

Support for progress on the global plastic pollution treaty

House of Lords oral question

Thursday 11th September 2025



Background

- Every year, the world [produces over 460 million metric tonnes](#) of plastics. Just 9% of this is recycled, and over 90% is made up of single-use plastics like plastic cutlery or microplastics found in cosmetics.
- This causes immense harm to wildlife and ecosystems, as well as posing significant risk to human health and the world economy. The damage caused by plastic pollution between 2016 and 2040 is an [estimated US\\$281 trillion](#).
- The UN Environment Programme estimates that on our current trajectory plastic production will account for [19% of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions](#) by 2040.
- In February 2022, the UN Environment Assembly [adopted a historic resolution](#) to create a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution. This mandated an International Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop a legally binding instrument that would address the full life cycle of plastic pollution, from production to waste management.
- Although the INC was meant to have adopted a resolution by the end of 2024, countries have still failed to agree on a mandate and August 2025 negotiations failed again. The UK has taken a positive role in negotiations and is a member of the High Ambition Coalition but remains one of the largest exporters of plastic waste globally at [600,000 tonnes per year](#) in 2023.
- Whilst countries agreed to convene again, no future date has been set yet.

Why are talks towards a treaty breaking down?

- At the most recent talks in August 2025, the INC talks collapsed yet again as delegates from 183 countries were unable to agree on key provisions within the treaty.
- With [99% of plastics made from oil and gas](#), and with the world shifting towards renewable energy, fossil fuel companies are looking to plastic production to lock in future income. Without intervention, plastic production could triple by 2050, and it is already projected to account for 45% of net oil demand by 2040.
- Lobbyists from petrochemical and fossil fuel companies, as well as delegates from major oil producing states, have sought to weaken ambition by shifting the focus of the talks towards recycling, rather than reducing production.
- This ignores the fact that recycling currently processes only [around 9% of plastic waste](#), and even by 2060 is projected to reach no more than 17%, which is far below what is required to handle current, let alone future, levels of plastic production.

What is needed for the treaty to be successful?

- To address and reverse the harm caused by plastic pollution, the treaty needs to call for a broader shift away from throwaway culture by prioritising reduction, reuse and better product design across all materials. This approach will prevent plastics simply being replaced by other single-use materials.
- A global target to reduce primary plastic production, along with guidance on the national level actions required, and national reporting requirements and regular reviews, is widely

considered the main goal of the treaty and has been supported by the majority of negotiating countries, including the UK.

- Provisions are needed to stop plastic waste exports to countries unable to manage it safely. Despite the Basel Convention's aim to prevent harmful exports, the UK still sends waste abroad where it is mismanaged, dumped, or leaked into the environment. Loopholes that are framed as recycling enable this to continue. The treaty should close these loopholes and reinforce the Basel Ban, ensuring clear rules, accountability, and transparency in global waste trade.

How can the UK lead the way domestically?

- With major plastic producers blocking progress, the UK could lead the way in reducing domestic consumption, not just of plastic, but of raw materials across the board. The UK should pioneer a broader shift away from throwaway culture by prioritising reduction, reuse and better product design across all materials.
- Overall, the UK uses [twice as many](#) raw materials as the UN considers sustainable. The UK government is currently preparing England's first [Circular Economy Strategy](#) to "promote efficient and productive use of resources", and chemicals and plastics will be one of the areas it focuses on.
- Initial steps such as bringing forward a deposit return scheme for drinks containers from 2027, and extended producer responsibility for packaging, are positive. The UK's plastics packaging tax could play a greater role in ensuring virgin plastic does not continue to undercut the business case for investing in recycling or reuse facilities. The UK should also ensure it is meeting its obligations under the Basel Convention.
- The Circular Economy Strategy should include as its north star a [long term target](#) to bring the use of resources down to sustainable levels across the UK economy.

What do voters think?

- A 2025 [Ipsos poll](#) for the Environmental Investigation Agency found that 67% of people polled said that manufacturers and producers of plastic or companies selling plastic products or packaging should have the most responsibility for taking action to reduce the amount of plastic pollution in the UK.
- Another [poll by Yonder Consulting](#) in 2025 found four in five Brits people think "there is a need to shift towards a society that uses resources more efficiently", while 83 per cent agree "throwaway culture is a big problem in the UK".

Suggested interventions

- How does the government plan to push for the Treaty to address the full life cycle of plastic pollution, beyond just recycling and waste management?
- How does the government plan to phase out the UK's exports of plastic waste, in line with the commitments it made in the Basel Convention?
- What steps will the government take through the Circular Economy Strategy to reduce the UK's consumption of plastic and prevent displacement to other single-use materials?