

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 24 September 2025
14th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2164: Ban all non-essential single-use plastics

Introduction

Petitioner Tabitha Fletcher

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to strengthen existing regulations and ban all non-essential single use plastics in Scotland

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2164>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 13 May 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 14,787 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2164: Ban all non-essential single-use plastics

Petitioner

Tabitha Fletcher

Date Lodged

13 May 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to strengthen existing regulations and ban all non-essential single use plastics in Scotland

Background information

I'm aiming to make Scotland the first country in the world to ban the usage of all single-use plastics for good; this would include items such as silage wrapping, disposable vapes, wet wipes, crisp packets, balloons, and single-use water bottles, which are all huge polluters. Visit my website [Make Scotland Plastic Free](#) for more information on my campaign so far.

Further information on the debate around single-use plastics and tackling plastic pollution can be found on the [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#) website.

The Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 set out the measures already in place, which would need to be strengthened.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2164

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

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](#).

Alexa Morrison, Senior Researcher

18 August 2025

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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government written submission, 10 June 2025

PE2164/A: Ban all non-essential single-use plastics

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The Scottish Government understands the intention behind the petition and shares the ambition to tackle the environmental impact of problematic single-use plastic products. However, the petition has a very broad scope and raises a number of complex issues. We have already taken, or are taking, action in relation to some of the asks in the petition, and the remaining asks may not be practical or achievable; and further detailed evidence gathering, consultation and impact assessments would be required in order to assess the petition's asks on which action is not yet being taken.

The complexity of issues associated with measures to tackle single-use plastic items was, for example, highlighted by Scottish Government's 2022 call for evidence on tackling consumption of single-use food containers and other commonly littered or problematic single-use items (bowls, trays and platters; incontinence and period products; sachets; tobacco filters; and fruit and vegetable packaging).

A wide range of evidence was presented by respondents about the environmental, economic and social issues associated with single-use plastic items and products.

Key themes that emerged from this call for evidence included: litter and the environmental damage littering of single-use plastics can cause; the large and complex market associated with single-use plastics and the range of industry and business interests at stake; that environmentally-friendly alternative products are available but there are a range of negative impacts and challenges associated with these; that barriers to change include consumer behaviours, business costs and the complexity of policy and regulations.

Responses also pointed to a need to consider inequalities in society and how those who experience socio-economic disadvantage and those with protected characteristics may be impacted by policy development in this area.

The analysis suggested that there may be a lack of data and evidence available across a number of items and topic areas and further analysis was needed.

What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering a different approach to our economy, one where we move from a "take, make and dispose" model to one where we value materials and keep them in use. Our Circular Economy and Waste Route Map, published in December 2024, sets out a range of priority and supporting actions to accelerate progress towards a circular economy, including

developing further measures to tackle consumption of problematic single-use items and promote uptake of reusable alternatives.

The Scottish Government is taking action on the issues raised in this petition by taking targeted action to combat the environmental impact of some of the most problematic single-use plastic products. Further information on a range of action taken or planned is set out below.

Single-use plastics

The Scottish Government is committed to matching or exceeding the standards set out by the EU Directive 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment where we are able to do so and in a manner that contributes towards maintaining and advancing standards.

For example, the Environmental Protection (Cotton Buds) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 ban the manufacture and/or supply of plastic-stemmed cotton buds. the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 ban the manufacture and/or supply of some of the most problematic single-use plastic products, such as expanded polystyrene beverage containers or cups, expanded polystyrene food containers, plastic stirrers, plastic cutlery and plastic plates, plastic balloon sticks and plastic straws (subject to some limited exemptions).

The Scottish Government has also consulted on the proposal to introduce a minimum 25p charge on single-use beverage cups to tackle the significant environmental impact of these items.

Scotland has one of the highest rates of consumption of single-use cups in Europe – creating around 5,400 tonnes of waste a year. Introducing a minimum charge will encourage reusable alternatives, tackle waste and cut some of the estimated 15 million cups littered each year. We are continuing to work closely with stakeholders to develop a policy that is deliverable and allows businesses and consumers time to prepare.

Plastic pellets (nurdles) are the raw material in the manufacture of all plastic products. They are the second largest source of microplastic pollution (by weight). We are working internationally, and with industry, to minimise plastic pellets being lost to the environment, through a full supply chain approach.

Single-use drinks containers

The Scottish Government is committed to introducing a Deposit and Return Scheme (DRS) for single-use drinks containers in Scotland to help increase recycling, reduce litter and meet our climate change targets. Of the items listed in the petition, DRS will work to reduce littering of single use plastic water bottles.

A DRS works by encouraging people to recycle. When purchasing a drink in a single-use plastic bottle or metal can, a small deposit is paid upfront. The deposit is refunded when the empty bottle or can is returned. The DRS will be managed by an organisation known as the scheme administrator.

DRS is expected to reduce littering by a third, and increase recycling of single-use plastic and metal drinks containers to 90%.

Draft regulations have been laid before the Scottish Parliament making amendments to the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Regulations 2020 to align with the equivalent schemes being introduced in England and Northern Ireland, and to designate an organisation as the scheme administrator. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the scheme will launch in October 2027.

Disposable vapes

Draft regulations were laid before the Scottish Parliament on 10 June 2024 which were subsequently approved by the Scottish Parliament on 3 September 2024, and made by the Scottish Ministers on 1 October 2024 to ban the sale and supply of single-use vapes in Scotland. On 20th February, we laid regulations to amend the current coming into force date from 1 April 2025 to 1 June 2025 to ensure a common date across the four nations. So the single-use disposable vape ban has now come into effect as of 1 June 2025.

We were the first government in the UK to commit to taking action on single-use vapes and have fulfilled our 2023 Programme for Government commitment to consult on measures to tackle the environmental impact of single-use vapes.

The findings from the UK-wide consultation showed a clear majority are in favour of a ban on the sale and supply of single-use vapes in Scotland.

In 2023, the Scottish Government commissioned an urgent review of the environmental impacts of single-use vapes. The review found that up to 26 million disposable vapes were consumed and thrown away in Scotland in just one year, of which an estimated 10% were littered and more than half were incorrectly disposed.

In Scotland, 82.3% of respondents supported restrictions on single-use vapes (79.3% UK-wide), and 73.4% favoured an outright ban (68.1% UK-wide). We continue to engage with COSLA and The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland to consider any support required for enforcement purposes.

Silage wrapping

Farmers and Crofters are encouraged to follow a mantra of Reduce, Reuse & Recycle to minimise the waste plastic use on farms. It can be found here: [Technical note \(TN724\): Minimising Plastic Waste on farms | Information helping farmers in Scotland | Farm Advisory Service](#)

The Scottish Government is developing a Product Stewardship Strategy, focusing initially on high-impact or hard-to-recycle items (e.g. mattresses, textiles, vapes).

Product Stewardship ensures producers take more responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products throughout their lifecycle, including at end-of-life.

The strategy will provide a framework for identifying priority product types for policy intervention, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Deposit and Return Schemes, take-back requirements and eco-design incentives.

Farm plastics (including silage wrapping) were considered during an initial review of potential products for further assessment.

The Product Stewardship Plan, which will set out how we intend to bring this work forward, will be published later this year.

Wet Wipes

The Scottish Government supports a joint UK approach to introducing regulations to ban the sale of wet wipes containing plastic. We are working in alignment across the UK nations on scope and timings of each piece of legislation. The legislation will seek to ban the supply and sale of wet wipes containing plastic. There is intended to be exemptions for medical and industrial wet wipes, and for business-to-business sales, and it is proposed that there will be an 18-month transition period for businesses to adjust. We are now working to bring forth this legislation.

Packaging

The Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging is being implemented this year on a four nations basis across the UK. It will impose an obligation on businesses to pay the full cost of dealing with packaging waste (which would include crisp packets) from households away from taxpayers and local authorities to the producers of that packaging, applying the 'polluter-pays' principle.

Funding will go to local authorities to support efficient and effective collection services for household packaging waste. Based on indicative payment notifications issued by PackUK, we estimate that local authorities in Scotland will see around £160 million per year in funding to support collection for household packaging waste. These payments will start from November 2025.

Packaging EPR will incentivise businesses to reduce excess packaging, to design and use packaging that is easily recyclable, and encourage use of reusable and refillable packaging.

Other

In line with our drive to move to a more circular economy, the Scottish Government is also taking action on other single-use plastic items such as fishing and aquaculture gear. We contributed to the work of the European Committee for Standardisation on the development of a Standard for circular design of fishing and aquaculture gear. This aims to reduce the environmental impact of plastic gear during its entire lifespan, supporting reuse and improving recycling opportunities. The Standard was published in November 2024. We are working across the four nations and with industry towards improving the collection and recycling of end-of-life fishing and aquaculture gear.

Waste Prevention: Reduce and Reuse Unit / Circular Economy Division

Petitioner written submission, 8 September 2025

PE2164/B: Ban all non-essential single-use plastics

This petition was created with seventeen years of experience of coastal pollution, living and working within a Scottish island community and discussing the issue with its inhabitants. It demands new legislation to ban the use of all non-essential and non-biodegradable single-use plastic items, which would comply with the UK's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) (Chapter 4: Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste) and the responsible consumption and production area of the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map.

In the last two decades, global plastic production has doubled¹, with the UK at the forefront, producing the second highest amount of plastic waste per capita². Single-use plastics are responsible for large amounts of this waste, and common items can take up to 500 years to biodegrade. Plastics cause significant harm to wildlife due to ingestion or entanglement: since 1986, the average abundance of Scottish seabirds has declined by 49%³, largely to do with plastic pollution. Additionally, over time macroplastics will break up into micro or nano plastics which can become airborne, seep into drinking water, and contaminate human food sources, creating potential links to cardiovascular diseases⁴, digestive problems, and endocrine disorders⁵.

Already, some legislation exists which acknowledges the impact of single-use plastic waste: the Environmental Protection (Cotton buds) (Scotland) Regulations 2019, the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) Scotland 2021, and the single-use disposable vape ban that came into effect as of 1st June 2025. The issue that arises from these pieces of legislation is that working on a product-by-product basis does not acknowledge the sheer volume of single-use plastics that exist or are created daily, which all have the potential to become harmful pollutants. In the time taken to categorise and outlaw every individual existing single-use plastic item manufactured globally, further significant and potentially irreversible environmental damage would have occurred. The existing legislations also only apply to commonly littered plastic items, discounting the harm caused by single-use plastics that enter or escape from landfill, or produce unnecessary methane when incinerated (in 2022, the waste sector represented 30% of total UK methane emissions⁶, significantly contributing to climate change via the greenhouse gas effect).

However, these pieces of legislation do prove the demands of this petition are viable. If a total ban on single-use plastics were to be put in place, it suggests similar guidelines would likely be followed: enforcement would be the responsibility of local authorities and failure to comply with the regulations would carry a fine, following the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes polluter-pays principle. As with the existing legislation, it will only apply to products manufactured in or imported directly into Scotland.

The proposed ban would exclude any single-use plastic products defined as essential, such as those required by disabled people or hospitals for hygiene or accessibility – for example medical packaging, incontinence or period products, syringes, IV bags, tubing, catheters, surgical gloves, face masks and shields, and disposable gowns. It should also take into account whether more sustainable alternatives are available. Furthermore, the new legislation should only target single-use items, which are defined by The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) as an item that is made wholly or partly from plastic and that is not conceived, designed or placed on the market to accomplish, within its life span, multiple trips or rotations by being returned to a producer for refill or re-used for the same purpose for which it was conceived. Some examples of the included items are

silage wrapping, most plastic food packaging, cigarette butts, single-use water bottles or other drinks bottles, wet wipes, and many cosmetic products.

It is acknowledged that this petition raises complex issues, as explored in the Scottish Government's 2022 call for evidence on tackling consumption of single-use food containers and other commonly littered or problematic single-use items. Further consultation and impact assessments would be required before the ban could be put in place. Adequate preparation time and support would also have to be given to businesses to allow them to alter their products or change suppliers.