

By email to: Plastics.Consultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Plastic straws, stirrers & cotton buds Consultation,
Resources and Waste Team,
Defra,
Ground Floor, Seacole Building,
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF



**North London
Waste Authority**

Unit 1B
Berol House
25 Ashley Road
Tottenham Hale
London N17 9LJ

T 020 8489 5730

E post@nlwa.gov.uk

W nlwa.gov.uk

wiseuptowaste.org.uk

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Consultation on proposals to ban the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers in England: Response from North London Waste Authority

Introduction

North London Waste Authority (NLWA) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation on proposals to ban the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers in England.

NLWA is the joint waste disposal authority for north London established by the Waste Regulation and Disposal (Authorities) Order 1985. As a joint waste disposal authority NLWA is responsible for the disposal of waste collected from households and local businesses by seven north London boroughs – Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest, the 'constituent boroughs'. NLWA manages the residual waste from all seven boroughs, recyclable and compostable waste from six boroughs and all the north London reuse and recycling centres except in one borough. NLWA also delivers extensive behaviour-change campaigns in the fields of waste prevention and recycling.

Whilst we have reviewed all the consultation questions, we have confined our comments to the elements of the consultation that are relevant to a waste disposal authority in the capital. We also responded last year to the Defra 'Call for evidence on voluntary and economic incentives to reduce littering of drinks containers and promote recycling', namely the call for evidence on introducing a deposit return scheme or other recycling incentive scheme for drinks containers. In addition we responded to the HM Treasury consultation on 'Tackling the plastic problem - Using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste'

NLWA response to the questions

Q 1. *Would you like your response to be kept confidential?* No

Q2. *What is your name?* Cllr. Clyde Loakes

Q3. *What is your email address:* Please correspond with Martin Capstick, Managing Director of NLWA – martin.capstick@nlwa.gov.uk

Q4. *What is your organisation?* North London Waste Authority (NLWA)

Q5. *It would be helpful for our analysis if you could indicate which of the sectors you most align yourself/your organisation with for the purposes of this consultation. (please tick/circle one which is most applicable to you):*

Public body ✓

Non-governmental organisation

Retail industry

Manufacturing industry

Member of the general public

Other

Part A: Plastic drinking straws

Q6: *Do you support the proposal to introduce a ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic drinking straws in England? (Yes/ No)*

Yes – NLWA supports the proposal, but suggests that the ban is explicitly applied to single-use plastic straws. Re-usable straws such as those which are made of metal or glass should be exempt from the ban.

Q7: *Do you agree with our proposed date for the ban (October 2019)? (Yes / No. If no please explain why.)*

Yes we support the proposed October 2019 introduction of the ban.

Q8: *Do you support a ban on beverage carton straws?*

Yes/ No

Please give reasons.

Yes, NLWA supports the extension of the ban to include beverage carton straws. NLWA suggests that the reasons for banning these products are as follows:

Although straws are removed from beverage cartons at the point of consumption, (so that the product packaging becomes more easily recyclable as a result i.e. it no longer consists of a lined cardboard carton and a plastic straw); the straws themselves typically do not get recycled. They are usually left in the carton once the drink has been consumed, rendering both the carton and the straw unrecyclable.

As the beverage in the cartons is often consumed on the go, there is a risk that these straws will be disposed as litter so it is useful to ban them from a littering perspective.

It is also important to send a message that single-use plastic products which remain in the environment if disposed incorrectly are no longer acceptable for environmental reasons.

If there is a tax on single use plastic carrier bags and single use plastic drinking straws are banned why should single use plastic straws that are stuck to cartons be exempt? Extending

the ban on plastic drinking straws to include beverage carton straws sends a consistent message about the undesirable nature of single-use plastic products.

Would you support a ban on beverage carton straws coming into effect later than October 2019? If so, how much longer? (April 2020/October 2020)

No. We would prefer the ban to come into effect in October 2019 as it will be some time before cartons with plastic straws are all sold and therefore disappear from shopping shelves. To place the requirements on one type of straw manufacturer considerably later than others also seems lack any justification – this proposal to ban all single use plastic drinking straws should apply to all as soon as possible.

Q9. Should the government begin with a targeted ban on the distribution of straws with a longer-term view to extending it?

Yes/ No

Please give reasons.

Yes. It is better to start off gradually and give time for the changes to be embedded.

Q10: If pursuing a broader ban including the sales of straws, do you agree with the proposal to exempt plastic straws for medical-enabling and other specialist uses from any ban?

Yes/ No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we agree with the proposal to exempt plastic straws for medical-enabling and other specialist uses from any ban. However, we believe that these products should contain a proportion of recycled content and that efforts should still be made to ensure that these products are recycled at the end of life.

Q11: Do you agree with the proposal to provide exemption for wholesalers to import and stock plastic straws for distribution to, pharmacies, and pharmacy departments in retail outlets and other users for medicinal and specialist uses?

Yes/ No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we agree with the proposal to provide exemption for wholesalers to import and stock plastic straws for distribution to, pharmacies, and pharmacy departments in retail outlets and other users for medicinal and specialist uses, but we are concerned about how this exemption will work in practice. How will exempted products be identified and/or wholesalers be audited to ensure compliance?

Q12 – 16: These questions are not answered by NLWA as they are not within our area of expertise.

Q17: Do you agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA)?

Yes/ No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA) straws.

There are two types of biodegradable plastics:

- ones which are made from plant-based materials (known as bioplastics) and
- those that are made from petrochemicals with chemical additives that allow them to break down faster.

Due to their chemical composition, biodegradable plastics cannot be recycled into new plastic products, and only bioplastics can be composted (in the right conditions). However, with both types of biodegradable plastic there is a difficulty of identifying them for separate handling and processing because they may not look any different to other types of plastic and are therefore difficult to identify. The collection systems and recycling machinery used to sort recyclables currently would not be able to separate them out for a different next use.

Secondly, from a waste hierarchy perspective, substituting compostable bioplastics for single use recyclable plastic, doesn't move this waste stream up the waste hierarchy, it simply changes the processing route. If the government wants to take decisive action on single use plastics, including reducing litter, it would be much better to encourage a move away from single use and throwaway materials and instead to encourage a much greater use of reusable products and the minimisation of plastic waste, including packaging as an alternative to single use products. This can only be achieved through a range of measures including legislation, financial drivers and behaviour change communications to normalise the use of reusable alternatives.

Q18 - 20: These questions are not answered by NLWA as they are not within our area of expertise.

Q21: *Our proposals for enforcement are that the ban will be enforced through civil sanctions set out in Part 3 of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008:*

How should compliance with the ban be monitored?

Who should enforce the ban? (for example, Local Authorities, Trading Standards or Office for Product Safety and Standards)

We agree that the ban should be enforced by local authorities' trading standards officers, who also enforce the plastic bag charge. However, we are unclear what level of enforcement will be required in order to ensure that the impact of the ban is as per the pre-ban modelling predicts. No new un-funded burdens should be created for local authorities as a result of these proposals.

Q22: *Are there any risks that alternatives to plastic straws will themselves have significant environmental impacts?*

Yes/No?

If so, how could these risks be avoided, minimised or mitigated? Please supply any evidence you may have to support your suggestions.

Yes, we consider that one of the risks is that plastic small beverage carton straws are just replaced with paper alternatives so that the sales of single use straws for beverage cartons in particular does not fall at all. Whilst the substitution of plastic with paper means that the packaging cartons have the potential to be recycled with the straw left in the carton, there is still a high risk that this will not happen. There is also a risk that because these products are largely consumed on-the-go that the paper straws are littered after use. The environmental impact of the products may be reduced as a result of this substitution and the potential for

recycling will be improved by the substitution, but the overall level of consumption a single use product will not. Unfortunately we have not evidence to support our suggestions.

Q23 – Q28: These questions are not answered by NLWA as they are not within our area of expertise.

Part B: Plastic stemmed cotton buds

Q29: *It would be helpful for our analysis if you could indicate which of the sectors you most align yourself/your organisation with for the purposes of this consultation. (please tick/circle one which is most applicable to you):*

Public body ✓

Non-governmental organisation

Retail industry

Manufacturing industry

Member of the general public

Other

Q30: *Do you support the proposal to introduce a ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic stemmed cotton buds in England?*

Yes/No

Please give reasons.

Yes, NLWA supports a ban on the distribution and sale of plastic stemmed cotton buds in England. One of the main reasons for our support is because of the volume of these products which are incorrectly disposed and the negative impact upon the environment that results. These are single use products, which are relatively persistent when disposed in the environment – plastic being durable. There are less persistent alternatives available so banning their sale and distribution would send a strong signal to consumers about the undesirable nature of single-use – thus helping to build a momentum to increase consumer support for reuse and product longevity. Ultimately, fewer single-use items has a beneficial environmental impact which we would support.

Q31: *Do you agree with our proposed date for the ban (October 2019)?*

Yes/No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we support the proposed October 2019 introduction of the ban because this would be consistent with the date for a ban on plastic straws which amplifies the message that single-use (and particularly single-use plastic) is the least desirable option for a range of products.

Q32: *Do you agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA)?*

Yes/No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA).

As noted for plastic straws there are two types of biodegradable plastics:

- ones which are made from plant-based materials (known as bioplastics) and
- those that are made from petrochemicals with chemical additives that allow them to break down faster.

Due to their chemical composition, biodegradable plastics cannot be recycled into new plastic products, and only bioplastics can be composted (in the right conditions). However, with both types of biodegradable plastic there is a difficulty of identifying them for separate handling and processing because they may not look any different to other types of plastic and are therefore difficult to identify. The collection systems and recycling machinery used to sort recyclables currently would not be able to separate them out for a different next use.

Secondly, from a waste hierarchy perspective, substituting compostable bioplastics for single use recyclable plastic, doesn't move this waste stream up the waste hierarchy, it simply changes the processing route. If the government wants to take decisive action on single use plastics, including reducing litter, it would be much better to encourage a move away from single use and throwaway materials and instead to encourage a much greater use of reusable products and the minimisation of plastic waste, including packaging as an alternative to single use products. This can only be achieved through a range of measures including legislation, financial drivers and behaviour change communications to normalise the use of reusable alternatives.

The other problem with plastic stemmed cotton buds is that the products are both multi-material in composition so they are not recyclable and a relatively high proportion are thrown incorrectly into toilets so they need to be made of materials which will not cause a problem if they are disposed incorrectly. Even if the stems were made of compostable or biodegradable plastic they would still be multi-material (with cotton bud ends) so would not be recyclable. And we are not aware of any evidence which would suggest that biodegradable or compostable cotton buds are less likely to be disposed incorrectly to the sewerage system.

Q33 – 36: These questions are not answered by NLWA as they are not within our area of expertise.

Q37: Our proposals for enforcement are that the ban will be enforced through civil sanctions set out in Part 3 of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008:

How should compliance with the ban be monitored?

Who should enforce the ban? (for example, Local Authorities, Trading Standards or Office for Product Safety and Standards)

We agree that the ban should be enforced by local authorities' trading standards officers, who also enforce the plastic bag charge. However, we are unclear what level of enforcement will be required in order to ensure that the impact of the ban is as per the pre-ban modelling predicts. No new un-funded burdens should be created for local authorities as a result of these proposals.

Q38: Is there anything else you would like to tell us relating to the proposed ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic stemmed cotton buds?

No.

Part C: Plastic drink stirrers

Q39: It would be helpful for our analysis if you could indicate which of the sectors you most align yourself/your organisation with for the purposes of this consultation. (please tick/circle one which is most applicable to you):

Public body ✓

Non-governmental organisation

Retail industry

Manufacturing industry

Member of the general public

Other

Q40: Do you support the proposal to introduce a ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic drink stirrers in England?

Yes/No

Please give reasons.

Yes, NLWA supports a ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic drink stirrers in England.

These are single-use products for which more sustainable, reusable alternatives exist. They are made from polystyrene and material which is frequently identified as a marine/beach contaminant.

Q41: Do you agree with our proposed date for the ban (October 2019)?

Yes/No

Please give reasons.

Yes, we support the proposed October 2019 introduction of the ban because this would be consistent with the date for a ban on plastic straws which amplifies the message that single-use (and particularly single-use plastic) is the least desirable option for a range of products.

Q42: Do you agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA)?

Yes/No

Please give reasons and any evidence that might be helpful. Are there environmental or economic reasons why these should not be banned?

Yes, we agree that the ban should cover all compostable and biodegradable plastic (such as PLA).

As noted for plastic straws there are two types of biodegradable plastics:

- ones which are made from plant-based materials (known as bioplastics) and
- those that are made from petrochemicals with chemical additives that allow them to break down faster.

Due to their chemical composition, biodegradable plastics cannot be recycled into new plastic products, and only bioplastics can be composted (in the right conditions). However, with both types of biodegradable plastic there is a difficulty of identifying them for separate handling and processing because they may not look any different to other types of plastic and are therefore difficult to identify. The collection systems and recycling machinery used to sort recyclables currently would not be able to separate them out for a different next use.

Secondly, from a waste hierarchy perspective, substituting compostable bioplastics for single use recyclable plastic, doesn't move this waste stream up the waste hierarchy, it simply changes the processing route. If the government wants to take decisive action on single use plastics, including reducing litter, it would be much better to encourage a move away from single use and throwaway materials and instead to encourage a much greater use of reusable products and the minimisation of plastic waste, including packaging as an alternative to single use products. This can only be achieved through a range of measures including legislation, financial drivers and behaviour change communications to normalise the use of reusable alternatives.

Q43 – Q44: These questions are not answered by NLWA as they are not within our area of expertise.

Q45: Our proposals for enforcement are that the ban will be enforced through civil sanctions set out in Part 3 of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008:

How should compliance with the ban be monitored?

Who should enforce the ban? (for example, Local Authorities, Trading Standards or Office for Product Safety and Standards)

We agree that the ban should be enforced by local authorities' trading standards officers, who also enforce the plastic bag charge. However, we are unclear what level of enforcement will be required in order to ensure that the impact of the ban is as per the pre-ban modelling predicts. No new un-funded burdens should be created for local authorities as a result of these proposals.

Q46: Is there anything else you would like to tell us relating to the proposed ban on the distribution and/or sale of plastic drink stirrers? No

In conclusion, NLWA is supportive of government intervention to reduce the amount of single-use plastic waste which is currently thrown away and welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and support proposals to ban the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers in England.

Yours faithfully



Cllr. Clyde Loakes
Chair of the North London Waste Authority