

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Preventing waste and enabling a circular economy, HC 929

Tuesday 8 July 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Alistair Carmichael (Chair); Sarah Bool; Charlie Dewhurst; Helena Dollimore; Sarah Dyke; Jayne Kirkham; Tim Roca; Henry Tufnell.

Environmental Audit Committee member present: Mr Toby Perkins (Chair).

Questions 1 to 114

Witnesses

I: Rudy Schulkind, Political Campaigner, Greenpeace UK; Dr Allison Lindner, Founder and Chair, Waste Law Research Group; Professor Richard Thompson OBE FRS, Professor of Marine Biology, University of Plymouth, and Co-coordinator, Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty.

II: Dr Peter Williams, Group Technology Director and Head of Investor Relations, INEOS Group; Patrick Brighty, Head of Recycling Policy, Environmental Services Association; Helen Jordan, Sustainability Manager, British Plastics Federation; Joe Franes, Vice-President, Sustainability, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Greenpeace UK](#)

[Environmental Services Association](#)

[British Plastics Federation](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Allison Lindner, Rudy Schulkind and Professor Richard Thompson.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome to this meeting of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. We turn our attention this morning to our thematic inquiry into preventing waste and enabling a circular economy. Our questioning this morning will concentrate on the global plastics treaty. Can I welcome our first panel to the Committee? For the benefit of those who are following our proceedings and for our own official record, can I invite you please to introduce yourselves and explain the roles that you perform?

Rudy Schulkind: Hi, everyone. My name is Rudy Schulkind. I am a political campaigner at Greenpeace UK. I work on the UN plastics treaty, pushing the UK Government to take a more ambitious approach and securing parliamentary scrutiny of the plastics treaty. I was at the last round of negotiations and I will be on Greenpeace's delegation at the next round as well. Thanks very much for inviting me to give evidence today.

Dr Lindner: Hi. I am Dr Allison Lindner. I am a lecturer in law at UCL. I am also the founder and chair of the Waste Law Research Group, which is a group of waste law academics who research various aspects of waste law. I am here to represent the group today. Thank you very much for the invitation.

Professor Thompson: Hi. I am Professor Richard Thompson. I am a professor of marine biology at the University of Plymouth. I have been working on plastic pollution for 30 years. I am also a co-co-ordinator of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty, which is an organisation that we built in the absence of a clear mechanism to deliver scientific evidence to member states around the treaty. It has grown from a handful to now 430 scientists across 63 countries, with an aim of making sure the treaty is grounded in evidence-based decision making.

For the record, for the purposes of today's inquiry, my views here today will be my own. If you would wish to have written views on behalf of the scientists' coalition, either I can point you to our written documents that are already published or we can supply some, but it is difficult to anticipate the nature of the questioning, so I will speak in my own regard as an independent scientist here.

Q2 **Chair:** Okay, I am sure that that is fully understood. If necessary, we will follow it up. If these are all public documents, we will have access to them in any event. I am going to take it for granted that you all want a global plastics treaty. Could you all, in turn, very briefly, give us an indication of what you think is important in it in terms of scope and application?



Rudy Schulkind: I would like to foreground that with a little bit of context. I think we all can agree that we are deeply in a plastics crisis at the moment and that is why we had this historic moment in 2022 when 175 countries agreed to develop an international legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution. We have the incredibly visible impacts of the crisis that we can all see.

You will all have constituents who are doing work in your local constituencies to tackle this at the local level, but there are also the incredibly invisible impacts, including the climate impact of plastic and the fact that plastics, as an industry, emits more than the entire global aviation industry and more than the entire global shipping industry. That is at the upstream, so that is the process of plastic production itself. On top of that, there is the incredibly insidious accumulation of microplastics inside our bodies and organs.

For all of those reasons, for us the holy grail of this treaty is cutting plastic production and the success of this treaty will be measured by the extent to which it is able to cut plastic production. There is a core package of elements that an emerging consensus has grown around.

Alongside cutting plastic production, that is regulating products and chemicals, and some of the most harmful products and chemicals that go into plastics. That is developing an ambitious financial mechanism to ensure that countries, particularly global south countries, are able to implement the obligations contained within the treaty. It is also ensuring that this is a living treaty, so that, in future meetings, when countries come together, decisions can be pushed to a vote, rather than only proceed by consensus alone, which would, we think, prevent the treaty from adapting to the future.

Q3 **Chair:** Allison, speaking as a recovering lawyer to a lawyer, I am guessing that you will have a view on the importance of definitions in relation to these negotiations. Can you talk us through some of that?

Dr Lindner: I definitely think there should be a commitment to ban hazardous chemicals within the treaty and a phase-out of polymers of concern. There are about five different agencies that have agreed on a list of hazardous chemicals and polymers of concern. For instance, when it comes to plastics of concern, there is agreement that there are issues around bioaccumulation, toxicity and reducing the value of recyclability of plastics. They also do not break down easily.

I can give you the list of those plastics but it is quite long: brominated flame retardants, certain UV stabilisers, PFAS—so polyfluoroalkyl substances—phthalates, bisphenol A, biocides, certain metals and metalloids, aromatic hydrocarbons and other non-intentionally added substances. There are listings that can be referred to.

Q4 **Chair:** You mentioned PFAS there. Richard, there is some concern that already the move away from the use of plastics has led to the increase in



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the environment of these forever chemicals. Is the law of unintended consequences somewhere at play here?

Professor Thompson: There is certainly the potential for unintended consequences. We have measures that we use to assess the safety, sustainability and essentiality of plastics. Those criteria of essentiality, safety and sustainability are going to be key to guide the treaty, but we must also apply the same criteria to anything that you might consider an alternative or a substitute, so that we are entirely certain that those things are better, not just merely different.

Q5 **Chair:** We are not just jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Professor Thompson: There is a real risk of that. I see it already with things that are on the market. It is really important that we can identify a safe and sustainable plastic from one that is not, and that we use the same measures to look at alternatives and substitutes.

Q6 **Chair:** The negotiations so far have struggled on this point about legally binding targets reducing the production of primary plastics. What effect would these targets have on countries that are major producers of these plastics?

Rudy Schulkind: No doubt there will be an impact on countries with a large upstream plastics industry. If we get a legally binding target to cut plastic production by the amount that is necessary, which we think is 75% by 2040, acknowledging that that is an extremely ambitious target, at the same time we are not calling for overnight shutdown of these industries. We want it to be phased and we think that there needs to be a timescale. There needs to be a smooth transition for the workers.

There will no doubt be an impact in those countries but, at the same time, the sooner that countries agree to end what is fundamentally a polluting activity and transition towards a circular economy, the smoother the transition will be for those countries and for the workers in all parts of the plastics value chain. I think that DEFRA and Steve Reed, as the Environment Secretary, recognise the massive opportunities for growth and jobs in transitioning to a circular economy. We would encourage the treaty to encourage countries to move towards a just transition in that way. At the same time, the UK can really lead from the front on that.

Q7 **Chair:** There are those who will tell us that this can all be done by waste management. You keep producing it but just manage it better—you recycle it or whatever. I was quite struck, Rudy, that your organisation tells us that it is actually about 17% that gets recycled in the UK, as opposed to the total percentage claimed, which is about 60%. The rest of it is going for incineration or export. Is that right? Of course, once it is exported, we lose control of it, do we not?

Rudy Schulkind: Yes.

Q8 **Chair:** Do you have any views on the waste management?



Dr Lindner: Waste management has its limits. I was just in Accra, Ghana, where I saw children swimming in the sea with plastic and fashion waste. Waste management is really good at cleaning things up, but it is not good at reducing volumes. In order for the treaty to be ambitious, it has to focus on reducing the volumes of plastics and certainly with regards to the use of hazardous chemicals in plastics.

Professor Thompson: If I might speak to both issues you raised—the idea of a reduction cap or reduction target, and waste management—it is really clear that production currently is somewhere in excess of 450 million tonnes per year, with predictions that it will triple by 2060. It is also really clear that the rate of production is escalating away at an exponential rate from our ability to manage that waste. You have curves that are diverging, so that the scale of the waste problem will only get worse. Our ability to create waste management infrastructure in parallel with the increases in production that are predicted is not realistic, so it is really clear that we need to reduce the amount that we produce.

Is that via a target or a cap? Yes, possibly, but the challenge with that is that, if you were to pick an arbitrary figure, and it is difficult to know exactly what that figure should be, there is an amount that falls below that target that remains. We would fail in our aspiration if those items remained as being unsafe and non-sustainable. It is no good carrying on with business as usual with two-thirds of the plastic produced in the same way.

I would argue that the way forward is to introduce criteria around safety and sustainability to make sure that any plastics that we produce are, first, essential. There are many aspects of plastic products that are non-essential, some of which we have seen prohibited in the UK, such as the microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics. You could produce a long list of things that are not essential. For those that are essential, we need to adopt safety and sustainability criteria to make sure that those plastics are safer and more sustainable. That will, on a criteria basis, drive down the production to ensure that what we are producing is safe and sustainable. To complement that, we then need measures to ensure that there are proper standards to address those plastics and that there are transparent labels, so that safe and sustainable plastics can be recognised in trade nationally and at international borders.

You talked about economic effects. It is pretty clear to me, from UNEA 5/14 and the countries behind that, that the risk to business is business as usual. It is clear that that is unsustainable and that things have to change. There is a strong public and political appetite for change, and I see it in industry. It is clear that the current model is not going to work. I would argue that the opportunity is for the first adopters of safer and more sustainable plastics.

We need to make sure that those first adopters are supported by proper standards and labelling, so that we can recognise safer and more



sustainable plastics. It is not about, to me, picking a number out of the sky and saying, "We need it to fall below this". It is making sure that what we do is safe and sustainable, but recognising that that will involve producing less.

Q9 Chair: I have one final question before I hand on to colleagues. It is about the actual process and the way in which it has operated. We are in the last-chance saloon now, I guess, next month in Geneva. It is the influence of lobbying from some of the oil-producing countries and the industry itself.

I came across an interesting figure that there were 220 lobbyists in Busan from the industry, which, if they had all been there collectively, would have made them the biggest single delegation. How do you see the impact of the industry and its engagement with this negotiation itself playing out? Rudy, it is maybe for you in the first instance, but I will take it quickly from you all and then I really need to move on.

Rudy Schulkind: The impact is massive. As you say, it is the single largest delegation. It is interesting that there is an emerging consensus around the need to cut plastic production and to stop business as usual. That consensus is from the majority of countries, from people around the world, as we see in several different polls, from civil society and from the rest of the business community, including the business coalition.

It is really only the upstream plastics industry that is against production cuts and production limits. Of course, it has deep enough pockets to attend these negotiations. It has very good access with Governments, not just the UK Government. It is a major risk with smaller countries. In some cases, lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry are actually able to be on the delegation of countries, so they have a seat at the table at the negotiations in a way that, say, civil society or indigenous communities do not.

The impact is absolutely massive. Our concern, and it has been our concern from the start, is that, if this process is not able to address these conflicts of interest and vested interests, they will prevent us from getting a treaty with the kinds of meaningful provisions that would protect people.

Dr Lindner: The Waste Law Research Group advocates for a two-tiered structure in the treaty. You have a framework treaty where all countries have agreed on baseline activities and materials, and then there is a high-ambition protocol for the majority of countries. I believe that there are about 94 countries that agree on some of the larger issues that are under negotiation, and that that should be done with regard to the best available science and in the interest of people around the world. There was even a business roundtable statement to the UK Government that had called for an ambitious treaty that addresses plastics across their lifecycle. That would be one way of breaking the deadlock between the two groups of the high-ambition group and the like-minded states.



Professor Thompson: To amplify a bit, it is a real concern that you raise. As a scientist, I came into these international negotiations somewhat naive of the process. I have to say, it has astounded me that the UN, which has been behind many multilateral, multinational environmental agreements, did not have the ability to stand up a proper independent evidence mechanism to guide the treaty.

On the one hand, you have the many well-funded industry representatives, who, of course, are a really key voice in this. On the other hand, you have the scientific independent evidence, which is only there if those individual scientists can find the money to get themselves there. We are only there as observers in the process, with very little opportunity to speak.

Moreover, scientists I work with have been threatened on UN premises as part of these negotiations. Almost what I would consider a fundamental right to science and to access science is being denied. It particularly falls on some of the smaller nations. DEFRA is very well blessed in that it can afford to send a big delegation of highly trained scientists, which is fantastic, but they stand alongside small island developing nations, which perhaps only have one individual there. The need for a science mechanism is actually mandated in UNEA 5/14, and we need it really urgently to address this issue.

Q10 **Chair:** Just pull back there for two seconds. Scientists have been threatened on UN premises?

Professor Thompson: Yes. It is on the record if you wish to go to it.

Q11 **Chair:** Threatened by whom, and with what?

Professor Thompson: They were threatened verbally by representatives from industry, who were then sent out of the UN premises.

Q12 **Chair:** Right, but with what? What was the actual threat?

Professor Thompson: I would need to refer you to the UN record on that, but threats to scientists are not a new issue. It has happened through many of these negotiations. My point is that there is not a fair and transparent mechanism to make sure that accurate, independent science has a place there. It is there, self-funded, in people's spare time, and it is a slightly David and Goliath battle. That needs to be addressed if we are to solve the problem.

Chair: That is part of why we are here, and thank you for that. Jayne, can you lead the questioning, please, on tackling deadlock and financing the treaty?

Q13 **Jayne Kirkham:** Obviously this has been going a long time. Agreement has not been reached. As somebody else said, it is kind of a last-chance saloon in Geneva in August, so the consideration is that it may not work. If it does not work, what on earth happens? If it does not work, what do



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you think? You have already talked about one option for breaking the deadlock and there are other ways that it could be done.

We could be looking at, rather than consensus, maybe a vote. We could be looking at, like Paris, setting targets for each place individually, a two-tier system, or a treaty of things that everybody agrees on and then adding to it later. Which option do the three of you think would be the best, if the deadlock cannot be broken next time?

Professor Thompson: Broadly speaking, I see three options. The option I would like is a strong, legally binding treaty that is ambitious. We may fall short of that. We could fall short of it so far that we have a treaty that is so weak that everybody agrees to it, but it is powerless to really do anything meaningful.

To me, the middle ground, if we need to go down that pathway, would be to ensure that we have a strong treaty that is backed by a substantial coalition of the willing. I believe that we have seen that from initiatives taken by Panama, the EU and others in Busan, and by the statement from the French, from Macron, at the UN Ocean Conference. If we cannot achieve agreement on something strong by consensus, we maybe need to take it out of the UN process and have a strong treaty with the majority aligned behind it, in the hope that other nations would join. In short, I think it is easier for other nations to join a strong treaty than it is to convince multiple nations, step by step, to incrementally strengthen something that is weak. That worries me, because that option could take a long time.

Dr Lindner: There are two potential options. One is that voting should be done by consensus, so that the countries should try to reach consensus or have this two-tier treaty. Also, there will need to be some build-in for common but differentiated responsibilities and recognition that all countries do not have the same capabilities. There will need to be phase-in and flexible arrangements depending on a country's own capability. With this treaty, usually treaties take a much longer time than two years to negotiate, so one option could be to extend the mandate for negotiation.

Q14 **Jayne Kirkham:** That would delay it more. Do you think we would ever get to a point where they would agree though, or would it just go on and on?

Dr Lindner: That is a good question. The ideal, in my view and the Waste Law Research Group's view, would be to have the two-tier baseline treaty and then a protocol that is agreed by high-ambition countries. Then other countries can join as that rolls on.

Q15 **Jayne Kirkham:** It is letting them off the hook a bit though, is it not?

Dr Lindner: That is one way of looking at it. The other option might be that, if you go with what Professor Thompson has said and taking it out of the UN, you would have a similar thing where you have a treaty that



some countries have signed up to and others follow. It is better to keep it within the UN framework and work on that basis.

Q16 **Jayne Kirkham:** Rudy, do you agree?

Rudy Schulkind: Our position is very much that the most important thing is to get the strong control measures, particularly cuts to plastic production, strong measures on products and chemicals, an ambitious financial package and the ability for the treaty to proceed by voting in future meetings of the parties. There are around 100 countries that support strong measures across those four elements, so there is clearly basis for a strong treaty among those countries.

Hopefully more countries can be brought on board, whether or not that can happen through this process, through the UN. For instance, if the draft rules of procedure, which have not yet been adopted, are adopted and that gives countries the capacity to move to a vote, we could be looking at something like that, but being agreed through the UN process. If not, countries may look to agree something outside of the UN. There are risks to that in terms of a fragmented international legal system and the signals that that sends to multilateralism more broadly. At the same time, the absolute priority has to be strong measures that protect people from the scourge of plastic pollution.

I have one final point. If we get a treaty that does not include all of the 175 countries, it can be strengthened also with non-party trade provisions, so provisions within the treaty that specify, if parties to the treaty are going to trade with countries that have not signed the treaty, that they will need to comply with certain parts in order for that trade to take place. That is a way of bringing other countries on board and beginning to grow the number of countries that actually want to be part of it, so that it could be strengthened and that consensus could be enlarged over time.

Q17 **Jayne Kirkham:** The next contentious thing, when it is finally agreed, will be how to pay for it, because how it is implemented will cost money and different states will have different resources. How do you think it should be financed?

Rudy Schulkind: There is a big emerging split within the treaty between countries that support having a dedicated multilateral fund and countries that support going through the GEF—the Global Environment Facility. We support the setting up of a multilateral fund.

Q18 **Jayne Kirkham:** Why would that be?

Rudy Schulkind: The first reason is that this is what almost all, or in fact all, the global south countries are calling for, on the basis that the GEF has failed them in the past. Essentially, it is difficult to access the finance for various reasons, including requirements on co-financing. Also, from my understanding, it is not set up necessarily to provide the kind of funding that would be needed by an instrument such as this. On top of



that, it would probably help to set up a fund that is specifically designed to provide countries with the funding that is needed to implement the specific obligations of this treaty. It could be quite a complex agreement with several different obligations and there would probably need to be a fund that is set up for purpose with that in mind.

Key features of the funding need to be that it is mostly grant-based rather than loans, so it should not add to the debt crisis that many global south countries are facing. There should be an emphasis on public finance, rather than solely through unlocking private finance. There should be priority for the least-developed countries and small island developing states.

The reality of the climate crisis globally is that countries are going to have to find funds to pay for the mess that polluters have created. Governments have a choice as to whether that cost is passed on to taxpayers and communities, or whether Treasuries can find a way to pass that cost on to polluters. As Greenpeace, we strongly advise Governments to find a way to put the tax burden on to the polluters that are responsible and have deep enough pockets to pay for the crisis.

We think that countries such as the UK should lead from the front with that. There are proposals within the treaty for a polymer fee, which we think are interesting and we support. Finding ways to give life to the “polluter pays” principle, which is an accepted principle of international law and is on a statutory footing here in the UK, would be a priority for the financial mechanism.

Q19 Jayne Kirkham: DEFRA has told us that it would prefer to use the Global Environment Facility because it would avoid further fragmentation of the environmental financial architecture and allow for synergies with funding of the challenges of climate and nature. Do you think that that is reasonable, or do you disagree with that for the reasons that Rudy set out?

Dr Lindner: I agree that the GEF should be used, primarily because it already supports six different MEAs, so the UNFCCC, the Convention on Biological Diversity and so on. It would reduce the administrative burden involved in looking at conditionalities for different countries when it comes to dispersal of funds.

Jayne Kirkham: That is one each.

Professor Thompson: It is quite balanced between the two. It is more important to me that we make sure that what it is that we are financing is clear. There have been criticisms—you are right—of the GEF that it can be overly bureaucratic. It is really clear that the financing mechanism needs to be predictable. We also need to be sure that it addresses the whole lifecycle of plastics.

Historically, one of the challenges with financing that has gone into plastic pollution is that it is unbalanced and overly focused on end of life



and waste-management activities. That can create technological lock-in, particularly for developing nations. I am more concerned about what we spend the money on, but of course we need to make sure that that budget is readily available to the nations that need it.

It is a key point because it is a point that holds back some nations from reaching an agreement. I remember specifically speaking to a representative of less well-off nation at the negotiations in Ottawa. He said to me, "I totally get what the science is telling me. My heart is telling me I need to have high aspirations for my country. My head is telling me I am worried that I cannot afford it and, whatever the richer nations tell me, they will renege on their promises".

It is really important that we go to Geneva with a clear outline of how the treaty will be financed to make sure that we get a just transition and that no one is left behind. That is going to be fundamental in reaching the consensus that we are all seeking. It is about what we fund and the mechanism. Making sure those funds are accessible is more important to me, maybe, than the vehicle, but I accept the differences you have outlined.

Jayne Kirkham: That is really helpful.

Q20 **Sarah Dyke:** On the back of that, assuming that the GEF is the right financial mechanism, do you think that there needs to be some technical assistance incorporated within that model? Do you think that the financial and the technical elements should be strongly linked?

Professor Thompson: In my view, when you say "technical", I would consider that as being independent evidence. As a scientist, I would call it scientific evidence, but it is from indigenous rightsholders and knowledge holders as well. It is making sure that we have evidence to guide the implementation of the treaty. Of course that needs to relate to the financing of it. As I just alluded to, we need to be sure that the financing addresses the whole lifecycle, and it is done in a manner that is fair and equitable and does not leave anybody behind.

Absolutely, the evidence mechanism to guide member states needs to also be able to guide the financing, but it is a guidance to member states. The subsidiary body is not the treaty. It is about making sure—and we do not have that at the moment—that there is a clear mechanism where we have a group composed of independent individuals who are free of conflicts of interest. They do not stand to gain personally from the outcomes. We will also need industry representatives there, because industry holds the key to some of the solutions. It is making sure that any conflicts are declared and that we have a majority of individuals who are independent from financial gain as a consequence of the direction of the implementation and financing.

Chair: That is very helpful. Thank you. We are moving on to chemicals of concern and scientific evidence. Helena, you wanted to lead us on this.



Q21 Helena Dollimore: I refer the House to my entry in the register of interests. Before diving in on the specifics of chemicals, I wanted to ask a general question, probably for Rudy and Allison. In the UK, which are the worst offenders and which are the companies you are impressed by?

Rudy Schulkind: It has been interesting in the UK context that we have companies that have quite a mixed record. For instance, you look at a company such as Unilever, which is a very large plastic polluter, particularly in the global south, with things such as sachets. It is based here in the UK. At the same time, it is playing a really important and leading role within the business coalition at the plastics treaty, pushing for production cuts and a level playing field for business, and making very similar demands to large portions of civil society. It deserves a lot of credit for that.

Our main concern is with the upstream plastics industry and with companies based here in the UK such as INEOS, which is actually expanding its petrochemical activities massively in Europe. We think that we are already at overcapacity. We are already flooding the world with virgin polymers and we do not need any more. That is a major concern for us.

Q22 Helena Dollimore: Do you think that those upstream producers perhaps do not get as much scrutiny from consumers and the public because they do not face the consumers in the same way and the brand is not as known?

Rudy Schulkind: Yes, I would say so. It is instructive to look at the example of supermarkets in the UK. People see supermarkets as the main cause of plastic pollution. That is a good thing in some ways, because they apply a lot of pressure on supermarkets to clean up their act, but I agree with your point that some of the upstream companies can fly under the radar. With this crisis, the problem starts at source, and it starts at production.

Q23 Helena Dollimore: You touched on sachets there, which are a huge source of plastic pollution. They are perhaps not as well known in the UK, because they are used more often in the global south and cause huge pollution, particularly in the oceans. Is that something that you hope to see a clear ban on in the plastics treaty and what do you think the likelihood of that happening is?

Rudy Schulkind: We would like to see that, yes. It is probably unlikely to be something that would be agreed at INC-5.2 if we end up signing a treaty there, but we would like the treaty to have the capacity to adopt new annexes and protocols, and to ban some of the most harmful products. We would include sachets within that. I am not aware of them being on the table as something that is likely to be banned at this stage, but that is what we would like to see going forward.

Q24 Helena Dollimore: Allison, Richard, did you want to add anything on those points?



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Professor Thompson: Your question was initially about chemicals of concern and it is absolutely critical that chemicals are within the scope of the treaty.

Q25 **Helena Dollimore:** We are coming on to that shortly. It was a more general point about who the worst offenders are, which companies are impressing you, and then on sachets particularly in the global south.

Professor Thompson: I am not going to call out specific companies. I am the one who receives the letters of a threat for a High Court action if I do. If I publish peer-reviewed science, I get those threats, so I am not going to call out companies here. It is important that we have a proper science body that has protection for the scientists within it. There are certainly some that are better than others, but I will leave it there in terms of individual companies.

Q26 **Chair:** If I could just intervene at this moment, proceedings in Parliament, including in this Select Committee, are protected by parliamentary privilege, so, if you have a concern that you can evidence, you are, to use a slightly layman's term, bombproof. Incidentally, we asked Unilever. We had hoped to have it with us, but we were a little bit underwhelmed by its enthusiasm. It was not keen to assist the Committee.

Professor Thompson: Thank you for that reassurance, Chair. I do not think I will delve into the detail of it just now, but we need to look at and scrutinise not just the products but the individual industries. Certainly sachets are a problem, but they also bring at a low price point—and that is the reason they are so popular—things where individuals might not be able to afford a whole container, so we need to look at new delivery formats. It is not as simple as just banning sachets.

Finally on this point, many of the products we have are overly complex. If I talk to product designers, they say they were asked to design products that functioned and were attractive. They say that end of life or the environmental footprint of the product was not really in their brief. Given that 40% of the plastics we produce are single-use items, it is really important that we start to recognise from the design stage what end of life might look like. The complication with the single-use sachets is that they are often multilayers and are really challenging to recycle, but do we need that level of longevity and durability for the delivery of some of the contents?

There are existing formulations of ways that we could do things better, but it has just not been a priority so far. We need to elevate that priority as a consequence of the plastic treaty. I could expand on multiple examples of products where I look at product A in a shop and product B, and I compare them. For instance, the rate of shedding of microplastics from clothing can be up to 80% different between two similar-looking garments. That is not because one has been designed in a way to be



better. It is an accident of chance of the way it is designed. You could probably say the same of microplastic emissions from tyres.

I could go on at length about inadequacies of design, where we could achieve a lot better without necessarily needing to reinvent the wheel. It is about making sure we have end of life, particularly, and, if it is the microplastics, reduced shedding during life incorporated.

Q27 Helena Dollimore: We will come on a bit more to product design later in the questioning. On the point that you made, Richard, noting what the Chair said, about having threats against you and legal letters, without referencing who those might have come from, is that something you have experienced a lot as a scientist working in this area?

Professor Thompson: I have certainly experienced it more than I would like to.

Q28 Helena Dollimore: They are legal threats from companies in the industry.

Professor Thompson: Yes.

Q29 Helena Dollimore: You think that that has had a big impact on scientists operating in this field.

Professor Thompson: It is not going to encourage them to come forward, is it? It makes sense that, if you are receiving threats of potentially expensive legal action, that is going to compromise your—I am happy to speak about it at length, but I do not think that it is really the function of this discussion.

Q30 Helena Dollimore: It is important because it sets the context in which these discussions are taking place and the context in which you, as scientists, are operating. You have talked about the need to have truly independent science available to the decision makers, so it is relevant in that context, but I can feel that you do not want to go any further. I would just say, as the Chair has said, that there is also the option to submit evidence to Select Committees, which is published under parliamentary privilege. That is open to your colleagues in the science field as well.

On the question of chemicals, to the whole panel, how should chemicals be dealt with within the treaty? How do you want to see chemicals treated?

Dr Lindner: There should be a ban on hazardous chemicals used in plastics and then a phase-out of polymers of concern. This should be done through a listing that is given by a scientific committee of experts that is independent, so ideally nominated by other scientists. There should be a facility for the listing to be updated on a periodic basis, so that the hazardous chemicals and the polymers of concern can also be updated.



There could be provisions for bans under the WTO. The technical barriers to trade committee can have bans or restrictions on the particular plastics or chemicals that have been banned under the treaty as well. There might be restrictions on subsidies for plastics and hazardous chemicals that have been listed as being banned or restricted under the treaty, so that there is a kind of integration with other multilateral agreements that deal with trade in goods.

Rudy Schulkind: I agree with what has been said. The only thing I would add is that, as far as possible, when banning the most harmful chemicals, we should look at banning categories or groups of chemicals, rather than individual chemicals. We know that companies have the capacity to slightly alter the formulation of chemicals so that they evade the ban, without actually changing the nature of the hazard.

Professor Thompson: I agree completely with what has been said already. I want to endorse that it is really critical that chemicals fall within the scope of the treaty. It is going to be impossible to make plastics that are safer and more sustainable unless that is the case. There are some 16,000 chemicals associated with plastic production, 4,000 of which are known to be hazardous. Very few are disclosed and only a small handful are regulated via existing MEAs. It is really critical that they are within the scope of the treaty.

They compromise safety, with exposure to humans beginning before birth and extending throughout the entire lifetime, but they also compromise sustainability of plastic products. You take the multiple formulations. If you think of those 16,000 chemicals, we do not need 16,000 chemicals to deliver functionality.

We have somewhere in the region of two dozen formulations of plasticisers to make my spectacles bendable. Why is that a problem? It creates a real challenge for recyclers to know what the provenance of the material is that they are recycling. We have excessive chemical diversification that, in some cases, is causing harm through the chemicals associated with plastic, but, in other cases, is making the job of circularity unduly complex.

We need simplification and standardisation. The groupings approach that you alluded to, Allison, is absolutely key. When you think of the 16,000 chemicals, we cannot do a risk assessment on every one. Some of those with low ambition would want to push us in that direction. That would take an awful long time. We need to take a groupings approach. There are approximately 15 major groupings of chemicals of concern. That would be a good start in terms of the treaty annexe to assume that each of those groupings, all the chemicals within them and their close relatives, are potentially hazardous and therefore work to phase them out or eliminate them, unless they are proven safe.

Q31 **Helena Dollimore:** What is the mainstream scientific consensus on these chemicals of concern and the impact that they have on humans?



Professor Thompson: There are a wide range of impacts on humans, particularly endocrine-disrupting effects that you have probably heard a lot about in the media. It is estimated, for example, that if we were to eliminate bisphenol A in the US and Europe, that could save around £4 billion per year in health costs, just to put it into context without going into the details of all the effects on humans.

You talked about the financing earlier on. One challenge is that plastics are seen as inexpensive, but most of the costs of plastic—I would argue that they are really expensive—are external to production. While we are thinking about financing and costs, let us not forget for a moment that there will be immense savings from the point of view of healthcare and benefits to the environment through no longer having to meet those costs.

Chair: We will move on then to Toby and UK leadership. Welcome to the Committee.

Q32 **Mr Perkins:** Thank you very much indeed, Chair. Rudy, we anticipate that we know broadly what the UK and the high-ambition bloc are likely to be asking for at the upcoming conference. We have the *Stand Up for Ambition* statement issued in December 2024, updated now with 95 countries in June 2025. Would you expect the UK to be at the more ambitious and demanding end of that high-ambition bloc in terms of what the UK is asking for going into this conference?

Rudy Schulkind: I think that it will be up there. It will not be the highest. In terms of what we have seen up to this point, the UK delegation has been a credit to the UK Government in the way that it has approached the negotiations. It has brought ambition and has tried to convene countries to identify areas of convergence and move the process along. It is clearly extremely committed to getting a strong plastics treaty.

The UK is not injecting as much political energy into the discussions as some others that we have seen. That would be a lot of the Pacific small island developing states, Panama, France, Rwanda and several others. We have not seen the UK within that grouping, which is really at the top of that high-ambition group. At the same time, we would expect to see it holding the line and trying to bring some of the middle-ambition countries into that grouping.

I can expand a little on how we would like to see the UK change its approach at the next round of negotiations, if that would be helpful. There are a couple of key areas. One is really showing some leadership on the finance point and raising the level of ambition among the overseas development assistance donor community, so essentially the wealthier countries that are going to be expected to finance the treaty. That is the way, as Richard has alluded to, we can unlock some more ambitious control measures within the treaty.



At the same time, between now and the negotiations, and at the negotiations, it should be made a real diplomatic priority, bringing the plastics treaty into other bilateral and multilateral spaces that the UK Government are engaged in, injecting that level of political energy that can get this over the line, and ensuring that there is ministerial attendance in the final few days so that that real deal making can be done. Finally, it is going to be about not backing down. The pressure to back down is going to be immense, not just from, as we have spoken about, the presence of fossil fuel lobbyists, but also from the political and media narrative around the talks continuing. That would lead to a narrative of, "The talks have collapsed", and the Government could be worried that that would look like a political failure.

The real failure would be accepting a toothless treaty that puts the fight against plastic pollution in reverse and prevents us from actually solving this. We will measure that on the extent to which it is able to cut plastic production and ban the most harmful products and chemicals. It is about not backing down and sticking to the most ambitious treaty that we can get.

Q33 Mr Perkins: Professor Thompson, you were suggesting earlier that an ambitious treaty that had fewer signatories would be better than a treaty that was able to please everyone, but was—to use the phrase—toothless. We have seen the statement from the like-minded group, which said, among other things, that it wants to avoid any unrealistic obligations, actions or targets that are not supported by corroborated scientific reports. We know there is this additional powerful group, including China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, pushing back.

On the question of the science, to what extent is the science arguable? Do you think that they have an argument to say, "It is not corroborated scientific reports"? Do you think we broadly know, scientifically, what the damage being caused here is?

Professor Thompson: There is always more science you could gather, but the question is when you reach the tipping point of evidence. It is really clear, on the basis of the evidence and the science that I have studied for 30 years, that we have more than sufficient evidence that plastic pollution is harmful to the environment. It is harmful to a wide range of species, economies and human health. We know that the production is escalating and we are not able to manage that quantity of waste.

Indeed, in a way, I almost feel that, compared to when I started my career, UNEA 5/14 is actually that consensus. We now have a consensus that there is a problem. While we could carry on trying to further diagnose the problem, it does not start to work on a solution. To me, a tipping point of a change in the science that I do with my team was UNEA 5/14, because it is agreeing on a global basis that we have a problem and cannot carry on the way that we are.



Of course, in any negotiation, there are going to be winners and losers. There are bound to be some that want to try to nitpick over the evidence. That is the nature of a negotiation, but I do not think that we are lacking in any way in enough evidence that we need to move towards safer and more sustainable production of plastics. To me, that is absolutely crystal clear.

Thinking about it for a moment, you could argue, and some do, that maybe we need to understand more evidence about the exact effects on human health. That could cost billions in funding. We could spend decades doing it. When we have done it, my point is, if we already have the balance of evidence that we have a problem, we are still going to need to invest in solving the problem.

If I was advising a philanthropist on where to invest their money, because there is not much UK science budget at the moment, I would be saying, "Put it into the solutions, but focus on upstream solutions. We do not need more evidence on the problem". I am happy to receive it, but I do not think that it is mission critical.

Q34 Mr Perkins: That is useful. Can you explain to the Committee, in terms of these powerful nations that are looking to take the more cautious approach, if you want to put it that way, or more risky approach scientifically, why it is that they are holding out to say, "We should not be more ambitious"?

Professor Thompson: Let us not forget that the carbon source of plastics is predominantly fossil oil and gas. Approximately 4% of world oil and gas production is the carbon source that goes into producing plastics and approximately a further 4% is the energy to turn that carbon into the plastics that we all produce.

It is estimated that, as we start to address carbon emissions associated with climate change, the proportion of revenue coming from plastics to those nations is going to increase. The share, if you like, of plastics is going to increase because other uses of oil and gas are, rightly, being challenged. Of course those countries feel threatened economically by that and they are going to take a position to defend their interests. It does not surprise me that they would want to take that position.

Q35 Mr Perkins: Allison, in order to maximise the chances of success at this treaty, what would you like to see the UK Government doing in advance of the conference and at the conference?

Dr Lindner: Certainly at the conference the UK Government should stay within the INC negotiating framework, mainly because it is a tried and tested framework for negotiations for different MEAs. The UK Government can consider this sort of framework agreement, with a tiered protocol for the high-ambition countries to agree to that has more stringent measures around banning and phase-out of chemicals and plastics of concern. I also think that the UK Government should—they are already doing that—



have the Global Environment Facility being the way to finance the treaty and operationalisation of the treaty.

The policy decision should be taken with the best available scientific evidence. Nomination of scientific and legal experts to any scientific body should be done by their peers and not by a political council. If you think about alternatives to conventional plastics, biodegradable plastic should be one alternative to conventional plastics, but there needs to be an assurance that those plastics are ones that can degrade easily, do not need a lot of processing to do so and will not have the same effect on the environment as conventional plastics, because that is also possible.

- Q36 **Mr Perkins:** In terms of the UK looking to get signed up to the treaty on the basis that has been put out there, how can the UK ensure that we remain competitive? What should be the stick that we use towards those countries that are not wanting to sign up to say, "If you do not sign up, there are going to be consequences"? We cannot presumably just allow them to have the competitive advantage that they might see that they have by not signing up. What should the UK look to say to those countries that might be reticent to sign up?

Dr Lindner: I can send you links to the papers on it, but there is evidence that inaction on plastics is more costly to the world than action on plastics.

- Q37 **Mr Perkins:** That may be the case globally, but some of these nations that are very dependent on oil revenues might say, "Not for us, it is not". That is why they continue to be outside of it and say, "You guys carry on, but we are staying out of it". What should the UK be saying to those countries to try to bring them to the table and get them signed up?

Dr Lindner: The two-tiered example that I gave earlier of the protocol, seeing how that is operationalised and seeing that money can be made out of looking at alternatives to conventional plastics, would be one way of doing that.

Professor Thompson: I do not think that the behaviour of nations with a low ambition justifies us taking a low stance. The reputation of the UK and its environmental science, and our ability to lead the world, is there historically from evidence that we have provided around substances such as tributyltin and our evidence contributing towards reducing ozone depletion.

Going back to the UK position, I think we are seeing a weakening of position in the US and there is a case for us taking a strong and galvanising position. We have a legacy of that. Of course we are worried about the financial implications. To be clear, I would like a strong and legally binding treaty that everybody agrees to, but I recognise that we might not get that. In my view then, you are talking about the kinds of free riders that might escape that.



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It is going to be really critical if we have an alliance of more than 120 countries. That mandates a significant proportion of world trade. The World Trade Organisation is behind an ambitious treaty. The ISO is keen to develop international standards that are not driven by market needs but by the environmental necessity of the treaty. The key to trade and ensuring that safer and sustainable plastics are traded, and others are not, is making sure that they are properly tested, certified and labelled, so that they can be recognised at borders.

If we go down that route, if we are in excess of 120 countries at the minute, I would argue that it will not take long before those that have a lower ambition realise that it is them that are at a disadvantage. That is the gamble that, to some extent, we need to take if we want to protect the world from plastic pollution as we see it today.

- Q38 **Chair:** That concludes the questioning that we have in this part. Before I release you back to do your day jobs, Richard, can I just run over a few of your credentials, so to speak? You hold the chair. You are professor of marine biology at the University of Plymouth. You are actually an OBE and a fellow of the Royal Society.

Professor Thompson: I am.

- Q39 **Chair:** The University of Plymouth itself, in the research excellence framework, is rated as having done, in the marine science field, research that is world leading or of international quality.

Professor Thompson: The REF impact case study for the work that we did on plastic pollution was a four-star impact case study in the last two research excellence frameworks and we received a Queen's Anniversary Prize for that work.

- Q40 **Chair:** There we are. You strike me as being the living, breathing definition of the word "eminent", if I may say so, but still you receive threats. You are at the top of your career. If you were perhaps a twenty-something post-doc researcher at the start of your career, would you be able to face down these threats with the same capacity that you are obviously doing at the moment?

Professor Thompson: I certainly think that it would be a concern. I see it in some of the younger researchers, including where we have tested specific products. Of course, it helps the science if you are clear and identify what the products are, rather than just refer to them as A, B or C in the scientific paper. I note the concerns of some of my younger colleagues.

Forgive me, I really respect the reassurance that you have both given me. It is not that I do not want to answer. It is actually that I would have come more prepared to address that question. There is nothing of substance that I want to add about a list of companies or products A, B and C here, but, notwithstanding what you are saying, those threats are



a concern. They are a concern to the younger generation, but how you address that is quite a challenge.

Chair: It is a challenge we may wish to take up. Thank you all for your evidence this morning. It has been tremendously insightful. We are very grateful to you and we will now move on to the next panel of witnesses.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Patrick Brighty, Joe Franses, Helen Jordan and Dr Peter Williams.

Q41 **Chair:** Can I welcome you all to the Committee? As with the previous panel, can I invite you to introduce yourselves and explain your job titles, please?

Patrick Brighty: Good morning, everyone. Many thanks for the opportunity to speak. I am Patrick Brighty, head of recycling policy at the Environmental Services Association. We are the trade body that represents the resources and waste sector. Our members deliver waste collection, sorting and reprocessing services for about 17 million people on a daily basis. I cover big policy reforms domestically on the recycling side, but also waste exports, waste electricals and biotreatments for our association.

Helen Jordan: Good morning. I am Helen Jordan. I am sustainability manager at the British Plastics Federation. We are the trade body for the whole of the plastics supply chain across the UK. We have about 600 members, of which 98% are SMEs. We are particularly focused on how we can help SMEs move forward on sustainability issues.

Joe Franses: Good morning. Thanks for the invitation to join. I am Joe Franses, vice-president of sustainability at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners. We make, move and sell Coca-Cola products across 30 different markets. We have 40,000 people in the business and have 95 manufacturing sites. We have been in Great Britain for over 100 years. My role specifically is to lead our sustainability strategy. We have been leaning in heavily to support the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty.

Dr Williams: Good morning, everybody. I am Peter Williams. I am the group technology director of INEOS. I also head up investor relations with INEOS. Outside INEOS, I work on the boards of a couple of other companies involved in recycling and the development of bioproducts. I also chair the Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre in Scotland.

Chair: Thank you very much. You are very welcome. Henry, you are going to lead our questioning in relation to the industry involvement in the plastics treaty process.

Q42 **Henry Tufnell:** Thank you, Chair. Before I get to that, I just wanted to



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touch on the issue discussed in the previous session on the threats to the scientific community. If I could just start with Peter, I was wondering whether this is something that you are aware of or that you recognise. I would be grateful if you could present your views on what you heard because you were in the evidence session that we have just had.

Dr Williams: I was surprised by what I heard, to be quite honest. I know that pressures are put on different groups in these negotiations, including on industry, of course, but to go to the point of threats seems to me unacceptable. In fact, I do not like some of the pressures that come in any case. It was news to me that actual threats against an individual had been made. I would deplore that.

Q43 **Henry Tufnell:** As a Committee, we were not aware, but reference was made to it being on the public record that that has taken place. Is that something you are familiar with?

Dr Williams: It has passed me by. I was not aware of it, no.

Joe Franses: I was not aware of it. I would not condone or support it in any way.

Helen Jordan: We were aware of it because we work with universities. We have a university group within the British Plastics Federation. We are trying to get links between industry and universities. We did hear via some of our university members who were at the negotiations that that had taken place. We would not agree with that by any stretch. Having been in Ottawa, I was not aware of anything like that taking place on the ground.

Q44 **Henry Tufnell:** What actions has your federation taken, having heard those concerns raised by your colleagues in universities?

Helen Jordan: From our perspective, our members are not generally out at the negotiations. As I said, a lot of our members are SMEs. By attending the negotiations, we are trying to give them greater awareness of what is happening on the ground in those negotiations and raise awareness of the treaty so that, when we hopefully get a treaty at INC-5.2, they can then help with the implementation. They are not on the ground, but we would not condone that happening.

Q45 **Henry Tufnell:** You were aware of that taking place, but you did not take any action as a result of hearing that it had taken place.

Helen Jordan: Our members were not there. If we had known that our members were there, we would have had that conversation. We did not have members that were out there at the negotiations.

Q46 **Henry Tufnell:** Does it not speak to the wider issue in terms of trying to approach this topic in good faith led by scientific evidence? At the same time, there are bad faith actors trying to suppress information and evidence.



Helen Jordan: Absolutely, yes. We do not agree with it happening. We did not take any particular action as a result of that, but we were aware of it. If we were aware of anything particularly involving our members, we would have addressed that. We very much feel that the scientific community needs to be part of discussions. One of our key requests for the treaty is that it is science-based. We want scientific evidence to be the basis of the negotiations. We very much value that the science community is there, along with all other stakeholders. We want to make sure that their views are very much part of the negotiations.

Patrick Brighty: I was not aware of it until this morning, but I am deeply concerned to hear about the threats that scientists face.

Q47 **Chair:** Just before we move on, Helen you have said a couple of times that your membership is predominantly SMEs. Presumably, not everybody in your membership is an SME.

Helen Jordan: Not all of them, no, but 98% are SMEs.

Q48 **Chair:** You would not need to have many bigger companies to make up that 2%, would you?

Helen Jordan: No. We have some. Within the treaty, we know there are some bigger companies that would be able to get involved in those processes themselves. In our role, we feel it is really important to make sure the voice of SMEs is going into the negotiations. For example, we have been involved in all the dialogues that DEFRA held via the Ocean Plastics Leadership Network. Generally, you get bigger brands and bigger companies that are part of that. We want to make sure the SME voice is coming through as well, so we try to do that.

As I say, we are making sure that SMEs are aware of what is happening. A lot of our members did not really know much about the treaty or what discussions were happening. It is a really important role for us to make sure they understand what is happening, they are aware of it and they can see how they can help in the implementation phase.

Q49 **Chair:** If any of your members were found to have been taking part in the sort of threatening behaviour that we have heard about, would you be happy to keep them as members?

Helen Jordan: No, we would look to address that. We would do that.

Q50 **Henry Tufnell:** Could you briefly outline the extent of your engagement in the UN global plastics treaty process? We can start with Peter and then just work our way down.

Dr Williams: My own personal involvement is zero directly. We do observe. We have a small delegation, one or two people, that goes to the meetings, mainly in an observer capacity. Overall, we have very little influence on how those discussions unfold.

Q51 **Henry Tufnell:** Are you able to set out what the delegation from INEOS



would be doing in those settings?

Dr Williams: It would be observing the direction of the discussions and reporting back to INEOS, i.e. to our businesses, the direction of travel of those discussions.

Q52 **Henry Tufnell:** Those delegations do not go with the view of inputting any kind of position.

Dr Williams: I do not know the details. I would have to come back to you on that separately with some written comment. No, we have little influence on the direction of negotiations. We state our point—we state that publicly, and I am happy to talk about that—but in those discussions we have little influence.

Q53 **Henry Tufnell:** You set out a public statement before, but your representatives on the ground are merely observing the process that is taking place.

Dr Williams: Yes. Do not forget that also present in those discussions are industry associations of which we are members, such as Plastics Europe. We have a specific INEOS position, which I am happy to discuss.

Q54 **Henry Tufnell:** You do not present that because they are just observing.

Dr Williams: We present it normally on a day-to-day basis, not just in that forum but in other fora.

Q55 **Henry Tufnell:** I am just struggling to understand this. You have industry representatives. You are part of an association.

Dr Williams: We also attend the meetings, yes.

Q56 **Henry Tufnell:** Why are you sending a delegation, in any event?

Dr Williams: We want to observe how the discussions are going.

Joe Franses: As Coca-Cola, we support a legally binding global plastics treaty. As Coca-Cola, we have attended every one of the INCs. We have done that because we believe that industry support is going to be really critical to gaining the agreement that we have referred to on the treaty.

We have been a founding member of the business coalition, which has brought 290 businesses together to support getting the treaty over the line. We have been a co-chair of the policy working group. We are encouraged about the growing alignment that we see ahead of Geneva.

Helen Jordan: As I mentioned, we have been involved in the UK dialogues that DEFRA has run—the upstream, midstream and downstream discussions—to represent our members' voices. We have a position statement on the treaty. We attended INC-4 and INC-5, and plan to attend INC-5.2. We did that to understand the process better. It is not something that we had been involved in previously. We wanted to understand how the United Nations process works, how those



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negotiations and discussions take place, and be able to feed that back to members and make sure they are aware of any impacts that it would have on them.

Patrick Brighty: We have had quite limited engagement directly in the process. My director, Jacob Hayler, participated in the DEFRA-led plastic pollution treaty roundtable a few weeks ago. We are signatories to that statement calling for an ambitious and effective treaty. Much of our focus has been on what the UK Government can do domestically to create the conditions to develop a circular economy for plastics and, by extension, minimise the global impact of plastic waste generated in the UK as part of that process.

Q57 **Henry Tufnell:** We touched upon this point around industry lobbying in the previous session. The Chair mentioned that industry lobbyists would be the largest delegation. There were seven representatives from Coca-Cola, including two from Coca-Cola Europacific Partners. Joe, could you give a bit more of an outline? We have heard from Peter in terms of INEOS taking an observing position. Can you outline what you expect from those seven representatives? What are they doing on the ground? What does that look like?

Joe Franses: The starting point is that we acknowledge the size and the scale of the challenge that we are facing. When we look at the plastics treaty, we believe it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to tackle plastic pollution. That is exactly why we have people attending the INC. It is exactly why we have leaned in very heavily to the business coalition.

We have been very clear that we support, for example, the discussion around product design. If you think about the plastics that we use, we use plastics that are always recyclable. They are recyclable at scale. Making sure that the treaty delivers on common criteria around product design is going to be absolutely key.

We are also seeking a harmonised approach, for example, on extended producer responsibility. When you think about extended producer responsibility, product design and the different types of plastics that are used globally, there is an incredible opportunity to put the right rules in place, which would apply to us as a business as to all other businesses, to get this right and tackle the plastic challenge that we all see.

That is why we have been on the ground. We have also heard very clearly from many different country representatives that they want to hear a very clear view from business in support of a global plastics treaty. Being there on the ground and having discussions as part of those delegations has been a critical part of what we have seen happen. That has been welcomed by many of the countries that have attended.

Q58 **Henry Tufnell:** That seems to be a very different approach from the one that Peter set out in respect of just being an observer to the proceedings. You seem to be much more an active participant around product design



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regulations.

Joe Franses: As I say, we have been very supportive of many of the things that the global plastics treaty is trying to address. We have been active on the ground to voice our support. We do that on many different topics where we think there is a specific interest that we want to put forward.

Q59 **Henry Tufnell:** Helen, you sent three representatives. Can you speak, in the same way, to what those representatives were doing on the ground?

Helen Jordan: A colleague of mine went to INC-5. We have been trying to understand more about how the process works. Predominantly, that is what they were there to do: to sit, to listen and to understand how the negotiations were going and any impacts that they would have on our membership, so we could let them know about that. We took an academic, through our university group, with us in that delegation as well, and one of our member companies was there. It is part of the business coalition, so it would be part of that position.

From the point of view of the BPF, we want to see how the negotiations are unfolding so we can talk to our membership about that. We are very supportive of having a high-ambition treaty. We were disappointed, alongside everyone else, that that did not happen at INC-5. We are optimistic that we can achieve that at 5.2 and we can start moving forward with how the longer-term treaty develops.

Q60 **Henry Tufnell:** In respect to what was outlined by Joe, there is less input on regulations or consumer products. You have less input; it is more of an observation role.

Helen Jordan: That is what we were there to do.

Q61 **Henry Tufnell:** I just want to move on quickly, if that is okay. There was a roundtable co-ordinated by the UK Government, and a statement about a plastic pollution treaty. Have you signed that treaty? We will go from Peter all the way down.

Dr Williams: I am not aware that we have, no.

Q62 **Henry Tufnell:** Why are you unable to support that treaty?

Dr Williams: It may not be a question of being unable to support it, but I would have to revert on that one. I am sorry.

Q63 **Henry Tufnell:** Are you able to provide a written statement to the Committee as to why you are unable to?

Dr Williams: Yes.

Joe Franses: My understanding is that we did support that in both the first and second iteration.

Helen Jordan: It is still something we are in discussion with our membership about. As I mentioned, we have over 600 members. This



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impacts through to all those members. We are still in discussions. We have meetings happening this week to talk further about that.

On the whole, though, we are very much in support of the overall sentiment of the statement. There are a few minor elements that are a bit more of a concern to some of our membership, but those discussions are still ongoing and we will have those discussions through to INC-5.2.

Q64 Henry Tufnell: What is the sort of timeframe? You have until 25 August, which is pretty soon.

Helen Jordan: We have key meetings this week with some of our membership, where it is on the agenda to be discussed.

Patrick Brighty: We signed it. We thought it was a really positive statement, particularly the intention to push for the committee to set a mandate in the agreement for countries to create national regulatory frameworks. Extended producer responsibility is a key mechanism to mobilise funding for the development of robust waste management systems in developing countries for the collection and recycling of plastic products and, by extension, to eliminate material escapement into the wider environment. We were very happy to sign the roundtable statement.

Q65 Chair: We are going to take a slightly deeper dive into the individual responsibilities that you have. Before I do that, Helen, you spoke about some minor concerns. What are these minor concerns?

Helen Jordan: There are concerns around the creation of lists of problematic materials and chemicals of concern.

Q66 Chair: That comes right to the heart of it. It is hardly a minor concern, is it?

Helen Jordan: We are very supportive of a lot of the paragraphs within the statement. We are very supportive, overall, of having an ambitious treaty. We are supportive of that being across the whole lifecycle of plastic.

We are concerned that there could be frameworks to deal with some of these chemicals of concern and problematic materials. A list would not necessarily take into consideration applications of material or particular countries' requirements. We want to make sure that plastic is used where it offers the best environmental outcome. We spoke earlier about the concern about a knee-jerk move from plastic to another material where the environmental impacts of that become greater. We want to make sure that plastic is used where it offers the best sustainable outcome and that we consider alternatives and look at each use in turn to make sure we are using the best environmental product material.

Q67 Chair: I am going to ask Sarah Dyke to lead the question in a second in respect of INEOS, Dr Williams. Just to be clear, you are aware that INEOS



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has not signed the roundtable statement.

Dr Williams: I believe that is the case, yes. It would not fall into my—

Q68 **Chair:** You found out that much before you came to us today, but your curiosity did not extend to finding out why.

Dr Williams: No, not before I came today.

Q69 **Chair:** You did not anticipate that this might be a subject of interest to the Committee.

Dr Williams: No, but the content of the direction is a subject of interest. In other words, the issues at stake are a subject of interest. I am very happy to talk about those.

Q70 **Chair:** How much is plastics worth to INEOS as a company?

Dr Williams: It is difficult to say that exactly, but we are clearly a significant producer of plastics. In the UK, we probably produce about 33% of the plastics, but the UK is principally structured for imports, as is the rest of Europe, for plastics. We are a significant producer. We probably participate in most plastic value chains in one way or another, be that carbon fibre composites, insulation, packaging and so on.

Q71 **Chair:** You are still content to take a fairly passive role in this and take whatever the treaty throws at you.

Dr Williams: No, we are not content to take a passive role more generally. We have strong views, which we do express, on what we believe would make a sensible product.

Q72 **Chair:** In which fora might we find these strong views?

Dr Williams: Certainly, we have public views. I am happy to discuss them now.

Chair: In which case, Sarah, you have some questions in relation to sustainability commitments.

Q73 **Sarah Dyke:** I do. Thank you, Dr Williams. INEOS is one of the world's largest petrochemicals producers. Your Grangemouth site in Scotland is the second-largest plastic-producing plant in the UK. Do you accept that we must produce less plastic?

Dr Williams: We do not believe in caps in production or bans, to be quite honest, because of the potential unintended consequences. We also believe that it is really important, guided by science and the insights that people are developing currently, to choose the best material for the job, regardless of whether that is plastic or not.

In this situation, we have to understand that we do not just produce plastics without knowing where they are going. We produce plastics because people need and want them. Most of the modern materials on



which we rely contain plastics, be that carbon fibre, packaging, medical goods, household goods, fibres and so on.

The demand for plastics is clearly there. They serve a benefit. Studies show that that benefit is environmentally quite often, nearly always, the better choice in the world that we understand today. As we progress in the development of plastic applications, we must consider the application; we must consider the people who buy materials containing plastics, which is everybody in this room and all other consumers. We rely on those materials. We rely on affordable energy; we rely on materials for our health, et cetera. On that basis, it is important that we choose the right material for the job.

We would support very strong scientific guidance on the development of materials in the future. We support strongly a circular economy. We support strongly the reuse of resources. We have taken practical actions and put in investments to try to achieve that.

From a company perspective, we tend to spend, frankly, little time in some of the discussion fora, but we are spending a lot of time on understanding how a circular economy may be created. We are developing new products to meet the demands of the circular economy, such as the multilayered packaging that you heard of earlier. We have developed a new product that solves the problems of recycling that. We are taking practical actions and investing. There are difficulties to that, which I will go on to explain, if we have time.

Q74 Sarah Dyke: You mentioned the circular economy. Does INEOS need to increase your recycled material targets for future years to be really part of that circular economy?

Dr Williams: We have set recycled material targets, as I am sure you are aware. There is a struggle to achieve them. The struggle is due to manifold issues. One is the regulatory framework. We need a good, strong, clear and fair regulatory framework. For example, at the moment advanced recycling is not fully supported in the UK or Europe—we consider this a region, frankly. That is an issue. Demand is an issue, frankly.

We can make recycled products. We have made, developed and are marketing recycled products. We led the PVC industry in recycling. That is probably the most successful in Europe at the moment. The demand for products is not quite there. The third component is a lack of good feedstock. What you find in the UK is that recycling capacities are going down, not up. That is upstream of us in the sense of recycling.

Those are some of the issues that we have to address, taking into account the user need and bearing in mind the scientific evidence, so that we make progress in the right direction, and then delivering the products that help people in their everyday lives. That is our approach, rather than, frankly, participating in too many discussions fora.



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Q75 Sarah Dyke: You mentioned the upstream companies. Are the upstream companies against a reduction in plastic usage? I also wanted to quiz you on improved labelling for consumers.

Dr Williams: We would support measures to increase understanding of the provenance of materials. Absolutely, yes. We want high regulatory standards that cross borders and the highest safety standards that we can muster across borders as well. We would not support anything that disadvantages one region unfairly. As we look at this from a UK and a Europe perspective, that cross-border adjustment, which is very complex to do, needs to work.

People talked about the flux of plastics at the moment. China has put in an awful lot of capacity. We know that. Industry in Europe, from the polymer point of view, is closing down, not expanding, despite the comments that were made. It is important that standards apply to imported materials.

On a consumption basis our greenhouse gas emissions are quite different from those that we report, but on a consumer basis in the UK we rely on these imports, as it stands at the moment. We would support in-region production for in-region use, where regulations are strictly controlled and higher standards are maintained because the provenance of those materials will be assured.

Q76 Sarah Dyke: Just going back to the consumer, if the consumer was aware through improved labelling, do you think their attitudes to buying products contained in plastic would change? I note that INEOS does not commit to many specific or measurable targets. Is there a link there with helping consumers change their habits in buying products contained in plastic?

Dr Williams: I am not sure what would make consumers change their habits.

Sarah Dyke: Having products not wrapped in plastic, perhaps.

Dr Williams: We talk to the rest of the value chain on that. Frankly, if we do not want to wrap things in plastic, plastic wrapping will not be made. That is clear. It is like asking us whether we still make typewriters. We do not. Things move on. The majority of the plastics industry is around other applications, even though plastics packaging is a very significant one. We do not support frivolous packaging and stuff like that. No, not at all.

Q77 Sarah Dyke: You say it is not the plastics themselves that are the problem but the fact that they are thrown away into the environment and sent to landfill or incinerated. Just going back to my line of quizzing around improving the information that goes to the customer, to what extent would curbs on plastic production be a threat to your business?



Dr Williams: That is difficult to calculate. One of the concepts is that by curbing production you encourage recycle. As we have heard, that requires substantial investment. One of the issues that we have today in recycling is making it work economically because people are not prepared to pay. Just to be clear on that, it is not that the technology is not there or the will is not there. The market is not there because people will not pay for it at the moment.

I am not sure what will change consumer habit because it seems very price-sensitive. Some of the people downstream of us that are consumer-facing probably can give a better answer on that issue because, of course, we are business to business mainly.

Q78 **Sarah Dyke:** At the moment you have set no overall emissions targets or at least you do not disclose all your emissions targets.

Dr Williams: We do. We have emissions targets. Emissions targets are expressed in our annual sustainability report for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Q79 **Sarah Dyke:** Do you disclose all your emissions?

Dr Williams: In what sense? We disclose water, waste, toxic waste, gases other than greenhouse gases, and greenhouse gases. In fact, we disclose everything that will be required under the CSRD in Europe.

Q80 **Sarah Dyke:** Are those all your overall emissions?

Dr Williams: Water, waste and air emissions pretty much covers it. I am hesitant to say that it covers absolutely every single piece but certainly the vast majority.

Q81 **Sarah Dyke:** ClientEarth has produced a greenwashing file on INEOS. It notes that INEOS does not disclose its overall emissions.

Dr Williams: All I can do is supply you with and guide you to the emissions declarations that we make. Each individual asset that we build or run has to have a detailed report around it. Those are public documents, normally. I struggle to understand why they would argue that we would not declare our emissions. We do.

Q82 **Sarah Dyke:** Just finally, would setting a net zero emissions reduction target help INEOS contribute to your overall plastic reduction targets?

Dr Williams: We have set a net zero emissions target. It is some distance out; it is 2050. The most important one is 2030, by which time we are looking for a 30%-plus reduction in emissions. That leads us to key opportunities that make good business sense.

One of those is the investment that was referred to earlier by our Greenpeace colleague, which is an investment in intermediate ethylene in Antwerp, which will reduce emissions for production, based on the cracker there, by 50% compared to the next best in Europe and will also make it cheaper. There is a win-win there in terms of both sustainability



and economics. That is the sort of project that is really important. Sustainability is not just about environment and the societal aspects; it is also about economics. We need to be able to afford to invest.

Secondly, we have just gone through a final investment decision for a large storage project in the North Sea. Those are two of the principal projects. Frankly, the industry is at a very low ebb at the moment. It is in very much a long-lasting down cycle for a number of reasons, but we are still going ahead with those two projects.

Q83 Sarah Dyke: If the treaty was ratified, would your company be able to adapt to a world that is less reliant on plastics? How would you do that?

Dr Williams: Yes, we would adapt because we have to adapt. We have always wanted to be a sustainable company and deliver sustainable products. The industry would have to adapt, but one has to be very careful here. If a cap is agreed, is it going to be agreed by China, the US and so on? At the moment, they would certainly oppose that. I do not see that as feasible.

The focus should be on setting the right standards, making sure those standards work across borders, following the scientific evidence and using that in balance with other factors. At the end of the day, materials are about giving a standard of living to people. We need to make sure that standard of living is delivered in a way that minimises any environmental impact.

Can we eliminate it completely? Probably not, frankly. Anything that we do as humans always has some consequence. We are trying to minimise that consequence, and we need to be led by science in that.

Q84 Sarah Dyke: Do you believe that the polluter should pay?

Dr Williams: Who is the polluter? First of all, define that. As a producer, we sell to other businesses, which convert and so on. We pay an EPR at the moment, which is intended to support the collection of waste.

Are we the polluter? Are we the ones who are throwing the plastic into the environment? We have signed up to Operation Clean Sweep. We work enormously to prevent any loss of plastic in our organisation, while it is in our control. We do not believe there is any role for plastic in the environment, but it is there.

At the end of the day, the question about where the pollution occurs, why it occurs and how to stop it is very much more complex than capping production. There are social aspects; there are cultural aspects in some regions. In other regions, there is a lack of infrastructure for collection, recycling and so on.

Those are really important issues. We would like to support those sorts of developments, for sure, but we do not believe in an overall cap. We believe in the best product for the application that we require.



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Q85 **Chair:** Global plastic production is 360 million tonnes a year. We have heard evidence that that will be triple that by 2060. Does INEOS have a view on that? Is that something that you are quite happy to see?

Dr Williams: In fact, I presented this recently to our investors. Depending on which study you read, the total production could be about 450 million tonnes at the moment.

Q86 **Chair:** You heard the evidence of the professor from Plymouth talking about that graph that is diverging.

Dr Williams: It will grow.

Chair: This is fine by you.

Dr Williams: Is it fine by me? If that is what we require, if that is what the world needs, that is fine by me.

Q87 **Chair:** There is no role for Government or public policy in this at all. Just let it run.

Dr Williams: No, there is a role in setting standards, regulations and so on to address some of the issues that we have been talking about.

Chair: But not be a cap.

Dr Williams: We do not believe in a cap, no, because we think that will lead to the wrong product for the wrong application.

Q88 **Chair:** Sorry, what does that mean?

Dr Williams: If you impose a cap on certain polymers and therefore they become unavailable for certain applications, you are choosing the next best alternative or an alternative that may have greater impact.

Q89 **Chair:** What would that be?

Dr Williams: From a greenhouse gas perspective, it might be changing from a polyester bottle to a glass or aluminium bottle. That is something that my colleague here can deal with. If you look at the studies—I am happy to direct you to studies in this—a 2020 study by Denkstatt and a 2016 study by Trucost show that the overall impact and the emissions impact, for sure, would go up if you did not use plastic in a lot of applications.

That is not to say there are not some frivolous applications that we would not support, but that is, generally speaking, the case. Therefore, our job is to deliver these materials.

Q90 **Chair:** You just deliver it regardless.

Dr Williams: No, we deliver it in response to customers. At the moment, the customers do not want to buy much, frankly, because of the downturn in the industry.



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Q91 **Chair:** You see no role for Government or Governments in influencing customer choice through availability.

Dr Williams: For example, we would support a recycling regulation that makes sense and is agnostic in terms of product and technology. We support those aspects of it.

Q92 **Chair:** Other people should have their behaviour influenced, but not INEOS.

Dr Williams: No, we are developing products and technologies to support the circular economy. We change our formulations in line with the best available evidence and regulations. We are not passive. We are very proactive. In fact, that is one of the hallmarks of INEOS.

Q93 **Chair:** Is it companies such as INEOS that prove the need to have a global plastics treaty? If you are not going to modify your own behaviour or conduct, other people have to do it for you, do they not?

Dr Williams: Sorry, but I have tried to explain that we do modify our behaviour and conduct. We modify our products. We do that with feedback from the market, from customers who have similar constraints on them. We take it very seriously. We have to. That is part of delivering materials for people in the best possible and most sustainable way. Of course we take that into account. We are responsible, I believe, in that.

Chair: I am not quite seeing a coherent argument here, but, anyway, Jayne, you wanted to come in.

Q94 **Jayne Kirkham:** There is a lot of consumer demand for change, actually. Some studies show that reusing and recycling could meet 60% of plastics demand. If there is a consumer push, it is possible. Is that something that INEOS could pick up and run with, and be a leader?

Dr Williams: We have tried. We have developed a whole range of products. For example, we are putting seats into a stadium in the Netherlands that will be from recycled material. We are trying to get more and more recycled material in. You need certain technologies to do that. Mechanical recycling does not always work. It is great for PVC but not great for polyolefins and other polymers because they degrade during that process. You want more advanced methods for recycle.

As I say, we find that the regulatory framework is insufficient to support the longevity of the investment required because we do not know whether regulations will change over time. The overall demand is not there at the moment because people do not want to buy it. They will not pay for it, frankly, because there is a cost to it. The availability of feedstock is somewhat limited. That is one of the reasons why we have seen a contraction, not an expansion, in the UK.

Q95 **Jayne Kirkham:** I just wanted to ask quickly about the emissions targets that you were talking about. How do you measure your emissions? Where are they reported? Do you include scope 3 in those measurements?



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Dr Williams: We do include scope 3 as of this year, which is a combination of upstream and downstream emissions.

Q96 **Jayne Kirkham:** I have not gone on your website, so I have not seen where they are.

Dr Williams: We report scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3. We have reported them for many years. We set targets based on 2019. You can see exactly the progress that we have made in our sustainability report. I can send you those separately.

Jayne Kirkham: The emissions measurements?

Dr Williams: Yes, I can send you those separately. Just to emphasise, regardless of what anyone says, we report emissions. It is a matter of the public record. You can read our reports on that.

Q97 **Tim Roca:** Joe, Surfers Against Sewage says that Coca-Cola's plastic waste is found in 50% of all the audits and that you are the worst plastics polluter for the last four years consecutively. My colleague just mentioned scope 3 emissions. In your 2023 sustainability report, those increased. Can you talk to us a little bit about what you are doing to reduce plastics pollution?

Joe Franses: We are absolutely clear that none of our packaging should end up as litter or in the oceans. Collecting packaging once it has been used for recycling is absolutely critical to our business. It is also critical to our greenhouse gas emissions. We were one of the first 10 businesses to set a science-based target. We publish scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. Packaging accounts for about 35% to 40% of our total value chain greenhouse gas emissions. We know that both collecting that packaging and then using recycled content to make that packaging are the two biggest drivers of bringing down the greenhouse gas emissions of that packaging.

If I think about our business in Great Britain, just to give a bit of an example, we use about 35,000 tonnes of PET every year in Great Britain. Nearly 65% of that is recycled plastic. We are active in the market. We are actively purchasing recycled PET. That comes at a significant on-cost, and that is part of the challenge.

One of the reasons why we have supported the business coalition and we support a global plastics treaty is so that we can see common criteria for product design and we can bring in common criteria for extended producer responsibility on a level playing field. If that were to be put in place, it would significantly increase the availability of recycled plastic so that companies such as ours could use it again and again.

Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, the business that I work for, has invested directly in four recycled PET reprocessing plants in different parts of the world. We have done that because we understand the criticality of getting that feedstock back once it has been in the hands of consumers and



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using it again and again. That is why we are committed to continuing to use recycled plastic.

Q98 Tim Roca: You touched on my last question there. You are supportive of the treaty because you think it will reduce your own chances of being plastic polluters.

Joe Franses: Nobody within our business welcomes hearing that our plastic ends up where it should not. The unique thing about Coca-Cola bottles is that they can always be recycled in practice and at scale. It is one of the reasons why in Great Britain we have been very supportive of the deposit return scheme, for example. We are leaning in heavily to make that work. We are part of the deposit management organisation. When that deposit scheme is put into place from October 2027, we think we will see much more of that plastic coming back.

If you think about the plastic bottles that we use in Great Britain, today somewhere between 60% and 65% are coming back to be recycled, maybe slightly more, up to 70%. If we look across different markets where deposit return schemes are in place, those collection rates can reach 80% or even 90%. That would lead to a much cleaner and greater volume of feedstock that can be reprocessed, made into recycled PET and used back in our bottles. That is what we would like to continue to do.

As I said at the beginning, we support the global plastics treaty. We certainly support the role that the UK Government have played in encouraging common criteria for product design. We support common criteria around extended producer responsibility, leading to a globally harmonised approach. Those two things alone would almost double EPR revenues and significantly enhance the amount of recycled content that would be available to be reprocessed. That is why we have supported the global plastics treaty from the starting point.

Q99 Tim Roca: You mentioned one of your targets earlier. There seem to be different targets depending on which year you go to. You mentioned carbon emissions. In 2023, you had a target of reducing emissions by 25% by 2030 based on a 2015 baseline. The following year, the target changed to reducing it based on a 2019 baseline and reaching it by 2035. There are other targets that have moved in your sustainability plans. How can consumers have confidence that you are committed to this agenda, if you are moving the goalposts year to year?

Joe Franses: I do not think many of those targets are consumer-facing, but let me give you a bit of context. I represent Coca-Cola Europacific Partners. I believe that some of the targets you were referring to are for the Coca-Cola Company at a global level.

If I think about the targets that we have set as a business, we have set a target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030 from a 2019 baseline. We have a target to reach net zero by 2040. Both those are endorsed by the Science Based Targets Initiative. We publish our



progress on that on an annual basis. The most recent numbers suggest that we have reached nearly a 20% reduction in those emissions. We are well on track for 30% by 2030.

Of course, our business changes shape. We recently acquired a business. We have to go through the process of relooking at the numbers and resetting them again. We are fully transparent about our greenhouse gas emissions across scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3. As I say, all our targets are approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative. We are also fully transparent about the amount of plastic we use. That goes on record, as does the amount of recycled plastic that we use. As I said, in Great Britain, about 66% of the plastic we used in FY24 was recycled plastic.

Q100 Tim Roca: You are right. There are different targets—this is what is confusing for consumers—between Coca-Cola, as the mother company, and you, as a bottling company. Looking at your specific targets, you have committed to 100% of your primary packaging being recyclable by 2025. Has that happened?

Joe Franses: We are very close to that. Over 99% of our packaging that goes into the market is recyclable. If you think about our products that would be on a supermarket shelf, you have aluminium cans, PET plastic bottles and a very small amount of glass. We also use dispensed to deliver our product. All those three packs are fully recyclable. They are recyclable at scale and very widely.

As I said before, the deposit return scheme that will be introduced in Great Britain from October 2027 will hopefully close the gap between plastic bottles that are not currently recycled and plastic bottles that hopefully will be in the future.

Q101 Tim Roca: Your company is responsible for Coca-Cola across Europe and Australia. If it is 65% in Great Britain, do you have a level for plastics recycling in Europe?

Joe Franses: Our business, CCEP, is responsible for 31 different markets. We operate across western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. We recently acquired the business in the Philippines. If I look across at group level, 46% of all the plastic that we use is recycled PET. That is a significant number and has been increasing over the years. GB is about 66%.

Q102 Tim Roca: It is 46% across the group.

Joe Franses: It is 46% at a group level for Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, yes. That does come at a significant on-cost to the business. We have referred in our integrated report and accounts to an investment of over €400 million to decarbonise our value chain. That includes a significant investment in recycled PET.

Q103 Tim Roca: I am conscious of time. Can I ask about virgin plastic? On your website, you have a target to stop using oil-based virgin plastic in



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your bottles by 2030. Virgin plastic can be produced using natural gas as well. I was thinking about the wording.

Joe Franses: We would love to be in a place where all the plastic that we use is recycled plastic. We would love to be in a place where we do not depend on any virgin plastic. The 2030 target is going to be challenging, partly due to the on-cost between recycled PET and virgin PET. In some markets, that on-cost can be as high as 60%, 70% or even 80%.

One of the reasons that we support a global plastics treaty is that, if we are able to get much cleaner feedstock into that recycling process, the theory is that that should increase availability and decrease that on-cost. Of course, you then have initiatives such as the introduction of deposit return schemes, which also bring a far cleaner feedstock.

One of the challenges, as I am sure that many of you will be aware, is that in Great Britain much of our feedstock is still as a result of co-mingled waste, which has a far lower yield than if you were to take a stream that is just plastic from a deposit return scheme, for example. That is why we have been active in welcoming and supporting the introduction of the deposit return scheme.

Q104 **Tim Roca:** In 2021 you had a plant-based plastic prototype bottle. Is that right? Is there progress on that?

Joe Franses: We have used plant-based material in the past. You are absolutely right. That is another way of bringing a virgin material that does not link back to oil. For a variety of reasons, that did not really work. It is not something that we are using at the moment. We are focusing all of our efforts on getting recycled PET into our packaging.

Q105 **Tim Roca:** Why did it not work?

Joe Franses: It really did not work due to cost. It was something that could be done scientifically, but it was not economical to pursue.

We prefer to put all our efforts into the investments that I referred to before in terms of recycled PET, not just purchasing the recycled PET but also investing in the recycled PET supply chain. By the way, that is both mechanical and enhanced recycling.

Q106 **Tim Roca:** How uneconomic was your prototype?

Joe Franses: I do not have those figures to hand. I can come back to the Committee.

Tim Roca: It would be interesting to know. There is clearly a solution there, but it is considered uneconomic by industry. It would be interesting to know why it is so uneconomic. That is the end of my question.

Q107 **Charlie Dewhirst:** Can I ask each of the panellists, as briefly as you can, to outline what the Government could do to make UK recycling capacity



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far greater than it is now so that we are not reliant on exporting for recycling purposes and we encourage better-value recycled products in the UK?

Patrick Brighty: I will try to do this as briefly as I can, but it is probably helpful to give a bit of background context as to why we have such a big plastic recycling capacity gap at the moment. Approximately 50% of the plastic packaging waste that is generated is exported for reprocessing. That is for a few different reasons.

First, the structure of the packaging recovery note system, in which producers purchase evidence that their material has been recycled, incentivises export over reprocessing in the UK. There is reform that can be done to equalise that.

Secondly, for material that does get reprocessed here at the moment, there is insufficient end-market demand in the UK, particularly for lower-value materials, such as films, which are going to be mandatory to collect from 2027. There is a challenge to resolve there. Where there is demand for recycled content at the moment, imported recycled content, particularly from lower-cost jurisdictions—Indonesia is a good example where energy and labour costs are significantly lower than in the UK—is able to outcompete UK reprocessors. For example, for the whole of 2024, recycled high-density polyethylene was about 25% cheaper from an Indonesian reprocessor than it was from the UK.

Just very quickly in terms of interventions, an escalator on the plastic packaging tax to £500 per tonne would insulate demand from fluctuations in oil prices. There are other associated things that could be done, such as looking at an increase in the minimum recycled content threshold to 50%, moving to mandatory recycled content, echoing the EU's approach in the packaging and packaging waste regulation, or subjecting imported recycled material to third-party certification that domestic reprocessors have to achieve, rather than the self-certification approach they have at the moment. Anecdotally, that is believed to lead to significant levels of fraudulent material ending up on the UK market, based on either the price or the fact that the material effectively performs too well to have been recycled.

I have mentioned reform to the PRN system. I will pass on.

Helen Jordan: We are very concerned about UK recycling capacity. We have about 70 recycling companies in our membership. They are all finding very harsh conditions at the moment. We have seen members that have closed down already and the ones that are still there are really struggling. We really think there needs to be immediate action to try to help support UK recycling infrastructure.

We agree that the PRN system has been an issue. Our members have talked about it as an issue for over 10 years. We have to have a system where we are not incentivising the export of material from the UK. We



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have to have a system where we are encouraging UK capacity to be developed and keeping UK capacity.

We have an issue within the plastic packaging tax around fraud. This has led to one of our manufacturer companies shutting down, because it cannot compete with the imported material that is claiming to have 30% recycled content in it, when in fact we know that is just not possible. Fraud is a big issue. We need to have better certification through the plastic packaging tax.

We have the issue of importing cheaper virgin material. Recycled material just cannot compete against imported virgin and imported recycled material. We have issues around chemical recycling. We have heard mention of advanced recycling already. We need to get the mass balance agreed within the plastic packaging tax. That is something that we are working with HMRC on.

We also have issues around the food contact regulations. There are a huge number of areas where you cannot use recycled content because the food contact regulations do not allow it. We need to ensure the safety of the materials that come in contact with food, but we need to move forward those regulations. The EU has updated its food contact regulation. We are stuck using one from 2008, which has not moved with developing times.

Q108 Charlie Dewhirst: Joe and Peter, do you have anything to add to those very comprehensive answers?

Joe Franses: I can be very quick and say what really matters now is the effective implementation of both EPR and DRS. We have been recently appointed, as you are aware, to the Deposit Management Organisation.

Wales's decision to pursue an independent deposit return scheme is going to create significant challenges. We would like a UK-wide scheme. Interoperability is going to be key. If Wales goes its own way, it risks both cross-border fraud and consumer confusion. Having one UK-wide scheme would be absolutely critical for us.

Dr Williams: From my perspective, I agree with a lot of what has been said, but we need incentives rather than penalties. We have to address how it appears to the consumer cost-wise, and therefore we need to make sure that there is a level playing field between recycled plastics and virgin plastics at the consumer level. There may be schemes that can achieve that.

Within the plastic packaging tax, just to reinforce, we have to be technology-agnostic. In addition to that, as we heard in the first session, we have to set very good standards and regulations that work when material is imported across borders. That is why we support the use of science-based evidence in establishing those standards.

Q109 Sarah Bool: I understand that the slightly more controversial element on



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the global plastics treaty is about having product design standards. I am just conscious of time. Clearly, you said you are supportive of some of these product designs. What one key element would you want included in any design standards that you think would be accepted across the board, given that we need to get to harmonisation? I will probably ask each of you. Joe, did you want to start?

Joe Franses: For us, it is about common design requirements to enhance collection and recycling. That includes design for recycling, bottle-to-bottle recycling, and the use of food-grade recycled content.

Just to give you one very small example from our business, the Sprite brand, which many of you will see as synonymous with the colour green, used to have green PET bottles. We made a decision a few years ago to change those PET bottles from green to clear. The reason why we did that is not that they were not recyclable as green bottles but that we wanted to make sure that they were clear, which enhanced the recyclability. The green was essentially risking contaminating the clear PET stream. Bringing harmonised rules around product design, which would significantly increase the recyclability and reusability of plastic, would be really beneficial.

Helen Jordan: We would want to see product design regulations that encourage not only collection but the true recycling of material, dealing with that through reprocessors if possible.

We want something that can adapt. Industry is great at innovation. We want to make sure that any product design regulations can keep pace with innovation. As new technologies become available that can handle material, the regulations need to be able to adapt to that.

Patrick Brighty: I would echo a lot of those thoughts. On product design, the primary vehicle to drive a circular economy globally would be around eco-design requirements, extended producer responsibility and modulated fees. Having higher fees for less recyclable materials and lower fees for easier-to-recycle material is an effective mechanism that could be included in the treaty. Certainly in Europe and now increasingly the UK, there is a bank of knowledge on how you design effective EPR schemes for plastics based on systems that are already in place. That would probably be the recommendation.

Dr Williams: I have little to add, but we would support global design standards in the way that has been described. We would support global standards for the environmental or safety aspects of any additives that are put into plastics as well.

Q110 **Chair:** Just as a matter of interest, Joe, do you buy your plastics from INEOS?

Joe Franses: In Great Britain we buy our plastics from Cleantech, which is a facility in Lincolnshire. We also buy recycled PET from Germany and the Netherlands.



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Dr Williams: We do not make polyester. We make one of the intermediates for it. Some of that may be in your products, but not polyester itself.

Q111 **Chair:** Joe, would you support the global plastics treaty having a cap on production in it?

Joe Franses: We support sustainable levels of production. We support sustainable levels of production that lead to a circular economy, so plastics can be recycled and reused.

Q112 **Chair:** It all depends on what we regard as sustainable.

Joe Franses: I mean sustainable in the sense that plastics can be reused, can be recycled and can lead to a circular economy outcome, yes.

Q113 **Chair:** Who says what is sustainable?

Joe Franses: That is down to the negotiation within the global plastics treaty.

Q114 **Chair:** If these negotiations produced an outcome that you are not happy with, would you withdraw your support for the treaty at that stage?

Joe Franses: We are really optimistic going into—

Chair: That was not the question; I was not asking you about your optimism.

Joe Franses: We would not withdraw our support for the treaty because we truly believe that a legally binding treaty will deliver the outcomes that we need. We support the pragmatic approach that the business coalition is proposing.

The business coalition has published a two-page strategy to try to break through the deadlock that we are currently seeing. We are optimistic that that deadlock can be broken. We would remain supportive of a global plastics treaty, but we do not want to see a weak plastics treaty. We want to see something that brings global rules.

Chair: Thank you very much for your attendance today and for your engagement. Without presuming to speak for the Committee, certainly we all hope we are able to get a treaty, and a strong treaty, next August because there is a generational importance to it. Anything you are individually or collectively able to do to encourage that, even if you are just a passive bystander in the process, would be for the good of us all. If we do not see the progress that we are hoping for, it is fair to say that the Committee will want to return to this. Perhaps it is not so much a case of goodbye as au revoir for this afternoon.

Thank you for your attendance. We will conclude the session at this stage.