



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Annex C: rural proofing impact assessment

Assessment of the impact a single use plastic ban would have on rural communities.

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Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on rural people, businesses and communities

Through our [preliminary impact assessment research](#), undertaken in 2019, public consultation and targeted engagement process, we did not identify any significant negative or positive impact of our proposals that would have a greater impact on rural communities. We anticipate a reduction in plastic litter and this will be of benefit to the wider rural environment (particularly in remote areas where plastic litter may accumulate).

Positive impact

Litter, particularly plastic litter, is a blight on our communities across Wales, from our bustling towns and cities to our beautiful coastlines to our stunning rural landscapes. However, clearing litter from rural locations in particular can often prove logistically difficult due to their remote locations and challenging terrain (for example mountainous areas). This includes removing litter from our extensive rural road networks. Whilst robust data on the nature of litter in these areas can be difficult to obtain, [previous research undertaken by the Welsh Government in 2019](#) and anecdotal evidence provided by correspondence to Welsh Ministers, indicates rural areas, like other areas across Wales, is often associated with food and drink “on-the-go” packaging. Consequently, our proposal to ban or restrict several single use plastic products such as polystyrene takeaway food containers and straws will result in a positive reduction of plastic litter in our Welsh countryside.

Our proposals will therefore have a positive impact on this issue by immediately reducing the amount of SUP products littered and a long-term positive impact of reducing the amount of plastic polluting the environment, contributing to climate

change. Our proposals will also provide cleaner green and natural spaces like beaches, forests, parks and countryside which has the potential benefit of improving mental and physical well-being as people enjoy their local environment more, which can also lead to greater social cohesion as people socialise and interact more with others in their community.

Negative impact

Some stakeholders highlighted concerns during our consultation that the legislation would mean smaller and medium sized (SME) businesses would be disproportionately affected by the bans, based on SMEs operating in a highly competitive market.

Our 2019 research identified that half (49.5%) of SME employers in Wales are based in rural locations. This proportion is lower (29.4%) for medium sized businesses. Whilst this may result in some costs being incurred by rural based SMEs as they make the initial switch to alternative products, we anticipate these costs will decrease as the use and availability of these products becomes more widespread. Our research also notes that the overall impact will be negligible, as the price differential between the plastic product and the alternative is relatively small or non-existent in many cases. Our consultation and wider engagement work has also not identified any specific concerns of those living or working in rural areas of sourcing alternative materials/ products.

The legislation will also apply to all retailers/ businesses across Wales and therefore does not impact a particular sector or location.

We are aware that many individuals and businesses throughout Wales, including those in rural area, have already taken voluntary measures to remove or reduce their use of SUP items as a result of an increased understanding of their impact on the environment and in readiness for the bans coming into force. We,

therefore, believe these proposals will have minimal negative impact.

Oxo-degradables

The economic impact of banning oxo-degradable plastic in rural Wales is expected to be minimal. Research has not identified any major user groups, apart from the agricultural and horticultural sectors where mulching film may be used for weed-control and for managing soil moisture content.

However, the limited available data suggests that use of such products in Wales is highly limited, hence the impact on business is expected to be negligible.

There is the likelihood of a small positive impacts on river and water quality, due to the reduced level of microplastics being leached from soil into watercourses.

This is also likely to be of positive benefit to the angling and freshwater fishing industry as microplastic pollution has been reported in both water and animal studies.

Welsh language in rural communities

The overwhelming majority of responses to our consultation were unable to identify any adverse impacts on the Welsh language from our proposals. A number of respondents offered broader views on the potential for the proposals to have an indirect benefit on the language, for example by providing an opportunity for greater bilingualism on packaging of alternative products made in or produced for Wales.

No respondents indicated the Welsh language would be treated less favourably than the English language as a result of our legislation. Some general points

were raised in relation to ensuring the use of the Welsh language in any communication campaigns to support the regulation, the potential for the proposals to show Wales in a positive light and the need to protect our cultural heritage.

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