

Written evidence submitted by McDonald's UK (PW0023)

Introduction

1. McDonald's UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Committee's inquiry on Plastic Waste. As a company, we share the Government's ambition to reduce waste in the UK, manage our resources more effectively, and address our shared impact on the environment. At McDonald's, we are committed to ensuring our packaging is both sustainable and functional, and we will continue to innovate with our suppliers to provide customers with packaging that keeps their food hot and fresh and is environmentally safe.
2. At McDonald's, we have three foundations to our sustainability goals which we aim to meet ahead of our global target of 2025:
 - Our customer packaging will be made from renewable, recycled, or certified sources.
 - Our customer packaging will be fully recyclable or compostable.
 - We will reduce the amount of material used across all packaging in customer and kitchen areas.
3. McDonald's believes a number of the Government's policy proposals and commitments – predominantly reforms to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) – mark an important step in achieving our shared ambition to tackle plastic waste. However, within these proposals, we have some concerns around the Government's overall approach to litter costs, to collective responsibility and education amongst consumers, and full policy alignment across the four nations in the UK. We have set out in more detail our position on these issues and our proposed solutions to ensure the Government can reach its objectives.

Reforming the system of producer responsibility for plastic packaging

4. McDonald's supports the Government's plan to reform the UK's Packaging Producer Responsibility system and believes it is an important step forward in terms of encouraging the production of more sustainable plastic packaging, the greater use of recycled plastics, and the reduction of plastic waste.
5. However, we have concerns around proposals on littering – that businesses and producers should be held solely responsible for the costs of litter management, including for plastic waste. At McDonald's, we believe we all have a role to play in tackling the challenge of waste and littering from designing recyclable products, providing disposal facilities for our customers, and helping prevent litter and enable recycling.
6. Whilst producers of food and drink packaging are rightly expected to communicate to their customers about how to recycle or dispose of their plastic waste or packaging, we believe the management of litter and penalties for littering – which is fundamentally illegal behaviour – should remain a duty of local authorities and other law enforcement agencies. It should not be the sole responsibility of businesses or producers.
7. McDonald's instead supports a more holistic approach to reducing litter, including through preventative measures, behaviour change, and local community engagement. We are proud of our long-standing work in these areas, being the first restaurant company to introduce litter patrols in 1982, with all our teams today carrying out at least three litter patrols every day. Overall, we believe a holistic approach will be more effective in terms of tackling plastic waste in future.

8. McDonald's, and some of our drinks and packaging suppliers, recently funded a ground-breaking anti-littering trial in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole with Hubbub. The pilot, which used AI and drone technology, produced the most scientifically robust litter map ever produced in the UK. Using this data we were able to inform Local Authority waste management strategies, and target behaviour change interventions aimed at reducing littering.

Single use plastics and the Plastics Packaging Tax

9. Our ambition is that by 2027 every piece of McDonald's waste will have a second life. This starts with making our packaging from sustainable materials – by the end of 2023, we will only be using either recycled or renewable materials from certified sources, for example paper fibre from FSC-certified forests. We will move away from plastic wherever possible and, where we do need to use it for safety or functional reasons, we will only use 100% recycled or plant-based plastics. All packaging materials will also be fully recyclable or compostable, eliminating waste which must go to landfill. We have made good progress towards this goal. By removing plastic straws, McFlurry lids and plastic salad boxes, we were able to remove over 1000 tonnes of plastic from our supply chain.
10. We support the Government's commitment to tackling single use plastics in particular. However, we are concerned that the Plastic Packaging Tax is not the right approach to drive greater uptake of recycled material. The tax merely creates an additional cost for businesses before the recycling infrastructure is ready to provide the necessary recycled material to meet the conditions of the tax. The Government should instead channel this funding into innovation and recycling infrastructure, rather than increasing the financial burden on businesses. This hampers our ability to make improvements to our packaging or processes, negatively impacting our customers.
11. We instead maintain that the proposals set out in the reforms to EPR, and Consistent Collections in Household and Business Recycling, will better deliver the aims of the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy. This should be supported by investment in improving national and local government waste and recycling infrastructure, as well as informing and educating consumers.

Encouraging greater recycling of plastic waste

12. McDonald's also supports the aims and objectives of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), particularly in terms of promoting greater levels of recycling amongst consumers, both for plastics and other materials. However, we would urge the Government to ensure full alignment across all Deposit Return Schemes across the four nations in the UK, both in terms of its substance – such as targets and structure – and in terms of timings. This will ensure the scheme is as effective and fit for purpose as possible.
13. We do, however, have concerns about the costs and implications of a DRS, particularly for Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) such as McDonald's. This is due to the proposed inclusion of glass in the scope of materials. As a restaurant that serves food freshly prepared in our kitchens, we do not sell or serve glass bottles as this would pose a significant food safety and health and safety risk due to breakages. This would also have significant hygiene implications for our workers as well as those across the hospitality industry, who would have to handle used drinks containers.
14. We therefore do not believe QSRs should be required to host vending machines or manually collect bottles, particularly for items that they do not sell. In addition, the considerable space required for such machines would limit the space in our restaurants that could be used for seating, negatively impacting the profitability of small businesses owners in the sector as well as

our franchisees. We would instead advocate for shared DRS return points to ensure greater flexibility and use.

15. Furthermore, we would encourage the Government to recognise the value of collective responsibility and education among consumers as part of its approach to tackling plastic waste. While businesses such as McDonald's will make every effort to follow due legislation or guidance, the actions of customers cannot be mandated which may impact the recyclability of certain products, such as plastic. We all have a responsibility to address our shared impact on the environment and we would urge the Government to give full consideration to this aspect in its approach.

Conclusion

16. McDonald's is committed to tackling the problem of plastic waste in the UK. We have already made significant progress towards achieving our sustainability goals but recognise the need to go further. We will continue to work collaboratively with the Government, and we believe the policy proposals and commitments discussed above mark an important step towards achieving our shared objectives. However, we would urge the Government to pay due consideration to the issues we have raised as it considers the right approach to tackling plastic waste, including adopting a more holistic approach to litter and waste management, encouraging collective responsibility and education among consumers, and ensuring policy alignment across the UK.

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