

Introducing market restrictions on problematic single-use plastic items in Scotland

Islands communities impact assessment

November 2021

Introduction to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

1. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 provides for a duty on the Scottish ministers and other relevant public bodies that they must have regard to island communities in exercising their functions and in the development of legislation.¹
2. Section 13 of the 2018 Act obliges Scottish ministers to prepare an islands communities impact assessment (ICIA) in relation to legislation which, in their opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities in Scotland.
3. Section 13 of the 2018 Act states that an ICIA must:
 - describe the likely significantly different effect of the legislation;
 - assess the extent to which the Scottish ministers consider that the legislation can be developed in such a manner as to improve or mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from the legislation; and
 - set out the financial implications of steps taken under this subsection to mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from the legislation.
4. The Scottish Government's island communities impact assessments guidance sets out four preliminary stages that must be undertaken prior to preparing an ICIA.² These are:
 - Developing a clear understanding of the objectives and intended outcomes of the policy, strategy or service including any island needs or impacts
 - Gathering data, identifying evidence gaps and identifying stakeholders
 - Consulting with appropriate stakeholders
 - Assessing whether there are any issues resulting from the proposed policy that are significantly different from those that would be experienced on the mainland, or on other islands
5. These steps have been undertaken prior to the development of this ICIA.

Policy objectives and intended outcomes

6. The Scottish Government is committed to tackling our throwaway culture, in line with the vision set out in *Making Things Last*.¹ Action has already been taken to place market restrictions on plastic microbeads and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in Scotland and the Scottish Government is now looking to go beyond this to address additional items. This assessment therefore considers the potential impacts on islands communities of a restriction of the following single use plastic products:
 - Single-use plastic cutlery (forks, knives, spoons, chopsticks);
 - Single-use plastic plates;
 - Single-use plastic straws;
 - Single-use plastic beverage stirrers;

¹ [Making Things Last: a circular economy strategy for Scotland](#)

- Single-use plastic balloon sticks;
 - Single-use food containers made of expanded polystyrene;
 - Single-use cups and other beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene, including their covers and lids;
7. These items are included in article 5 (restrictions on placing on market) of the EU directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment (2019/904) (“the single-use plastics directive”).
8. The following definitions, taken from the directive are applied to this ICIA:
- ‘Plastic’ means a material consisting of a polymer as defined in point 5 of article 3 of regulation (EC) no. 1907/2006, to which additives or other substances may have been added, and which can function as a main structural component of final products, with the exception of natural polymers that have not been chemically modified;
 - ‘Single-use plastic product’ means a product that is made wholly or partly from plastic and that is not conceived, designed or placed on the market to accomplish, within its life span, multiple trips or rotations by being returned to a producer for refill or re-used for the same purpose for which it was conceived;

Screening assessment

9. Prior to the consultation on these proposals,² which ran from 12th October 2020 to 4th January 2021, a screening assessment was carried out to identify whether there were issues specific to island communities that required further investigation.
10. Desktop research was undertaken to identify whether there was any existing evidence of the impacts associated with a restriction of the single-use plastic items in question being different for islands communities. This was intended to identify issues for further investigation.
11. This desktop research was then supplemented by identification of relevant issues that have been raised in previous ICIAAs.
12. In addition, representatives from local authorities whose remits are partially or wholly island based were offered the opportunity to discuss their thoughts with Zero Waste Scotland. These conversations were intended to better understand the impacts that were identified by the initial research and to draw out any other issues that were not previously identified.
13. Discussions took place with five of the six island authorities. These were Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council,

² [Consultation: introducing market restrictions on single use plastic items in Scotland](#)

Argyll & Bute Council and North Ayrshire Council. In addition, a discussion took place with a representative from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

14. For each conversation, representatives were provided with an opportunity to discuss their concerns about the impact of the proposed market restrictions on their communities and the unique challenges faced by island communities.
15. The screening assessment identified four initial issues:
 - Waste collections, where the potential impact was unclear;
 - Marine litter, where the impact was expected to be positive;
 - Use of alternatives on ferries, where a significant impact was not identified;
 - Access to alternatives, where any impact is not likely to be unique to island communities.

Consultation responses and stakeholder workshops

16. Analysis of the consultation responses has been undertaken and is publicly available.³ Analysis of the responses did not identify any island specific concerns.
17. In addition to the formal consultation, island stakeholders were invited to participate in a series of workshops, intended to provide further insight into the issues identified during the screening assessment, and identify any other island issues. Three workshops were held, engaging with fifteen representatives.
18. No additional issues were identified during the workshops, or in the consultation responses. However, stakeholders were able to provide useful context on the issues identified in the screening assessment.

Waste collections

19. With regard to waste collections, participants at the workshops noted that any impact would depend on what is used to replace the single-use plastic items, with two key considerations:
 - Whether the alternatives weigh more than the current single-use plastic versions;
 - Whether the alternatives are easily recycled in an island context.

Marine litter

20. Participants in the workshops agreed that the proposals were likely to have a beneficial impact on the marine litter that is experienced by the islands. This may have a beneficial impact on the health and wellbeing of islanders, as well as providing an economic benefit by ensuring that the islands remain attractive to visitors.

³ [Market restrictions on single-use plastic items: consultation analysis](#)

21. However, it was noted that the alternative items may be littered instead, so continued communications will be needed to minimise this.

22. In addition, several respondents to the consultation noted the prevalence of plastic waste, including the items within this proposal, on island beaches.

The use of alternatives on ferries

23. It was confirmed at the workshops that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, reusables were already being used on some ferries.

Access to alternatives

24. Participants highlighted concerns about the impact on island businesses of having to switch away from single-use plastic items. This was for two reasons.

25. Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic has had obvious impacts on hospitality businesses, and anecdotally, businesses have returned to single-use plastic as a result of perceived hygiene concerns. In particular, the example was given of hospitality businesses that have switched to takeaway service using expanded polystyrene.

26. Secondly, there was concern that island businesses may face higher transport costs for the alternative items. As discussed above, many of the alternative single-use items are heavier than the single-use plastic versions.

Assessment: is the policy likely to have a significantly different impact on island communities?

Waste collections

27. Zero Waste Scotland has undertaken research to understand the difference in weight of alternatives to the single-use plastic items that would be subject to market restrictions (see Table 1 below). The majority of the alternatives highlighted are heavier than the current single-use plastic versions.

Table 1: Average weight of single-use plastic items and common alternatives⁴

Measure No	Item	Functional unit	Average weight (g)
1	Plastic cutlery	1 spoon	2.6
	Wooden cutlery	1 spoon	3
2	Plastic plates	1 plate	9.98

⁴ This table is extracted from the environmental report:

[Introducing market restrictions on problematic single-use plastic items in Scotland: strategic environmental assessment, environment report](#)

Original data sources:

[European Union \(2018\) Life Cycle Inventories of Single Use Plastic Products and their Alternatives](#)

[DEFRA \(2018\) Consultation Stage Impact Assessment on the proposal to ban the distribution and/or sale and of plastic drinking straws in England](#)

	Paper plates	1 plate	19
3	Plastic beverage stirrer	1 stirrer	0.6
	Wooden stirrer	1 stirrer	1.9
4	Plastic straws	1 straw	0.55
	Wax-lined paper straws	1 straw	1.07
5	Plastic balloon sticks	1 balloon stick	4.81
	Cardboard balloon sticks	1 balloon stick	9.62
6	Food containers made of expanded polystyrene	1 container	5
	Fibre-based containers	1 container	12.5
7	Cups made of expanded polystyrene	1 cup	2.7
	Plastic-lined paper cups	1 cup	11

28. However, it should be noted that it is estimated that the total amount of single-use plastic waste generated is approximately 1,860 tonnes per year (for the whole of Scotland).⁵ This is considered to be insignificant in comparison to the total waste from all sources in 2018, which was over 11 million tonnes.⁶
29. In addition, it is anticipated that consumer choice will result in a reduction in the prevalence of many of these single-use items over time, regardless of the material used, through switching to reusable options or reduced use of these items.⁷⁸ This reduction may be increased if the communications accompanying the introduction of market restrictions highlighted the benefits associated with using less single-use items, regardless of the material.
30. We therefore do not consider that the additional weight of items poses a significant problem for waste treatment and collection in island communities.
31. With regards to the ease of recycling alternatives, previous DEFRA research has indicated that the recycling rates of the single-use plastic items in question are low (between 0 and 10%).⁹¹⁰¹¹ The recycling rates for common alternative single use items are in the same range, although it should be noted that alternatives to EPS are more commonly recycled, whilst non-plastic single-use cutlery is less commonly recycled.

⁵ [Strategic Environmental Assessment Post Adoption Statement](#)

⁶ [Scotland's environment waste discover data tool](#)

⁷ [A preliminary assessment of the economic, environmental and social impacts of a potential ban on plastic straws, plastic stem cotton buds and plastics drinks stirrers.](#)

⁸ [A preliminary assessment of the economic impacts of a potential ban on plastic cutlery, plastic plates and plastic balloon sticks.](#)

⁹ [A preliminary assessment of the economic, environmental and social impacts of a potential ban on plastic straws, plastic stem cotton buds and plastics drinks stirrers.](#)

¹⁰ [A preliminary assessment of the economic impacts of a potential ban on plastic cutlery, plastic plates and plastic balloon sticks.](#)

¹¹ [A Preliminary Assessment of the Economic Impacts of a Potential Ban on Expanded Polystyrene Food and Beverage Containers.](#)

32. These proposals do not dictate what alternative materials should be used, although it is noted that reusable options are considered to be preferable.¹² Businesses will therefore be able to choose appropriate alternatives, or in some cases move away from using these items at all. In island areas, items that do not require specialist treatment at the post-use stage may be preferable, as this may reduce local authority costs by enabling treatment or reuse closer to the source of the waste. However, it should be noted that the current single-use plastic items are also often difficult to recycle.
33. We therefore do not consider that this issue is significantly different for island communities.

Marine litter

34. Participants at the workshops and respondents to the consultation noted the prevalence of plastic waste on beaches in island areas at present.
35. It is anticipated that this proposal will have a beneficial effect with regard to marine litter, as cutlery, straws, stirrers, drinks cups and cup lids, balloon sticks and food containers are among the top ten single-use plastic items found on beaches in the EU.¹³ In addition, recent work by Marine Scotland indicated that local litter sources dominate plastic inputs to Scottish coastal areas, so local litter reduction actions can reduce marine plastics.¹⁴
36. We therefore consider that this is likely to have a positive impact on island communities. Using communications associated with the introduction of market restrictions to highlight the benefits of moving away from single-use items all together will increase the potential for a beneficial effect.

The use of alternatives on ferries

37. It was noted at the workshops that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, reusables were already being used on some ferries. It is therefore considered that a switch away from the single-use plastic items under consideration is unlikely to be problematic. It should also be highlighted that for food and beverage containers, only the use of expanded polystyrene would be subject to market restrictions, so ferry companies could use single-use items from an alternative material if necessary.
38. We therefore do not consider that this will have a significant impact on island communities.

¹² A hierarchy of actions is set out on page 14 of [Ending the throwaway culture: five principles for tackling single-use items](#) (the final report of the expert panel on environmental charging and other measures)

¹³ [Commission staff working document impact assessment, reducing marine litter: action on single use plastics and fishing gear](#)

¹⁴ [Marine Scotland topic sheet 151](#)

Access to alternatives

39. It was noted at the workshops that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on hospitality businesses, and businesses may have returned to single-use plastic as a result of perceived hygiene concerns.
40. We do not consider the impact of Covid-19 on businesses to be an island-specific impact, as businesses throughout Scotland have been impacted by the pandemic. However, it will be important to ensure that the island context is taken into account when communication of the changes is undertaken. It was noted during the workshops that this should include local business groups and newspapers for the islands. This will ensure that island businesses are able to plan ahead.
41. With regard to the potential for higher transport costs for heavier alternatives, it is well-documented that island communities face a premium for parcel deliveries.¹⁵ There does not appear to have been any equivalent research for the delivery costs charged by wholesalers, and there is little publicly-available information about wholesale delivery costs. However, it appears that some wholesalers base the delivery cost on the value, rather than the weight, of the order. This would mean that the delivery cost of the alternative items would not be higher, as costs tend to decrease with the value of the order. Even if companies do base delivery costs on weight, the weight of alternative single-use items remains very small so any increase in cost is likely to be insignificant when considered on a per item basis. We therefore do not consider that this will have a significantly different impact for island communities.
42. This should also be seen in the context of ongoing Scottish Government work to ensure that the parcel delivery market works in the interests of all Scottish consumers and businesses.¹⁶ In addition, it should be noted that encouraging customer use of reusable alternatives or reduced reliance on single-use items would enable businesses to reduce the impact of any increase in delivery costs.

Mitigation measures or adjustment of policy

43. On the basis of our assessment, we do not consider that this proposal will have any significantly different adverse impact for island communities. There may be greater benefits to island communities from any resulting reduction in marine litter. There is therefore no need for mitigation measures or adjustments to the proposal.
44. However, the importance of using appropriate communication channels during the implementation of the proposals has been highlighted. This should include

¹⁵ [The postcode penalty: delivering solutions](#); and [Postal delivery pricing: econometric analysis](#)

¹⁶ [Consumers and competition: parcel delivery charges](#)

island-specific channels such as local business groups and newspapers. This will help to ensure that island businesses are aware of the changes and can adapt in good time.

45. The potential for benefits to island communities may increase if communications around the introduction of the market restrictions encourage an overall reduction in the use of single-use items of all materials.

Conclusion

46. Our assessment has identified one positive impact where the benefits of the proposals may be greater for island communities. We have not identified any negative impacts where the impacts may be significantly different for island communities. In addition, the use of appropriate communication channels will ensure that island businesses are able to prepare for the changes.



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