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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Meg Hillier MP  
House of Commons  
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Our ref: MC2021/17658/WM

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Dear Meg,

Thank you for your email of 7 July to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about the export of plastic waste. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and apologise for the delay in doing so. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence.

We are deeply concerned about the illegal trade in waste, including reports of illegal plastic waste exports from the UK. We agree that this is an important issue and we are focussed on addressing it.

It is illegal to export waste from the UK to be dumped or burned overseas. It is therefore inaccurate for Greenpeace to claim that all plastic waste exported from the UK is dumped or burned when it arrives at its destination. However, where the UK cannot recycle materials economically in the UK, it is legal to export that material for recycling. This is important to avoid waste being landfilled instead. The real issue is therefore twofold; taking domestic action to reduce, reuse and recycle more plastics in the UK; and preventing illegal waste exports. Under the UK legislation on waste shipments, businesses involved in the export of wastes are required to take all necessary steps to ensure that the waste they ship is managed in an environmentally sound manner throughout its shipment and during its recycling. Individuals and businesses found to be exporting waste in contravention of these requirements can face a two-year jail term and an unlimited fine.

Over the last 12 months, monitoring by the Environment Agency (EA) has had a particular focus on preventing illegal plastic waste exports. In 2020, the EA prevented the illegal export of 46 shipping containers of plastic waste to Turkey. This year, the EA has already prevented the illegal export of 122 containers of plastic waste to Turkey. The EA currently has four active investigations into illegal waste exports to Turkey. The Turkish Government has now banned the import of most plastic wastes and the four UK regulators have been liaising with the Turkish Ministry of Environment & Urbanisation to forge better working relationships and ensure UK exporters are aware of the new restrictions. The EA has also liaised with Greenpeace, following their recent report, to seek information which could assist them with their compliance monitoring and enforcement of waste exports to Turkey.

The UK Government has pledged to introduce tougher controls on illegal waste exports, through the introduction of mandatory electronic tracking of waste, using powers included within the Environment Bill. This will make it harder for criminals to obtain and export waste illegally. We plan to launch a consultation on this in the autumn.

Going further, the Government has also committed to consulting on options to deliver a ban on exports of plastic waste to countries that are not members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and work is underway to make this happen. We plan to consult before the end of 2022 on options to deliver the ban.

The Resources and Waste Strategy sets out the Government's plans to reduce, reuse, and recycle more plastic than we do now, including plans to help stimulate investment in UK reprocessing capacity. Our target is to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste throughout the life of the 25 Year Environment Plan, but for the most problematic plastics we are going faster - which is why we have committed to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

Our three major waste reform proposals are:

- Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging that will make manufacturers responsible for the full net cost of recycling their packaging waste;
- Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers which will recycle billions more plastic bottles and stop them being landfilled or littered; and
- Consistent recycling collections for every household and business in England, ensuring more plastic is recycled and not condemned to landfill.

These measures, plus a new plastic packaging tax, which comes into effect from April 2022 and will apply to plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content, will incentivise appetite for investment in commercial infrastructure, giving investors greater confidence in the growing UK reprocessing market and less reliance on export markets. We will continue to review the latest evidence on difficult products and/or materials to take a systematic approach to reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastic products.

To help address plastic already within the global environment, the UK launched the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (CCOA) in 2018, along with our co-chair Vanuatu, to reduce marine plastic pollution. Since its launch, 34 Commonwealth member states have united to take action on tackling plastic pollution. To support the ambitions of the CCOA, the UK has committed up to £70 million to tackle plastic pollution entering the ocean. This includes boosting global research, supporting developing countries and making efforts to transition to more sustainable forms of manufacturing. The UK also supports starting negotiations on a new global agreement on marine litter and microplastics at the continuation of the 5th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2) in 2022.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.



**REBECCA POW MP**