

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM
Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd
Minister for Environment



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-750
Ein cyf/Our ref HB/00530/18

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions committee.
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26 June 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 4 June, regarding the petition P-05-750 related to introducing a Deposit Return System for drink containers and making fast food containers and utensils compostable.

I recognise that there is considerable interest in and support for a deposit return scheme (DRS) in Wales. However, it is clear that a UK-based scheme would be more practical for all concerned, including customers, retailers and manufacturers.

I am therefore considering a UK-wide DRS and will meet my counterparts from the UK and Scottish Governments about this issue in July. I am keen to ensure that any scheme delivers optimum benefits for Wales and that we take account of risks and benefits to existing provision and recycling levels here, including the possible effect on Local Authorities' statutory recycling targets.

The Eunomia study on Extended Producer Responsibility, which I referred to in my letter of 23 April has now been published at:
http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/waste_recycling/publication/final-report-options-for-extended-producer-responsibility-in-wales-final-report-executive-summary/

This has helped paint a picture of what is best for Wales. To ensure that we have the best evidence available to inform the scope and design of a DRS, I have agreed to commission feasibility studies to assess how a DRS might impact on our municipal recycling performance, and to look at the composition and sources of litter in Wales. This will help

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

inform our thinking and will also provide a baseline by which we can measure the impact of any new initiatives.

This is a fast-moving policy area and we need to keep track of other developments at a UK level which may have an impact. In particular, we need to take into account UK proposals to amend the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) and to consider a UK single-use plastics tax.

It is widely recognised that amendments to the Regulations are necessary to ensure that producers and retailers pay a larger share of waste management costs. The Regulations could also be designed to drive greater levels of waste prevention, reuse and recycling, increased recycled content, and less litter. We will be working closely with Defra on these amendments.

My colleague Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, is providing you with an update regarding the development of a potential tax on single-use plastics (Our Ref: MD/00302/18). Therefore I have not addressed the issue in this response, apart to confirm that we are working together closely on this.

With regard to the proposal in the petition that we should legislate to ensure that all single-use food and drink containers and utensils are fully compostable, I think we should consider this carefully because there are so many complex issues at play here.

There are many shops, communities, environmental groups and people who, with the best intentions, believe that biodegradable and /or compostable plastic is the solution to plastic pollution. However, the use of these materials brings its own set of issues, including perverse outcomes such as contamination of the plastic recycling stream, and the food waste stream. While some materials claim to be compostable, that may only be the case in specific circumstances such as in large scale, industrial composters. The same outcome is not achievable in home composting, and Anaerobic Digestion facilities, which are widely used to deal with food waste in Wales, cannot handle plastic packaging, biodegradable or not. People are often confused by what is becoming an increasingly complex area, and do not know what the best option is when they are trying to do what they think is most beneficial for the environment. The end result can be that much of the biodegradable plastic material ends up in landfill, emitting greenhouse gases – an outcome that no-one wants.

Another issue is that alternatives to conventional plastics are usually plant-based, and the increasing demand for these materials could potentially contribute to the global food crisis by taking over large areas of land previously used to grow crops for human consumption.

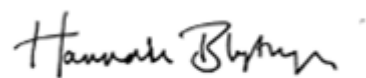
There is an urgent need for independent, scientifically evidenced advice on whether, and in what circumstances, it would be acceptable to use biodegradable / compostable plastic. This should include advice on how it should be labelled and managed at end of life, for example, the use of an on-pack recycling label and specific signage on relevant bins to ensure that it does not end up in the plastic or food waste streams. As part of their work to support their Plastics Pact, WRAP is developing guidance on the use and end of life management of materials which claim to be biodegradable or compostable.

I am clear that we need to take a comprehensive, well thought out, long term approach to the management of plastic waste so that it has a positive and sustained impact. Our success to date at recycling in Wales is not down to a quick solution to a current problem but more a strategic approach to creating a long term policy that delivers.

I do not, therefore, intend to put in place piecemeal solutions to topical issues without considering whether this will work for Wales and how it will impact on our long term strategic

goals and the welfare of future generations. Wales has a long history of ground breaking environmental policy and delivery and I intend to continue this approach.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hannah Blythyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

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