Announcement on proposal to legislate to ban the sale and manufacture of plastic cotton buds

Tomorrow 11 January, during a visit to Gullane Beach in East Lothian I will be announcing my intention to legislate for a ban on the sale and manufacture of plastic cotton buds in Scotland. Plastic cotton buds are consistently observed to constitute ~5-10% of marine debris surveyed in European seas and continue to feature in the top ten most common marine litter item in Marine Conservation Society (MCS) beach clean surveys with an average of 27 for every 100m of beach surveyed in 2017.

Plastic cotton buds are an example of a single-use product needlessly produced and discarded, wasting resources and causing harm to the environment in the process. Despite various campaigns, people are continuing to flush litter down their toilets, including cotton buds. Biodegradable alternatives are readily available and the Scottish charity Fidra has worked with industry and retailers to promote these. Given the lack of success of previous campaigns, and the availability of biodegradable alternatives I believe that banning the manufacture and sale of plastic cotton buds is a necessary next step in tackling litter in our seas and on our beaches and is another key step in taking forward the direction of travel set out in the Programme for Government.

Whilst recent episodes of Blue Planet have brought the issue of marine litter to the forefront of the public attention, we have been taking steps to address this issue for some time. In 2014 we published ‘Towards a Litter Free Scotland’ and a ‘Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland’ both of which set out the steps we will take to reduce litter on sea and land. Approximately 80% of marine litter is thought to originate on land. Steps such as the single-use carrier bag charge, the ban of plastic microbeads in personal care products (which will come into effect from June this year) and the introduction of a deposit return scheme for drinks containers will all contribute and support our work and comprise a coherent, strategic focus on tackling litter. In the Programme for Government we also announced our intention
to appoint an expert panel to advise on environmental charges and other measures to prevent wasteful behaviours for single use items, such as plastic straws, as well as our plans to host an international conference on marine litter in Spring 2019.

Yours

Roseanna Cunningham