



Plastic Pollution Reduction Targets in the Environment Bill

To be debated on Monday 21st June 2021

To guarantee holistic action on plastic pollution - Amendment No. 28

This new Clause would require the Secretary of State to introduce a target for reducing plastic pollution and the volume of non-essential single-use products (including but not limited to plastics) in circulation in the economy and society.

Such a target meets DEFRA Minister Pow's aim outlined in her response to a similar amendment debated at Report stage in the House of Commons on 26th January 2021 - *"We actually want to see a more ambitious resources and waste target under the Bill, which applies holistically to all materials, not just plastic"* - as it would complement the future 'resource efficiency and waste reduction' target by ensuring reductions in waste that match the scale of the plastics problem.

The government has resisted committing to a plastic target on the face of the Bill for the 'Waste and resource efficiency' area on the basis that it is a framework bill that should therefore avoid further specificity. However, the government has now introduced a requirement to set a target for the 'abundance of species', and the wording of this amendment mirrors it.

Plastic pollution is suffocating the planet. It's estimated that the weight of plastic entering the ocean every year is equivalent to the weight of approximately 60,000 fully-grown blue whales – and this is likely to triple by 2040. It is responsible for huge harm to wildlife and whole ecosystems at a global level and there is increasing evidence that microplastics ingested by people through air, food and water are having harmful effects on human health. Our everyday lives are also blighted with single-use plastics from our doorsteps to our beloved countryside.

Despite this, the Bill currently adopts a fragmented approach to reducing plastic pollution and to boosting resource efficiency and waste, missing a key opportunity to put forward a joined-up approach to addressing the huge and growing plastics problem. For instance, the waste and resource efficiency section of the Bill focuses on end-of-life solutions to plastic pollution (e.g. Deposit Return Schemes & Extended Producer Responsibility) as separate from powers to charge for single-use plastic products, as separate again from the resource efficiency and waste reduction target area set out at the start of the Bill. The real solutions to the plastic pollution crisis are to reduce our consumption and production of plastics in the first place and make sure that the plastic products we do produce are designed to be reused, thereby creating a circular economy.

The inclusion in the Bill of provisions for a future 'resource efficiency and waste reduction' target are welcome, however efforts to boost resource efficiency will make only a partial contribution at best to reducing plastic pollution. Furthermore, action only on single-use plastic products risks incentivising substitutions of plastic for other single-use materials which have their own associated environmental and climate impacts, and risks shifting the focus away from reducing all waste in the first place.

New Friends of the Earth and City To Sea joint polling (May 2021, sample size 2000 UK adults) revealed that three quarters of Brits feel "anxiety, frustration or hopelessness" at the amount of plastic packaging that comes with their shopping. A survey of nearly 1,500 WI members and non-members found that at least 9.4 trillion microplastic fibres could be released into the environment per week in the UK, with a single 6kg domestic washing machine load having the potential to release as many as 700,000 fibres. This amendment would ensure holistic action on reducing all plastic pollution at its source, including plastic packaging and microplastics.

In summary, this amendment would clearly join up the plastics-related measures currently in the Bill under an overarching target to reduce plastic pollution, hugely furthering the benefits brought by these measures as standalones. It would ensure that major types of plastic pollution in the UK cannot be overlooked in wider action on waste and resources. Finally, it would prevent substitutions of plastic for other single-use materials, instead prioritising reduction, reuse and a circular economy.

This amendment has the support of an alliance of NGOs working on plastic pollution including Friends of the Earth, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, Surfers Against Sewage, Keep Britain Tidy, Tearfund and City to Sea. The call for plastic pollution reduction targets to be set in the Bill also has [cross-sector support from businesses, representatives from faith, academic and student organisations, and NGOs.](#)

Amendment text (No. 28)

BARONESS JONES OF WHITCHURCH
VISCOUNT COLVILLE OF CULROSS
BARONESS JONES OF MOULSECOOMB
BARONESS BOYCOTT

Insert the following new Clause—

“Environmental targets: plastics reduction

- (1) The Secretary of State must by regulations set a target (the “plastics reduction target”) in respect of a matter relating to reducing plastic pollution and the volume of non-essential single-use products (including but not limited to plastics) in circulation.
- (2) The specified date for the plastics reduction target must be by 31 December 2030.
- (3) Accordingly, the plastics reduction target is not a long-term target and the duty in subsection (1) is in addition to (and does not discharge) the duty in section 1(2) to set a long-term target in relation to resource efficiency and waste reduction.
- (4) Before making regulations under subsection (1) which set or amend a target the Secretary of State must be satisfied that meeting the target, or the amended target, would further the objective of reducing the volume of non-essential single-use products (including but not limited to plastics) in circulation.
- (5) Section 1(4) to (9) applies to the plastics reduction target and to regulations under this section as it applies to targets set under section 1 and to regulations under that section.
- (6) In this Part “the plastics reduction target” means the target set under subsection (1).”

Member’s explanatory statement

This new Clause would require the Secretary of State to introduce a target for reducing plastic pollution and the volume of non-essential single-use products (including but not limited to plastics) in circulation in the economy and society.