

STRATEGIC NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO

# END PLASTIC POLLUTION



Aligning the UK with the  
**UNEA Treaty on Plastic Pollution**

resourcefutures 

### **About Surfers Against Sewage**

Surfers Against Sewage is a charity of water lovers campaigning to protect the ocean and all it makes possible, by taking action on the ground that triggers change from the top. We're more than surfers. It's more than sewage. We're here because of the ocean. Let's fight for it.

### **About Resource Futures**

Resource Futures is an employee-owned, independent environmental consultancy with a 30-year heritage in the waste and resources industry; our vision is to create a sustainable world. We are a purpose-driven business and have been a certified B Corp since 2016.



# REPORT CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Why end plastic pollution?	7
A world free of plastic pollution	8
Turning off the tap	9
The plastic pollution problem	10
To what extent is the problem being addressed?	11
The Strategic National Action Plan	12
Timeline & key policies	19

# FOREWORD

In March 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted resolution 5/14 “*End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument*”, convening an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to develop a new global agreement combatting plastic pollution, otherwise known as a new plastics treaty.

Without doubt, UNEA 5/14 was a landmark moment in global policymaking, handing a heavy task to negotiators who must now ensure the eventual agreement meets the expectations and ambitions of those who championed it.

The aim is to reach agreement by the end of 2024 and to open it for adoption in 2025, meaning there is no time to waste.

As an organisation based in the UK, we have been looking to our national Government for leadership on this issue and, fortunately, the UK has emerged as an active player in the international arena, initially co-sponsoring the UNEA resolution upon which 5/14 was based and then joining the High Ambition Coalition, a group of countries committed to developing the best possible agreement, including a goal of ending plastic pollution by 2040. We hope to see continued aspirational and engaged leadership throughout the process.

Whatever form the eventual agreement takes, it is clear that, at the global level, there are certain principles that must be agreed, including setting controls on virgin plastic production, agreeing restrictions for the most hazardous and problematic polymers, establishing clear criteria for eco-design and product standards, agreed methodologies for monitoring and reporting on plastic and plastic pollution and, critically, stable and predictable financing to ensure developing countries and economies in transition are able to meet the obligations of the agreement.

These globally agreed targets and actions will create the framework for national and regional implementation, as well as establishing a level playing field and clear direction of travel for a completely reformed plastics economy.

Country-level plastic pollution reduction plans — or national action plans — need to be at the heart of the global agreement, setting out the specific policies and measures taken or to be taken to comply with the settled international obligations and other related commitments.

The process for developing national action plans can be broken down into three main phases: (i) preparatory activities, such as data-gathering to establish inventories, sources and pathways of plastic and plastic pollution; (ii) needs assessment and intervention opportunities, particularly as it relates to promoting a circular economy and preventing leakage; and (iii) policy development and implementation, for example market restrictions, separate collection and recycling, infrastructure improvements (including for reuse systems), measures promoting secondary markets and sustainable financing mechanisms.

There will be no one-size-fits-all approach to tackling such a huge transboundary problem. What we cannot shy away from is the fact that plastic pollution now exists in every environment on Earth, in our bodies, in our food and in the air we breathe. Measures will need to be designed to reduce material production and consumption, while improving the safety and durability of designs, holding polluters to account and applying the precautionary principle.


This timely new report from Surfers Against Sewage should act as the catalyst for an ambitious and robust national policy agenda that responds to the urgency now recognised on the global stage.

With the benefit of being actively involved in the negotiations, the UK is perfectly positioned to establish a blueprint for effective domestic action which focuses on prevention, safe and non-toxic circularity for plastics, mandatory monitoring and reporting and clear targets for reduction.

I hope that in reading this report, policymakers are compelled to act — and act now.

## **Christina Dixon**

*Ocean Campaign Leader,  
Environmental Investigation Agency*



**I HOPE THAT IN  
READING THIS REPORT,  
POLICYMAKERS ARE  
COMPELLED TO ACT  
– AND ACT NOW.**

Christina Dixon, Ocean Campaign Leader,  
Environmental Investigation Agency





**OUR VISION IS A WORLD  
FREE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION.**

# WHY END PLASTIC POLLUTION? AND WHAT WILL IT BRING US?

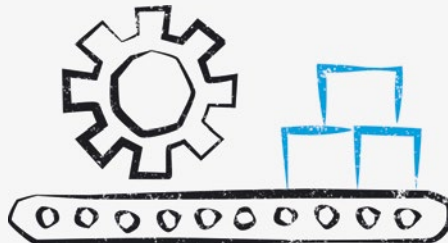
## GREEN GROWTH

Investment in skills-based circular economy jobs increases employment and household income, leading to economic growth. Money spent in the UK on Circular Economy services will continue to circulate within the UK.



## INCREASED UK MANUFACTURING

Many single use plastics are imported. Reducing these imports means less money leaving the UK, which can instead be focused on UK manufacturing of high-quality circular products.



## INCREASED EMPLOYMENT

Ending plastic pollution will require a shift to a circular economy. This means a massive increase in skills and employment around R&D, reuse, repair and remanufacturing, and manufacturing reusable products.



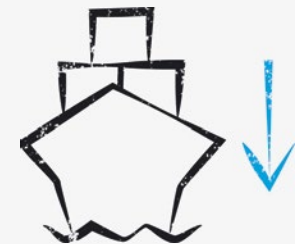
## INCREASED RESILIENCE

Protecting people against increasing prices, inflation, and shortage of supply of imported goods. By moving to an economy that's supported by more high quality and sustainable products and services produced in the UK, and maintained through reuse, repair and remanufacturing.



## REDUCE PLASTIC EXPORTS

Reducing plastic waste and reducing the practice of exporting plastic waste from the UK to countries where it is found dumped or burnt irresponsibly, stimulating UK markets for resources and waste industries.



## TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

Through low carbon products and services based on circular economy principles.



## RESOURCE SECURITY

by focusing on green growth and UK manufacturing, we will decrease our reliance on individual markets and suppliers overseas, avoiding risks in supply bottlenecks and increasing resource security.

# A WORLD FREE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION.

**Plastic is a versatile and valuable material that provides numerous benefits to society.**

However, the reality is that our current production and consumption habits, coupled with our current waste management systems, means that too much of this plastic becomes pollution. If we carry on at the current trajectory, the OECD estimates that plastic production will **double by 2040**<sup>1</sup>.

The WWF found that this could cost society \$7.1 trillion<sup>2</sup>, unless urgent action is taken. We can't rely on beach cleans to keep our beaches tidy. We need to take holistic and coordinated action to end plastic pollution.

There is **OVERWHELMING SUPPORT** to take action on plastic pollution in the UK.

The UN declared that we all have a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment<sup>3</sup>. We all want access to clean beaches and a clean ocean. UK citizens have never been more aware of and aligned in their desire to reduce plastic pollution. Sparked by the 'blue planet effect'<sup>4</sup>, public interest in plastic is at an all-time high<sup>5</sup>. The recent government consultations on banning single use plastic straws and other items received the **highest response rate**<sup>6</sup> in government history.

Numerous social movements, such as the Million Mile Clean, Plastic Free Communities, Brand Audits, and Refill Campaigns, are increasing in uptake year on year, whose missions are becoming firmly embedded in societal values.

We need our Government to push for **MEANINGFUL ACTION** to end plastic pollution.

The status quo cannot be relied upon to achieve our vision. **Timely and ambitious policies** can drastically reduce future environmental damages, and in particular plastic polluting our environment.

#### SOURCES

- 1 <https://www.oecd.org/environment/plastics/#:~:text=While%20with%20business%2Das%2Dusual,plastic%20leakage%20to%20the%20environment.>
- 2 <https://www.edie.net/plastic-pollution-wwf-urges-action-to-prevent-societal-costs-hitting-7trn-by-2040/>
- 3 <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/historic-move-un-declares-healthy-environment-human-right>
- 4 <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/88-blue-planet-2-changed-david-attenborough/>
- 5 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/plastics-tracker-report-2021>
- 6 <https://www.complydirect.com/news/plastic-consultation-generates-highest-response-rate-in-government-history/>

**We are calling on Government to:**



**PRODUCE A STRATEGIC NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION**



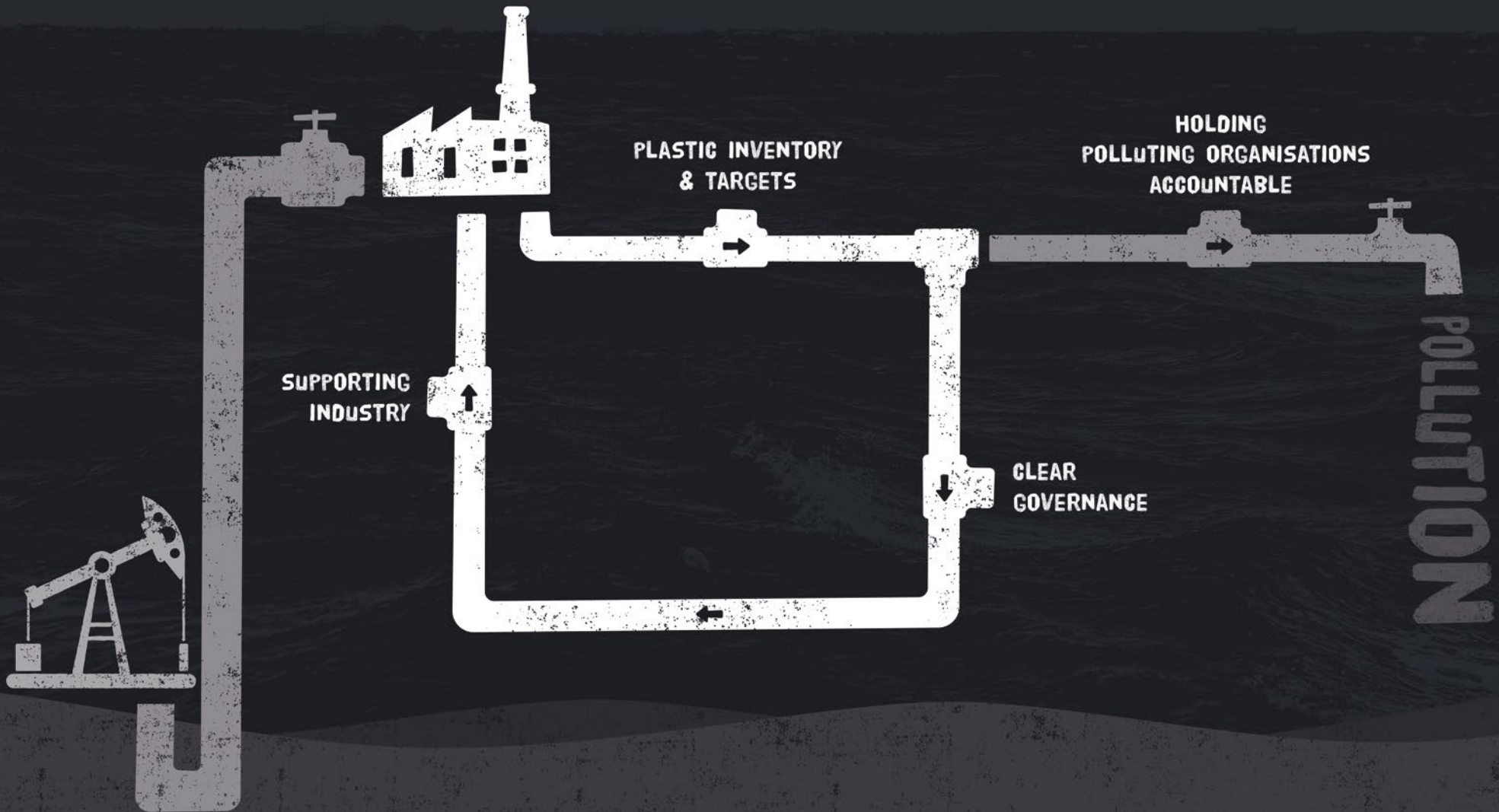
**DEFINE TIME-BOUND, SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE GOALS WITHIN THE PLAN**



**DEFINE AND COMMIT TO STEPS AMBITIOUS ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS**



# TURNING OFF THE TAP TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION.



# THE PLASTIC POLLUTION PROBLEM.

**Plastics are incredibly versatile materials that underpin a huge number of products and services that we rely on in daily life.**

However, plastic pollution is increasingly being found in our natural environment, greatly harming the health of our environment, our wildlife and our society.

The plastic pollution problem is **FAR REACHING, HARMFUL, and COMPLEX.**

**It is far reaching:** Plastic pollution is found everywhere, in all parts of the world – from fresh Antarctic snow<sup>7</sup> to the deepest ocean trenches<sup>8</sup>. The pollution that we see on our streets and beaches is just the tip of the iceberg.

**Harmful:** Plastic pollution is harming human and animal health, as well as the environment. It has been found in human blood<sup>9</sup>, mothers' placentas<sup>10</sup>, whales' stomachs<sup>11</sup>, and numerous fish, sea birds, and other marine mammal<sup>12</sup>.

**Complex:** Plastic pollution is not a just a result of poor consumer behaviour. It involves all actors of product value chains, including producers and Government, making it a complex issue to tackle.

**Coordinated ACTION is needed to protect our future.**

Plastic production, consumption and waste continue to grow year-on-year. Action is needed now to tackle the sources of pollution so that we can continue to use plastics in a sustainable way, without harming the environment.

**A ubiquitous problem requires holistic solutions.**

Plastic pollution is a persistent, long-term problem. Whilst there are some key plastic items we see polluted in the environment, there are a lot of fragments and degraded plastics that are difficult to identify.

A problem that is long-term and deriving from unidentifiable sources needs solutions that target whole systems, not just individual products.

**Business as usual is FAILING.**

While there have been commitments and bold ambitions regarding waste and plastic pollution by national Government and industry, there are significant gaps and delays – rapid and concrete action is urgently needed. The ambitious policies under development (e.g. EPR reform) must be pushed forward and implemented as planned in the Resources and Waste Strategy.

**The Government has clear support to ACT.**

Plastic pollution is one of the most widely recognised problems, and recent public consultations showed unprecedented support for Government action. Plastic pollution is hurting the reputation of the plastics industry, brands, and businesses. Organisations want to do more, but need a clear direction from Government and a level playing field in which to act.

**Targeted action in the UK is CRITICAL.**

While the plastic pollution problem is everywhere, targeted action is needed to address pollution sources in the UK. Actions can be coordinated with other countries for greater impact, but need to target the specific pollution problem in the UK.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/in-a-first-microplastics-are-found-in-fresh-antarctic-snow-180980264/#:~:text=Scientists%20have%20found%20microplastics%E2%80%94small,their%20findings%20in%20The%20Cryosphere.>
- <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/plastic-bag-found-bottom-worlds-deepest-ocean-trench/>
- [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/24/microplastics-found-in-human-blood-for-first-time?fbclid=IwAR3bk4yjnM-PnCvUq1RWZRSQtQZO5Tbm-sbq5snjNx4Hl2t9\\_x\\_6uX1yw](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/24/microplastics-found-in-human-blood-for-first-time?fbclid=IwAR3bk4yjnM-PnCvUq1RWZRSQtQZO5Tbm-sbq5snjNx4Hl2t9_x_6uX1yw)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/22/microplastics-revealed-in-placentas-unborn-babies>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/science-environment-47666059>
- <https://earth.org/plastic-pollution-animals/>

# TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE PROBLEM BEING ADDRESSED?

**UK Governments have over the last few years committed a number of new policies to tackle plastic pollution, but we know there are still significant gaps and a lack of urgency – more needs to be done.**

At the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi (March 2022), 175 countries agreed to a legally binding global treaty to end the plastic pollution crisis. The UK has a clear opportunity and need to develop holistic policy to tackle plastic pollution.

## SOURCES

- [13 https://www.weforum.org/press/2020/04/indonesia-unveils-action-plan-to-prevent-16-million-tonnes-of-plastic-from-entering-the-ocean/#:~:text=News%20Releases-,Indonesia%20unveils%20action%20plan%20to%20prevent%2016%20million,plastic%20from%20entering%20the%20ocean&text=Jakarta%2C%20Indonesia%2C%2022%20April%202020,combatting%20plastic%20pollution%20and%20waste.](https://www.weforum.org/press/2020/04/indonesia-unveils-action-plan-to-prevent-16-million-tonnes-of-plastic-from-entering-the-ocean/#:~:text=News%20Releases-,Indonesia%20unveils%20action%20plan%20to%20prevent%2016%20million,plastic%20from%20entering%20the%20ocean&text=Jakarta%2C%20Indonesia%2C%2022%20April%202020,combatting%20plastic%20pollution%20and%20waste.)
- [14 https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/10/ghana-becomes-first-african-nation-to-join-ambitious-partnership-to-end-plastic-pollution/](https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/10/ghana-becomes-first-african-nation-to-join-ambitious-partnership-to-end-plastic-pollution/)
- [15 https://www.anthesisgroup.com/ending-the-uks-reliance-on-plastic-waste-export/](https://www.anthesisgroup.com/ending-the-uks-reliance-on-plastic-waste-export/)
- [16 https://www.circularonline.co.uk/news/the-food-and-drink-federation-urges-next-pm-to-rethink-overly-complex-epr/](https://www.circularonline.co.uk/news/the-food-and-drink-federation-urges-next-pm-to-rethink-overly-complex-epr/)

**UNEA's draft global plastic treaty calls for **RAPID, AMBITIOUS ACTION** by individual nations.**

The treaty includes specific mention of the importance of national action plans that reflect country-driven approaches towards the prevention, reduction and elimination of plastic pollution. Each country is best positioned to understand its own national circumstances.

**The UK has signed the UNEA draft plastic treaty and can **LEAD THE WAY** on tackling plastic pollution.**

The UK Government was highly involved in the development of the treaty. As a key supporter and approver of the treaty, the UK must continue this trajectory of ambition and coordination, and respond in kind. We must develop an ambitious national action plan with concrete action, as others have already begun doing (e.g. Indonesia<sup>13</sup> and Ghana<sup>14</sup>). The UK economy is intrinsically linked to the global economy, particularly regarding plastics. Primary plastics, plastic-containing products and plastic waste are all actively traded. International coordination will be key.

**You miss the best opportunities to solve the problem if you only focus on waste.**

By the time a product becomes waste there are limited options. Truly impactful change starts with the way we produce and consume goods. Policy measures are needed that involve all actors in the value chain, from resource extraction and material production to manufacturing, distribution, use, reuse, and finally, end-of-life.

**Few policies include producers of virgin plastics.**

Beyond design decisions expected to be influenced by modulated fees, there are no specific policy developments in the pipeline that specifically work with producers of virgin plastics, which is an identified priority of the UNEA treaty.

**The UK must take **FULL RESPONSIBILITY** of its waste.**

53%<sup>15</sup> of the plastic waste we collect is currently exported, at which point all practical responsibility for the waste stops. There have been many exposés of waste from the UK found in dumps, open burning or waterways of poorer countries. We cannot export our waste problems and wash our hands of it. We must establish policies to increase responsibility for waste exports, or treat our waste responsibly within our own shores.

**A piecemeal approach will never address the whole issue.**

Policies currently in development are heading in the right direction, but proposals are lacking the urgency and ambition that would end plastic pollution for good. A review of current and upcoming policy shows an over-emphasis on product-specific policies, individual product bans and market restrictions. As new products and materials are being developed, and without addressing the fundamental causes of plastic pollution, Government policy will always be playing catchup, creating policy responses to manage decisions made by industry and brand-owners.

**We need **COHESIVE GOVERNANCE** with the power to act.**

Policies impacting plastic production and consumption can fall across the remit of several departments (e.g. BEIS, Treasury, Defra) making holistic joined-up action difficult. Fragmented governance leads to missed opportunities, ultimately failing to address the full problem.

**Current policies in development have the potential to drastically change the waste & resources landscape.**

Proposals for a Deposit Return Scheme, Extended Producer Responsibility reform, Consistent Collections, and the Plastic Packaging Tax together have the potential to be very powerful policies. However, Government should prioritise joining up these policies, and not further delay or overcomplicate them, as industry has called for<sup>16</sup>.

# STRATEGIC NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION.

## We need concrete actions to achieve an End to Plastic Pollution.

Plastic pollution is far-reaching, harmful and complex, and cannot be eradicated without specific and measurable targets, as well as concrete actions for how to achieve those targets.

### We are calling on Government to:

- ☑ Produce a Strategic National Action Plan to End Plastic Pollution
- ☑ Define time-bound, specific and measurable goals within the Plan
- ☑ Define and commit to steps ambitious enough to achieve those goals

In order to achieve lasting impact, we need a strong overarching strategy that is communicated clearly and early, so that the UK economy can prepare for and contribute to ending plastic pollution. The UK Government has never had more public support, and more need, for comprehensive action to tackle plastic pollution.

# OUR OVER-ARCHING STRATEGY

- 1 We need an inter-departmental body with **CLEAR GOVERNANCE** to oversee and deliver the necessary changes to achieve an end to plastic pollution.
- 2 To achieve this shared goal, we need a **PLASTIC POLLUTION BASELINE** and **AMBITIOUS REDUCTION TARGETS** to steer us towards a pollution-free economy.
- 3 Government should **GUIDE AND SUPPORT INDUSTRY** to meet these targets through product identification and tracking and adopting circular economy practices.
- 4 Government should hold **POLLUTING ORGANISATIONS ACCOUNTABLE**, where needed, providing additional incentives through taxes.

# THE FOUR STRATEGIC WAYPOINTS

The strategy that supports our Strategic National Action Plan must be ambitious yet flexible; it must provide a steady framework that can adapt and rise to new pressures.

The Four Strategic Waypoints will ensure a holistic, coordinated and balanced approach to end plastic pollution, supporting all actors to achieve our shared goal of a society without plastic pollution.



## 1 CLEAR GOVERNANCE

Our governance structure should have specific oversight on plastic pollution and the remit to deliver necessary change.

## 2 POLLUTION BASELINE & TARGETS

A clear baseline and targets will allow tracking of progress and clear understanding of the problem.

## 3 SUPPORT INDUSTRY

Support industry to meet targets through the uptake of circular economy practices.

## 4 HOLD POLLUTING ORGANISATIONS ACCOUNTABLE

Organisations that continue to pollute our environment should be held accountable if they do not meet the agreed targets.

# CLEAR GOVERN- ANCE

**We need a robust and coordinated governance system for the Strategic National Action Plan to establish controls to achieve sustainable production and consumption of plastic, and tackle related issues like climate change and the circular economy in a joined up manner.**

Such decisions should be informed by thorough assessment by scientific and technical bodies, balancing environmental objectives and feasibility with societal and economic needs. In order for solutions to fit together, we need to rely on a foundational Governance System that will ensure harmonisation.

## SOURCES

17 <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/historic-move-un-declares-healthy-environment-human-right>

18 <https://www.ukri.org/news/new-review-of-evidence-linking-the-environment-and-mental-health/>

19 <https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015-guidance>

## **PUBLISH A STRATEGIC NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR PLASTIC POLLUTION: MANDATE THE ECONOMY MUST ACHIEVE ZERO PLASTIC POLLUTION BY 2050.**

This is a crucial first step to get us on the path to end plastic pollution. Government must prioritise this action first, and importantly, be seen and understood to do so. By clearly defining a target and concrete steps for how to get there, economic actors can align their own operations and priorities to those of Government and of society as a whole. This will create aligned and common action toward our shared goal. Both a strategy and an action plan are important, as the strategy is the foundational basis on which the action plan is built.

## **ESTABLISH AN INTER-DEPARTMENTAL BODY WITH OVERSIGHT**

In order to develop holistic policy, we need a governance structure that is integrated and interdependent. We suggest establishing an inter-departmental body made up of BEIS, Defra, and Treasury. These three departments are critical for environmental policy going forwards – and thus each would benefit in being represented in an overarching governance body that would be responsible for internal coordination as well as external harmonisation with the EU and World. This body must be allocated adequate resources to develop and enforce coordinated and forward-thinking policy.

## **LAY THE GROUNDWORK TO PRIORITISE FUTURE WELLBEING**

We suggest designing an overarching policy or Act dedicated to ensuring future wellbeing, in order to align human values with policy development. The UN has declared that we all have a right to a clean environment<sup>17</sup>, and numerous studies<sup>18</sup> have shown that a clean environment free of pollution is linked to personal wellbeing. This link must be supported and encouraged in Policy and Governance. Like the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales)<sup>19</sup>, guidance must be provided to detail the ways in which public bodies must work, and work together, to improve the future well-being of the UK as a whole. This act must be integrated in the policy design process, e.g. requiring well-being criteria be met as a pre-requisite for every new policy designed in Government.

## **POLICY ESTABLISHED TO RING-FENCE REVENUE FROM TAX REGIMES**

Revenue from the taxes and fines described on page 15 should be ring-fenced to specifically support industry and government in the pursuit of these goals, particularly those described on page 14. If industry is made to pay fines or taxes, they should know that they will be re-invested in supporting and benefiting the whole plastics industry, to achieve the goal of ending plastic pollution.

## **ESTABLISH UK-WIDE PLASTIC POLLUTION INVENTORY**

The NGO sector has for years pushed the need for a clear picture of pollution quantities and pathways. A great wealth of data<sup>20</sup> gathered by NGOs already exists to this end, more than enough data to take policy action now.

Rather than more data, we need a standard process for conducting plastic pollution audits, so that progress towards ending plastic pollution can be measured. We need a nation-wide, repeatable methodology for an annual plastic pollution audit, following an internationally recognised approach.

## **PRODUCE BASELINE AND FIRST SET OF OFFICIAL ‘PLASTIC POLLUTION STATISTICS’**

Once the methodology is established, the first action should be to implement the audit to establish a baseline pollution level. This is a key data point for the Strategic National Action Plan. The results should be published; these will become official statistics (e.g. national level of mismanaged plastic waste). The results can become more detailed as further product-identifying measures are developed (e.g. product trackers). However, at a minimum, the statistics will include pollution by brand/producer, polymer, product category, and by hotspot location. The categorisation should align with internationally agreed categories where possible.

## **ESTABLISH TIME-BOUND POLLUTION REDUCTION TARGETS AND ‘CONTRIBUTIONS’**

Government should define clear and ambitious pollution reduction targets, as a proportion of the baseline, to achieve at realistic intervals (see page 18 for suggested targets). To focus the targets further, Government can use producer data from EPR, Plastic Packaging Tax and national statistics to establish specific pollution targets for individual producers. These could take into account specific challenges faced by certain sectors and where others can move faster. Plastic pollution is a global problem, so to link with global action, the UK can pioneer the idea of ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’ (NDC) of plastic pollution, similar to the Paris Agreement’s NDCs<sup>21</sup> for efforts to reduce national carbon emissions. These can become part of UNEA’s global plastics treaty and an important goal for economic actors in the UK.

## **MANDATE PRODUCT MARKERS TO FACILITATE IDENTIFICATION & TRACKING**

Any plastic-containing item must be marked to facilitate pollution tracking efforts, individual marking must be sufficient to enable identification of plastic pollution item and tracing back to relevant producers, e.g. UV tags, watermarks, and/or serialised product passports.

# **POLLUTION BASELINE & TARGETS**

## **Data and reporting provides the basis by which to design and measure policy.**

Plastic production, consumption, and mismanagement are key data points for understanding progress toward eliminating plastic pollution and promoting a safe circular economy for plastics. Scientists and policymakers will not be able to draw conclusions on the evolution of plastic pollution in the environment and the effectiveness of policy without knowing the quantities and types of plastic ending up as pollution.

### **SOURCES**

<https://www.sas.org.uk/brandaudit2022/> 20

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs> 21

# SUPPORT INDUSTRY

**Government must work with and support industry, creating incentives for industry to meet targets to reduce plastic pollution.**

Government could provide a ‘support package’ that can steer economic actors along the desired path to achieve zero plastic pollution. This package should include measures to adopt Circular Economy Practices.

## **CREATE AN INNOVATION SUPPORT FUND**

Using ring-fenced revenue from plastic pollution tax regimes, create an innovation support fund to help businesses be more circular and innovative. This can build from existing funds such as the Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging fund and other UK Research and Innovation funding programmes. Interested businesses will need to illustrate how their project would help to further the aims of the national action plan, e.g. research into developing digital product markers. Projects should also specify how they will incorporate capacity building and knowledge sharing. Priority should be given projects that can prove related or knock-on benefits to society or the environment, e.g. to support net-zero strategies. The support fund could also play a direct role in skills development – increasing training and support for Circular Economy academic studies, design, and knowledge sharing.

## **GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY SERVICES, INCLUDING REFILL/REUSE**

Incentivise a service-based circular economy and discourage linear consumption and production models. Increase the affordability and availability of repair services and increasing reuse of materials and products as a viable and competitive option in consumers’ decisions concerning their products. For example, a reduced VAT rate<sup>22</sup> on repairs could increase the ability of local shops to offer repair and maintenance services, in line with the national goals of increasing resource efficiency in the economy as whole. Government could consider standards on Circular Economy products and services, linking to EPR eco-modulation so that industry knows what to aim for and is rewarded for success.

## **ESTABLISH CLEAR QUALITY STANDARDS FOR PLASTIC WASTE**

Quality standards for plastic waste will facilitate a better UK market for plastic recycling, unlock investment, and prevent irresponsible exporting of plastic pollution. Quality standards for plastic waste will mean that the plastic waste is of a high enough quality to incentivise reprocessing in the UK – which will drive a healthier market for recycled content.

## **DEVELOP A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL**

The expert advisory panel should be made up of academics, scientists, eNGOs and practitioners. It’s role will be to advise the inter-departmental governing body on policy considerations and provide a ‘sense check’ of the real world impact of proposed policies. The advisory panel should act as a facilitator, and not blocker, of innovative policy. It will provide a mechanism to provide policy-relevant scientific and socio-economic information and assessment related to plastic pollution, sharing available scientific and other relevant data and information.

### **SOURCES**

<sup>22</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43615-020-00002-z#citeas>



### **EPR IS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE FULL RANGE OF POLLUTING PRODUCTS**

This policy measure represents a 'low-hanging fruit'. The groundwork for EPR already exists and can be expanded to include the most-polluting products, including cigarettes, fishing & aquaculture gear, crisp packets/confectionery wrappers, e-cigarettes and vape products, car tyres, textiles, and chewing gum. This will provide a powerful incentive and drive innovation in product design.

### **FINES AND TAXES IMPOSED PROPORTIONALLY ON HIGHER POLLUTERS**

The national plastic pollution audit will produce a list of the highest polluters. While all those that surpass the targets should be penalised, a proportional fee should be established that see the highest polluters paying a greater amount.

### **BAN PLASTIC WASTE EXPORTS**

In line with the principle of proximity outlined within the Basel Convention, waste should be managed as close as possible to the point of generation. Consequently, the UK should commit to phasing out all plastic waste exports to all OECD and non-OECD countries. Any exceptions should be limited to exceptional circumstances and subject to robust controls to ensure environmentally sound management. A ban should be coupled with a moratorium on new incineration capacity and an escalating incineration tax.

### **APPLY FURTHER PENALTIES FOR REPEAT OFFENDERS**

Achieving an end to plastic pollution will require whole systems of production and consumption to shift towards one that prioritises resource efficiency and circularity. While many businesses are heading this way, many may not prioritise this shift unless directly impacted by it. Direct/targeted measures could thus be considered, particularly for repeat offenders, such as production controls, corporate sustainability due diligence, and personal liability (e.g. as Chief Executive Officer).

# **HOLD POLLUTING ORGANISATIONS ACCOUNTABLE**

**Government should clearly communicate the consequences for not meeting the stated goals and targets.**

Accountability and responsibility for our actions should be a recurring theme in the Strategic National Action Plan – both at a shared and individual level. We all have a role to play in reducing plastic pollution, from producers to policymakers and individuals. Therefore, Government should ensure that pollution levels do not surpass targets identified through the national pollution audit. If they do, there will be increasing levels of penalties.

# ENDING PLASTIC POLLUTION

## STAGE 1

### Fast action on most-polluted items

Government has achieved much in the last decade, from dedicated waste strategies to targeted taxes and charges. However, action up until now has been largely product-focused and aimed at solving yesterday and today's most pressing issues.

## STAGE 2

### Creating a circular economy to end all future plastic pollution

We are entering a new phase of action. This phase is fully focused on aligning all economic actors toward turning off the tap on plastic pollution. All businesses and governments are united in their ambition to design-out waste from their operations, and are taking concrete steps to do so. The new status quo is collaborative and ambitious – exploring and sharing ways to be innovative in creating a circular economy.

2010

### FIGHTING FIRES

#### SINGLE USE PLASTIC BANS

Single use plastic ban (Scotland, 2022), Plastic straws, cotton buds and drinks stirrers (Defra, 2020)

#### WASTE STRATEGIES

Beyond Recycling (Wales, 2022). The Environment Protection Regulation (Northern Ireland, 2019). Resources and Waste Strategy (Defra, 2018). Zero Waste Plan (Scotland, 2010)

#### TAXES AND CHARGES

EPR for packaging (Defra, in dev.). DRS for drinks containers (Scotland and Defra - England, Wales and NI, in dev.). Single use cups charge (Scotland, in dev.). Plastic Packaging Tax (Defra, 2022). Single Use Carrier Bag charges (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Defra, 2013)

2024

UNEA Global Plastics Treaty becomes legally binding

2026

- Develop a multi-disciplinary expert advisory panel.
- Establish policy to prioritise future wellbeing.
- Establish UK-wide plastic pollution inventory and baseline.

2024

- Publish a Strategic National Action Plan for Plastic Pollution: Mandate the economy must achieve zero plastic pollution by 2050.
- Establish time-bound pollution reduction targets and 'contributions'.

2026

Plastic pollution baseline established

2025

- Establish an inter-departmental body with oversight.
- Create an innovation support fund.
- Policy established to ring-fence revenue from tax regimes.

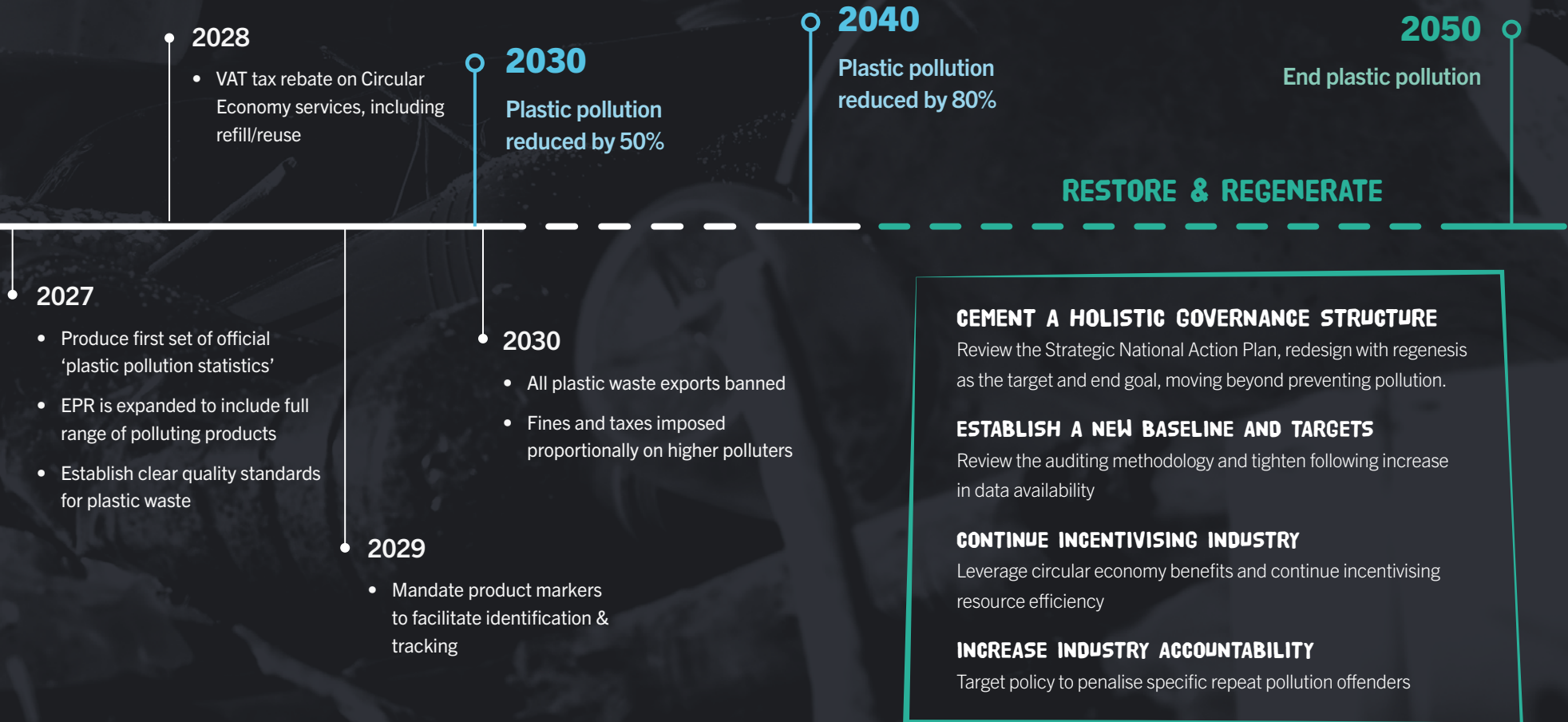
# TIMELINE & KEY POLICIES

This unlocks numerous other benefits that will see lasting impact: tackling climate change through low carbon products, investment in circular economy skills-based jobs, increases in employment and household income, creating a more resilient economy based on higher quality and longer-lasting products produced in the UK and maintained through reuse and repair.

## STAGE 3

### Upscaling to restore and regenerate

This future phase of action is integrated, reaping the benefits of the previous phase, going beyond circularity to drive a regenerative economy. The new status quo sees businesses and governments mutually benefit from creating a global plastics circular economy, and instinctively consider and prioritise the environmental impact of their operations and day-to-day decisions.





**SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE**

Unit 2, Wheal Kitty Workshops, St Agnes, TR5 0RD

Email: [info@sas.org.uk](mailto:info@sas.org.uk) | Telephone: 01872 553 001 | [www.sas.org.uk](http://www.sas.org.uk)



[facebook.com/SurfersAgainstSewage](https://www.facebook.com/SurfersAgainstSewage)



[instagram.com/SurfersAgainstSewage](https://www.instagram.com/SurfersAgainstSewage)



[twitter.com/sascampaigns](https://twitter.com/sascampaigns)

Printed on 100% recycled paper and using vegetable ink for minimum impact on the environment.

COMPANY REGISTERED NUMBER: 02920815 | CHARITY REGISTERED NUMBER: 1145877