

Bioclarity News

AUGUST 2021

Draft legislation on the Plastic Packaging Tax published



The government has just published the first draft of its Plastics Tax so here's our summary of what is included and who has to pay:

- The tax will be £200 per tonne (apportionment for part thereof).
- The tax applies to plastic packaging manufactured in or imported into the UK containing less than 30% recycled plastic when measured by weight.
- It applies to businesses who manufacture or import plastic packaging components or import packaged goods into the UK.
- 'Small operators' who manufacture or import less than 10 tonnes of plastic packaging in a 12-month period are exempted from the charge.
- There are anti-avoidance rules dealing with the artificial separation of business activities to avoid the tax.

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DEFRA has defended the UK approach by saying that 'The UK is a global leader in tackling plastic pollution'.

It also said that it was currently assessing whether there were items for which a ban would be a "suitable and proportionate measure". They said they were seeking powers in the Environment

Bill which would allow the government to tackle "problematic items" through a variety of policy measures, including charges for single-use plastic items.

There is also a variety of approaches proposed by the four nations of the UK as to how they plan to legislate on single-use plastic (see Issue 15). Northern Ireland is compelled under the Northern Ireland Protocol to transpose "certain articles" of the Directive by 2022, while Scotland and Wales have proposed bans in their own domestic markets.

Following consultation feedback, the government has extended the scope of the Tax to include imported filled plastic packaging that does not contain at least 30% recycled plastic content, such as plastic bottles filled with drinks, rather than just imports of unfilled plastic packaging.

Further exemptions include where the packaging is used for medicinal products or used in the transport of imported goods. Plastic components which are not subject to the tax such included items such as toolboxes, first aid boxes, glasses cases, CD, DVD and video game cases, water cartridge filters, printer or toner cartridges, inhalers and shop fittings

Businesses will be required to register with HMRC within 30 days, starting when; there are reasonable grounds to believe that in the next 30 days, the threshold of 10 tonnes will be surpassed or that the threshold of 10 tonnes was surpassed in the previous 12 months.

Not banning sups is a 'dereliction of Brexit promise' says campaigners

EU member states have recently banned most SUPs but, despite regularly stating that the country would uphold high post-Brexit environmental standards, UK ministers have yet to legislate to ban SUPs.

More than 20 environmental groups, including Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, City to Sea and Keep Britain Tidy have challenged the government on its commitments.

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McDonald's trials world's first cup take-back scheme



Six McDonald's restaurants in the Northampton area have been chosen to pilot returnable coffee cups. For a £1 deposit, customers can choose to have their hot drink in a returnable Loop cup.

Those that do will get 20p off their next medium hot drink order – meaning that after five returns and subsequent orders, customers will break even and will continue to receive 20p off every time they pick a Loop cup.

Starbucks has also announced plans to launch a reusable cup 'sharing' initiative in all British, French and German stores in the coming months, ahead of a roll-out across Europe, the Middle East and Africa by 2025.

Under the scheme, called 'Cup-Share', customers will pay a small deposit fee for a reusable cup that and will get 25-30p off of each beverage every time the cup is reused.

Take back and reuse schemes are set to explode as retailers and event organisers respond to consumer pressure to reduce plastic waste. At Wimbledon this year, all cold beverages were sold in reusable, rigid plastic cups rather than disposables. Co-op has confirmed plans to host reverse vending machines for plastic bottles and drinks cans at five music festivals this summer, and Heineken has recently launched the 'Greener Bar' to improve the brand's ability to upcycle, recycle and reuse materials, including the use of reusable and recyclable cups.

Are take-back schemes the answer to the kerbside collection lottery?



While measures to unify recycling collections across UK local authorities are not likely to be implemented by the UK Government for some time, due to Covid-19-related delays affecting consultations on the Resources and Waste Strategy, several retailers have shown they are keen to bridge the gap.

Co-op has recently announced that it is rolling out an in-store collection system for plastic bags and flexible packaging to 1,500 stores by the end of July and to 2,300 by the end of November.

The retailer claims that it will host Europe's most extensive in-store network of take-back bins for problem plastics once the full roll-out of the scheme is complete.

Sainsbury's last month announced plans to introduce in-store recycling systems for flexible plastics packaging across all stores nationwide, following successful trials in the North East of England earlier this year. Similarly, Tesco is adding flexible plastic recycling points to 171 large stores across Wales and the South West of England, while Aldi UK is adding them to 20 stores in the first instance.

WRAP data says that flexible film accounted for 290,000 tonnes of plastic packaging waste in 2019. Separate research from the Flexible Packaging Consortium revealed that some 215 billion pieces of flexible plastic packaging are placed on the UK market every year and that almost all of this material is sent to landfill or incineration.

Recent extreme weather takes climate change models 'off the scale'

The extreme weather, including fires, floods, heatwaves and droughts seen across the globe in recent weeks has left climate concerned that climate change is moving faster than models have predicted.

Devastating floods destroyed towns in Germany and Belgium. A ruthless heat wave and wild fires have frazzled the US and Canada. Heavy rains have paralysed a Chinese industrial hub home to 10 million people. Forest fires are raging through Eastern Russia.

Climate scientists have said the severity of these events is simply "off scale", compared with what atmospheric models forecast – even when global warming is fully considered.

One driver behind many of these events is the shifting pattern of the jet stream, a fast-flowing band of air that governs weather in the northern hemisphere. It's becoming slower and wavier, particularly in summer months.

When the jet stream becomes slow and wobbly, high-pressure systems and low-pressure systems grow in magnitude and get stuck in one place. This means heatwaves and drought (linked to high pressure systems) and flooding (linked to low pressure systems) both become more persistent.

But not all extreme weather events are solely related to the jet stream. Global warming also has a direct impact on rainfall because warmer air can hold more moisture. This is part of the reason why the recent floods in India and China were so devastating, involving monsoonal cycles rather than jet stream behaviour.

Furthermore, the warming of the Arctic is influencing weather elsewhere on the planet as well as weakening of the jet stream. The world has warmed about 1.2C on average since pre-industrial times, but the Arctic region warming about three times faster than the rest of the world largely because of the loss of reflective snow and ice.

