

Call for Evidence – Summary of Responses

AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE

Scottish Government call for evidence: tackling consumption of single-use food containers and other commonly littered or problematic single-use items

April 2024

Background:

A call for evidence on single-use food containers and other commonly littered or problematic single-use items (bowls, trays and platters; incontinence and period products; sachets; tobacco filters; and fruit and vegetable packaging) was released in April 2022. It received 69 responses, including 26 individual and 43 organisation responses. Organisation responses included: charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups, local authorities, businesses and industry bodies. A wide range of evidence was presented about the environmental, economic and social issues associated with single-use plastic items and products. This included scientific and industry reports, surveys, government reports, community action and volunteering-based evidence, and personal observations.

Analysis:

The analysis was undertaken by Scottish Government analysts based in the Rural & Environmental Science and Analytical Services division. Responses to each question were reviewed and coded into different themes, based on the nature and content of the evidence, opinion or arguments provided. The analysis and commentary presented in the main report focuses on the nature and content of the responses and the evidence provided. It does not make any assessment of the quality or validity of the evidence, opinions and arguments.

Findings:

Key themes that emerged from this call for evidence included: litter and the environmental damage littering of single-use plastics can cause; the large and complex market associated with single-use plastics and the range of industry and business interests at stake; that environmentally-friendly alternative products are available but there are a range of negative impacts and challenges associated with these; that barriers to change include consumer behaviours, business costs and the complexity of policy and regulations. Responses also pointed to a need to consider inequalities in society and how those who experience socio-economic disadvantage and those with protected characteristics may be impacted by policy development in this area.

Each specific item in this call for evidence raised specific issues, challenges and opportunities. For example, the evidence and views on food containers presented a range of challenges and opportunities for takeaway and hospitality businesses, including the use of reusable food containers and the food hygiene concerns this raises; meanwhile, the evidence and views on cigarette filters presented challenges and opportunities around alternative filter materials, waste disposal costs and the health debates surrounding smoking and e-cigarettes. The responses suggested that a range of (at times conflicting) public and business interests are at stake across each of the items and the evidence provided by respondents reflected that.

The analysis suggested there may be a lack of data and evidence available across a number of items and topic areas and further analysis may be needed. Some of the issues raised by respondents such as litter, harm to wildlife, smoking or access to incontinence and period products, clearly are emotive and sensitive topics and this points to a need for policy to consider a range of evidence types – from scientific reports to market and consumer research to individual interests, values and experiences.

Next Steps:

A critical next stage for policy development on single-use plastics is to review and assess the evidence, with expert input and further stakeholder engagement. The analysis demonstrated that single-use plastics is a dynamic and complex policy area, and that reviewing up to date evidence beyond this publication (from 2023 onwards) and from a wide range of evidence sources and stakeholder groups will be needed to ensure the latest evidence and a diversity of views are captured. The Scottish Government will review the evidence from this call and use this to shape future policy development on single-use plastics, in line with upcoming developments in the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, Circular Economy and Waste Route Map and Climate Change Plan.



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