

**P-06-1357 Draw up a new Microplastics Action Plan for Wales - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 18 June 2025**

Dear Senedd Petitions Committee,

I hope you are well.

I'd like to take this opportunity to update you on developments in terms of microplastics following on from our Senedd petition.

The coalition group Sustainable Clothing and Textiles Cymru worked with Welsh Government civil servants and Environment Platform Wales to organise an event to bring together academics from around Wales to share latest developments in their work on microplastics, nanoplastics and plastics more generally. This event took place at Cardiff University on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18th December 2024. It was very well attended.

The event was split in to different aspects, looking at some of the various sources of microplastics, their human and environmental impacts and then thinking ahead to some of the solutions, especially those for which we have the devolved responsibility for. It also looked at the issue of the multitude of chemicals present in plastics and what effect they can have when they leach out into the environment.

At the event it was stated that Welsh Government would be keen to look for some early wins on taking action on microplastics.

It was originally also the idea that we have 2 events, this first one and then one relatively soon afterwards to bring together other groups, experts and businesses who are working on issues and solutions around microplastic contamination.

So whilst the event went well and it was certainly a welcome development, there has been no mention since that of organising the second suggested event.

In terms of follow ups to the first event, there was an online meeting at the end of March this year. This turned into primarily one for academics. There was also a discussion at the meeting of excluding NGOs from future such meetings!

Since that online meeting, there has been no further communication from that group so unfortunately I am unable to say whether there will be any more meetings or whether progress will be maintained. This is disappointing.

In terms of recommendations to WG, I would offer the following:

- I still think we need a plan of some sort, whether that is an official strategy or action plan or even just a more informal plan of action. There are so many different sources of micro and nano plastics that we need a plan to work out what the solutions are here in Wales for each source. Some sources are being addressed by things like some single use plastic items being banned, but these only constitute a small percentage of

sources. We need to be taking action on as many different sources as we can in a joined up way. A plan would also allow us to determine whether we have the necessary regulatory powers over different sources of microplastics and would allow us to develop a timeline for action. At the moment we don't have that

- There are some obvious things WG could do such as finally introducing a comprehensive litter and fly tipping prevention strategy. Currently Wales is the only UK country not to have one of these strategies despite having consulted on one a few years ago.
- We need to have an ongoing forum which brings in people from businesses and other sectors as well as academics.
- WG should signal a direction of travel by taking action on some of the 'easy wins' or 'low hanging fruit' in terms of microplastics. Some sources will be more difficult to regulate, some will be easier. If we can't even address the easier ones to start with, then we will really be struggling. As they themselves stated that they were looking for some of these easier wins, we would like to see them follow up on that
- Thank you for forwarding the correspondence concerning the Senedd petition on artificial grass. Even though that petition was not from us, it does of course highlight one of the many sources of microplastics as well as having other negative impacts. I note that the Cabinet Secretary makes mention of microplastics in waste water in his response. It is important to note that currently neither Dŵr Cymru nor NRW test for microplastics in water courses in Wales. We established this through EIR requests. Again, this is an issue WG could address by requiring them to start testing so we can establish exactly what the situation is in Wales. Through our own citizen science testing, we know that sand and soil samples from around Wales contain huge quantities of microplastics. This again highlights the need for some sort of action plan. It should also be a very specific ask for WG – will you start testing water courses and other environments in Wales for microplastics?
- We currently have an ongoing Senedd petition concerning a somewhat related matter – the use of plastic mesh netting in grass turf. It is a totally unnecessary practice and one which has many negative impacts. It can become exposed and then snags and kills hedgehogs, birds and other small animals, it is a nightmare for gardeners as it is very difficult to cut through and it eventually breaks down in to ever smaller pieces of plastic over the years. WG could take action to prevent the use of this turf in new build housing estates in Wales for instance through amendments to Housing regs and Planning. It would be an easy win and would signal a direction of travel on microplastics. Helpfully, the UK Turfgrass Growers Association, the industry trade body, have taken a vote to ban this practice from their members from next year onwards. There should be nothing stopping WG following suit and using whatever

levers it has available to restrict its use in Wales wherever possible. We have turf suppliers in Wales who supply plastic free turf so we would even be supporting Welsh businesses. If we can't even take action on something this easy, something that is completely unnecessary and which the relevant trade body don't even want, then it will be a sad state of affairs. It will be interesting to see WG's response to our petition once it closes.

In summary I think it is fair to say that things could be better and that things need to move forwards more quickly and in a more joined up way. We also need to start seeing some more action from WG.

Yours sincerely

Bleddyn Lake