

Consultation on the proposed ban of the manufacture supply and sale of wet wipes containing plastic – North London Waste Authority Response

Link to consultation: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/wet-wipes-1/wet-wipes-containing-plastic/>

Closing date: 25 November 2023

Section 2: Questions on the proposal

Q8. To what extent do you agree with the following statement, “I/my organisation would support the proposal set out above to introduce a ban on the manufacture of wet wipes that contain plastic”?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Q9. To what extent do you agree with the following statement, “I/my organisation would support the proposal set out above to introduce a ban on the supply or sale of wet wipes that contain plastic, including giving away for free”?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Q10. Please explain your answer to Q8 and Q9, referring to specific evidence as much as possible.

NLWA fully support a ban on plastic-containing wet wipes leading to greater environmental outcomes. We encourage the environmental benefits of such a ban on our sewerage system and ecosystems. We want to see a reduction in the amount of plastic in the waste stream, of which sanitary products make up 11%. By eliminating wet wipes containing plastic, a significant amount of plastic would be removed.

However, it is vital that if a ban comes into force, that any wet wipes placed onto the market to them are genuinely less environmentally harmful in all aspects than wet wipes containing plastic. Measures would need to be put into place to enforce this independently, as opposed to relying on manufacturers' claims. We would also encourage the expansion of the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme to ensure producers cover the costs of their disposal.

Consumer impacts

Q11. Do you think that the proposed ban will have a negative impact on any specific groups of consumers?

- Yes
- No

I don't know

Q12. Please explain your answer to the previous question (Q11), referring to specific evidence where possible and whether you are part of the group impacted. Where possible, please indicate if this answer is specifically related to manufacture, supply, or sale.

The damage created by these products requires immediate action, and the responsibility of finding alternatives should be placed on to industry.

Definitions

Q13. Do you think the definition of wet wipes used within this consultation is suitable?

Yes

No, please expand

I don't know

Q14. Do you think the definitions of plastic used within this consultation are suitable?

Yes

No, please expand

I don't know

Q15. Wet wipes marketed as 'natural', 'biodegradable' or 'plastic free' may be made from polymers which have undergone chemical extraction, processing and refinement processes. Do you think wet wipes marketed in this way should be considered 'plastic free' and excluded from the proposed ban? For each material, please explain why:

Viscose (usually derived from wood) <Yes with reason/no with reason/I am not sure>

Lyocell (a semi synthetic cellulose fibre) <Yes with reason/no with reason/ I am not sure>

Cotton (reconstituted cotton fibres) <Yes with reason/no with reason/ I am not sure>

Other

As with the answer to Q10, any wet wipes marketed as such need to be genuinely biodegradable and better for the environment in all aspects in order to be excluded from the ban. Measures would need to be put into place to enforce this independently, as opposed to relying on manufacturers' claims.

Exemptions

Q16. To what extent do you agree with the following statement, "I/my organisation supports an exemption for plastic-containing wet wipes that are used in hospitals and have certain clinical and/or medical uses"?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

I don't know

Q17. To what extent do you agree with the following statement “I/my organisation supports an exemption for plastic-containing wet wipes in certain industrial and professional uses (business to business sales only)”?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Q18. Please explain your answers to Q16 and Q17, referring to specific evidence as much as possible.

We understand that there may need to be temporary exemptions for when plastic-containing wet wipes are absolutely necessary in these settings. However, we disagree that this is a suitable long-term approach. Plastic-containing wet wipes need to be banned in both a clinical and industrial setting as soon as possible. In the meantime, safeguards should be put into place to ensure that these wipes are only to be sold for genuine industrial and clinical consumption to minimise risk of these products being sold for household use.

Furthermore, we would encourage a longer-term plan to be developed, consisting of a clear roadmap that sets out how and when these exemptions would be required to move towards plastic-free alternatives that are suitable for these use cases, in order to completely eliminate plastic-containing wipes.