a growing amount (139 million metric tons in 2021) are single use.
- Plastics in the environment [harm ecosystems](#) and are a particular issue in the marine environment, as [80% of marine litter is plastic](#). Plastics in the environment are [predicted to increase by 50% between 2020 and 2040](#).
- Scientific literature is increasingly linking plastics in the environment with significant risks to ecosystem and human health. A [2023 UNEP study set out](#) that as well as risks to ecosystems, “microplastics have been found in the deepest recesses of the ocean, in pristine mountain glaciers, in breast milk and human bodies”. The same study set out that under a business-as-usual scenario, plastics could be responsible for 19% of Greenhouse Gas emissions allowed under a 1.5°C scenario by 2040.

In Scotland:

- The [Scottish Government estimated in 2020](#) that 550 tonnes of plastic from littering ends up on the seabed around Scotland each year.
- [Scottish Water state](#) that “plastic waste has become ubiquitous in the environment” and causes issues in the wastewater system e.g. blockages due to inappropriate disposal of products such as wet wipes. Microplastics also enter the wastewater system from various sources.
- Zero Waste Scotland summarises issues around transitioning away from plastics [in a 2022 blog](#). Although plastic sometimes fulfils an important function in our society, the quantities we consume and how we dispose of it cause problems. There is a need to transition away from disposable items in general, taking into account that material-switching i.e. substituting plastic for different materials where the product is still disposable can have unintended consequences.

Scottish Government action and policy

The Scottish Government has committed to support a transition to a circular economy in Scotland, moving from a "take, make and dispose" model to one where materials are valued and kept in use. Priority actions are [set out in the Circular Economy Routemap to 2030](#).

A key commitment in relation to single-use plastics is to publish a Product Stewardship Plan by 2025/26 which will “Develop further measures to tackle consumption of problematic single-use items”. The [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) also requires the Scottish Government to publish a new circular economy strategy, which must be guided by the ‘waste hierarchy’ i.e. the need to prioritise measures that first seek to prevent waste, followed by re-use, recycling, other recovery (e.g. energy recovery), and finally disposal.

Some key measures either forthcoming or introduced in recent years include:

- **Banning problematic items:** Scottish Ministers can introduce regulations under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ban the supply of injurious substances or articles for conservation purposes. These powers have been used a number of times to restrict single-use plastics:
 - [The Environmental Protection \(Single-use Vapes\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2024](#) banned single-use vapes
 - The [Environmental Protection \(Single-use Plastic Products\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2021](#) sought to tackle some of the most problematic single-use plastics, banning single-use expanded polystyrene cups and food containers, plastic cutlery, plates and beverage stirrers, plastic straws and plastic balloon sticks
 - The [Environmental Protection \(Cotton Buds\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2019](#) prohibited plastic stemmed cotton buds
 - The [Environmental Protection \(Microbeads\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2018](#) banned cosmetics containing plastic microbeads.

The [Scottish Government published a consultation analysis in respect of the above-mentioned 2021 Regulations](#) which included a summary of views on the need of further restrictions on single-use plastics. There was strong overall support for further restrictions, but respondents emphasised the need to avoid unintended consequences (environmental or social) and consider the availability and impact of alternatives.

The Scottish Government also [committed in 2024 to introduce regulations to ban wet wipes including plastic](#) by the end of 2024 with the ban due to come into force 18 months later ([welcomed by Scottish Water](#)). The Scottish Government's [response to the petition in June 2025](#) set out that it supports a joint UK approach to introducing regulations to ban the sale of wet wipes containing plastic and is now working to bring forth this legislation.

- **Deposit and Return Schemes (DRS):** Scottish Ministers exercised powers contained in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to introduce [the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Regulations 2020](#) which will introduce a DRS for certain single-use drinks containers including PET plastic (a type of plastic widely used for drinks bottles). The Regulations have been amended a number of times, most recently to align with other schemes developing in the UK. The DRS is [due to launch in 2027](#) and aims to increase recycling and reduce litter.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging:** A UK-wide producer responsibility scheme for packaging has been in place since 1997. New regulations came into force in 2025 which extend producer responsibility for packaging, generally including plastic packaging not covered by DRS. EPR seeks to make producers fully financially responsible for the costs of waste management of their products and incentivise reduced consumption of resources and increased recycling.
- **Single-use charges:** The Scottish Government used powers in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to introduce a minimum charge for single-use carrier bags. The [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) introduced a general power for Scottish Ministers to introduce charges on single-use items. The Scottish Government has [consulted on using the power to introduce a charge on single-use beverage cups](#). This was [recommended by a Scottish Government-appointed expert panel in 2019](#).

UK-wide policy and regulation (and internal market)

Waste is generally a devolved area, however some areas of waste regulation have been pursued at UK-level (e.g. EPR as described above) due to UK internal market reasons or the overlap between devolved and reserved areas.

A key example of a reserved area relevant to single-use plastics is taxation. [The UK Plastic Packaging Tax](#) applies to large UK producers and importers of

plastic packaging which contains less than 30% recycled plastic, aiming to encourage reduced consumption of virgin plastics.

Importantly, new product restrictions, such as a ban on further single-use items, may engage the principles in [the UK Internal Market Act 2020](#) (UKIMA) and as such require either a UK-wide approach or an agreed exclusion from the UKIMA principles. More information [is available in a SPICe blog](#).

International and EU action

- In 2022, at the UN Environment Assembly, representatives from 175 nations (including the UK) [committed to developing a global treaty](#) that addresses plastic pollution. [Talks on a draft text took place in Geneva in August 2025](#) but [ended without reaching consensus](#), after continued disagreement between countries about whether to include mandatory reduction targets for plastic production. More background is available in a [2025 House of Commons Library briefing](#).
- A [group of environmental organisations wrote to the Scottish Government in October 2024](#) urging it to support efforts to agree a global plastics treaty and to adopt certain domestic measures to reduce plastics. In [July 2025 the UK Parliament, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(EFRA\) Committee wrote to the UK Government](#), in the run up to the talks in Geneva, with recommendations drawn from evidence it had taken in June as part of a circular economy inquiry. Amongst other things, the letter called for legally binding targets to reduce primary plastics production.
- The EU's [Directive on single-use plastics](#) includes various regulatory approaches (which in turn target different products or types of product) including product restrictions, recycling targets, producer responsibility, DRS and product design standards e.g. a requirement for beverage containers to have attached caps came into force in the EU in 2024. The Scottish Government has sought to align with some parts of the Directive e.g. the [Environmental Protection \(Single-use Plastic Products\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2021](#) sought to implement Article 5.
- The [Scottish Government has previously supported the EU's vision to phase out single-use plastics by 2030](#) and said "it will do what we can in Scotland to make this a reality".

Scottish Parliament action

In session 5, a similar petition (PE1755) called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban single-use plastics. That session's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee [agreed to close the petition on 23 February 2021](#) on the basis that the petitioner could engage with the Scottish Government on the work it had committed to undertake following [the 2019 report of the expert panel on environmental charging](#).

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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