

Cross-Party Group on the Circular Economy

6th June 2023 – 6pm

Online via Microsoft Teams

Present

MSPs

- Maurice Golden MSP
- Brian Whittle MSP
- Maggie Chapman MSP
- Sarah Boyack MSP

Invited Guests

- Catherine Gemmell – Marine Conservation Society
- Dr Sarah Letsinger – Resources Future
- Morag Campbell – Scottish Government
- Daniel Stunnell - Eunomia
- Sol Milne – Wolf Fish (recorded presentation)

Non-MSP Group Members and Guests

- Liliia Akatova
- Sarah Archer – Zero Waste Scotland
- Sophie Brett – Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Dr Phoebe Cochrane - ScotLINK
- Matthew Crighton – Friends of the Earth Scotland
- Susan Evans – SER Advisory
- Catherine Gunby - Fidra
- Beryl Leatherland
- Matt Lewis – Circular Communities
- Heather McLaughlin – Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Mary Michel – Osterio
- Meg Pirie – Fashion Roundtable
- Paul Smith
- Laura Young

Apologies

- Michael Cook – Circular Communities
- Nicki Souter – Nicki Souter Associates
- Michelle Thomson MSP

Agenda Item 1: Welcome

- Maurice Golden MSP opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.
- The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Maggie Chapman MSP and seconded by Sophie Brett.
- Martha Wood of Circular-DS International was adopted as a member of the group.
- It was noted that the next meeting of the CPG would take place in-person around September time and be focused on decarbonization of waste.
- It was further noted that going forward there was an intention to hold every other meeting in-person whilst continuing to offer online access. Ideas for themes at future meetings were welcomed with suggestions including the Circular Economy Bill and developing policy asks from the CPG.

Agenda Item 2: Presentations

Beachwatch Data – Context Setting by the Marine Conservation Society

Speaker: Catherine Gemmell, Scotland Conservation Officer for the Marine Conservation Society

- It was noted that the coming Thursday was World Ocean Day – an appropriate time to discuss marine pollution.
- An update was provided on a beach clean that took place before the meeting, and Catherine thanked those who helped organise it. Photos from the afternoon showed the range of litter found, including nurdles, wet wipes and other littered items.
- Marine litter has a huge impact on marine wildlife and citizen science, such as beach cleans and litter surveys play an important role in tackling it.
- Beachwatch has been running for 30 years with volunteers given responsibility for 100m stretches of a beach. This follows a standardised methodology used by many countries, and litter is grouped by types which volunteers tally up. These surveys have led to bans on specific products, fed into the marine litter strategy and also helped implement the carrier bag charge and subsequently showed that the charge reduced the number of bags littered.
- Beachwatch results from 2022 were shown on a series of slides which can be requested. The results highlighted differences in what is found on Scottish islands compared to general findings e.g. fishing related debris is much more common. In turn, this sort of information can be used to help inform area based policies.
- Details were provided of two related projects being run by Keep Scotland Beautiful and Fidra - the Upstream Battle project on the Clyde and the Great Nurdle Hunt respectively.

Resource Futures - marine litter and pollution research and policy by Resource Futures

Speaker: Dr Sarah Letsinger, Senior Consultant at Resource Futures.

- Resource Futures have worked across the UK and internationally on various issues regarding marine pollution.
- One such project is looking specifically at the end of life for recreational vessels to understand the issues around decommissioning and identify relevant policies. For example, it seeks to answer the question of why people abandon boats – there are issues around the expense of proper disposal, insufficient infrastructure, limited recycling options for fibreglass, lack of information on proper disposal practice, difficulties in tracing ownership and no mandatory registration.
- These are important issues given the hazardous chemicals involved as well as the microplastics produced by the breakdown of fibreglass.
- It is difficult to accurately estimate the scale of the issue given there are around 550,000 recreational vessels.
- The project found fibreglass was the prominent material used in vessels likely to come to the end of their lifespan within the next 10 years with significant local impacts at vessel hotspots.
- Policy options have been examined with mandatory registration of vessels and extended producer responsibility (EPR) being the most popular options. EPR is already in place in France.
- Other policy options included incentivising circular design and making available and promoting best practice guidance with similar challenges being present across OSPAR nations.

Scottish Government - policy actions in the Marine Litter Strategy

Speaker: Morag Campbell, Marine Litter Policy Team at the Scottish Government

- Marine litter is a busy policy area for the Scottish Government with its visible impact and interest from all quarters.
- The new Marine Litter Strategy was published last year and received input from a wide range of organisations. It contains five strategic directions: behaviour change, reduced sources of litter, supporting litter removal, improved monitoring and strengthening stakeholder coordination. The new strategy was built on the successes of the previous strategy.
- A legislative approach has been proven to work, such as the ban on plastic micro-beads in personal care products. There is more to do though, such as tackling microplastics being lost at all points of handling.
- Scotland is taking the lead on this on the international stage. Working on standards there is a need for industry to sign up to these requirements, and the next stage being to ensure that best practice is implemented. There is also a need for guidance on how to implement clean up actions after spills, and the Scottish Government can provide advice on this.

- A considerable proportion of the marine litter problem is sewage related debris, such as wet wipes containing plastic.
- Measures to tackle this are progressing across the UK, and there is a need to ensure that wet wipes on the market aren't causing harm. Work is ongoing with the standards body regarding reusable and disposable period products with there being the potential for implementing a standard on these products.
- There is also a lot of fishing and aquaculture waste, and the problem is known and understood. The Scottish Government is working to support the industry on how best to collect and recycle/dispose of this waste. Solutions are being explored to deal with a lack of waste management infrastructure and there is ongoing work to help develop a European standard on circular design for fishing and aquaculture gear, which will make a big difference.
- The Scottish Government is also working on a number of other initiatives, such as artificial pitch infill.

'The Global Plastics Treaty: What's happening and what does it mean for Scotland?' -

Speaker: Daniel Stunell, Managing Consultant at Eunomia Research and Consulting

- This presentation covered background information on the treaty being negotiated and what it is trying to do.
- What is the global plastics treaty? The UN environmental assembly was tasked committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including the marine environment. A draft treaty is planned for 2024.
- Who wants what? There is a high ambition to end plastic pollution from around fifty governments, including the UK. For businesses, standardisation would make the effort easier. For NGOs, there is a debate around whether to pursue circularity or limitation of pollution. Questions being raised include whether the approach should focus on overall targets or targets more specific to products and materials.
- What are the product based controls and why are they desirable? This is likely to be a key component of the treaty as it is a sensible approach given it is the life cycle of products that result in problems.
- When thinking systematically about product controls there are a number of issues to consider, such as risk assessment, feasibility assessment and unintended consequences.
- 'Start then strengthen' – the aim should be to start with what you know works and then assume expansion from that.
- There are four key areas for action: packaging; single use items; secondary micro plastics; agriculture, aquaculture and fishing.
- Policy options: bans and reductions, economic instruments, extended producer responsibility and deposit return, product standards and minimum requirements (standards on collection, sorting, recycling and disposal). National regulations can go further though – the treaty will set minimum standards.
- Ultimately, we must think systemically about the extent of the problem.

Sol Milne from Wolf Fish (pre-recorded video presentation)

Wolf Fish uses drones to carry out ariel surveys to find and identify marine litter in the Pacific.

Most of the gear that gets lost is an economic loss, so it is important to fishermen to get it back. That means there is a need to assess what kind of gear is being dealt with where it came from and how much there is.

If gear is found in good enough quality, it can be returned to local fishing communities. If it is too badly damaged, the focus is on repairing it or failing that recycling it.

Imagery from the drone surveys is also use imagery to assess ecological damage and examine the condition of habitats.

Wolf Fish works alongside fishing unions and has established links with local fishing communities; both of which are essential to its work.

In the UK, Wolf Fish is using sensors on vessels to collect information on the sea floor. This is then combined with drone footage to obtain high quality images of habitats and fishing gear. This is used to better understand the damage and value of both.

Agenda Item 3: Roundtable Discussion

The first question was on taking a voluntary approach to standards as opposed to setting them in legislation.

- Morag Campbell – explained that standards are new and need to be tested first. Also, if mandatory, they can be expensive to audit and enforce. There would be pressure from customers and investors as they can make change happen more quickly. It's worth remembering that legislation can take a long time to develop and implement.
- Maurice Golden – asked if industry genuinely wanted to tackle the problem.
- Morag Campbell – pointed out that the voluntary 'operation clean sweep' hasn't worked. Industry knows that countries expect better, and as a consequence industry is working with governments towards a solution.
- Catherine Gemmell – said there are good examples of industry taking action, for example on cotton buds, but there is a feeling this is because the 'writing was on the wall' i.e. legislation was coming.
- Sarah Letsinger – pointed out that another example is where the UK government had signalled an intention to bring in measures to address chewing gum, which precipitated action by industry.
- Daniel Stunnell – said that industry are moving in the right direction, but it varies by actor. Industry want certainty and consistency of treatment and seeing legislation is coming enables them to plan ahead. With a global treaty, European action, extended producer responsibility and UK legislation – responsible players know things are going to be vastly different in 2030 – the writing is on the wall. A global treaty would set a minimum baseline and common direction.
- Morag Campbell – agreed with Daniel's point and said that part of the issue is that the plastic industry operates internationally. However, if industry sectors were to come together, they would have a greater bigger reach than individual nations.

- Maurice Golden – pointed out that international benchmarking for product standards is important.
- Maurice Golden – then raised the point that there are problems with vessels and ‘flags of convenience’.
- Catherine Gemmell – said there was a need for cradle to grave circular economy principles for all vessels and all items.
- Sarah Letsinger – said there needs to be a lot more work carried out on incentivising circular design.
- Morag Campbell – observed that on commercial shipping, which is a reserved matter, any conversations tend to be difficult and that there was uncertainty on how to take on flag ships. Don’t know how to take on flags of convenience.
- Daniel Stunnell – said that global shipping is notoriously difficult to regulate. It may be that countries currently receiving ships decide that they don’t want them anymore (as has happened with plastic waste). The fact that many vessels are fiberglass is a problem.
- Morag Campbell – said that conversations were taking place on fiberglass with regards to wind turbine blades.
- Sarah Letsinger – commented that a few countries have recently banned turbine blades from going to landfill, and as such will need to develop recycling technologies.
- Maurice Golden – made the point that we are not learning lessons from the oil and gas sector. Scotland has the opportunity to lead in decommissioning of renewable infrastructure, and we know it is coming down the line. It is a shame that governments are not thinking it through.
- Maurice Golden – asked all speakers ‘What would you like to see Scotland do in this space to reduce marine pollution?’
- Catherine Gemmel – said that she would like to see investment in reuse and moving to a reusable and refillable economy.
- Sarah Letsinger – said there should be an emphasis on reuse and a systematic approach in general.
- Daniel Stunnell – wondered if there were other things to apply bans and charges to. In addition to which there should be an extension of extended producer responsibility and an effort to influence the rest of the UK.
- Maurice Golden – agreed on this point, and particularly for textiles.
- Morag Campbell – said that we will see things happening on wet wipes and fishing gear. Her wish list includes good design in the first place so things last. Plastic is very cheap, but if it were more valuable, we would look after it better.

Maurice Golden thanked the speakers and attending guests for their contributions and the meeting was brought to a close.