



**END  
PLASTIC  
SOUP**

**“Microplastic fibres are shed from synthetic clothing with every wash and are the main contributors to microplastic contamination of the oceans. The NFWI calls on Government and industry to research and develop innovative solutions to this problem in order to stop the accumulation of microplastic fibres in our oceans”**

Ashley Green WI, Buckinghamshire Federation

Passed with 98.9% majority at the 2017 NFWI Annual Meeting

*“I believe that the Women’s Institutes have a huge role to play, your community presence and lobbying power will provide the public and political drive for change. Help to educate your family, your friends, your neighbours, local schools, your brownie pack, sea scouts, anyone, about the issue of microfibres and their effect on marine life”*

*Dr. Natalie Welden, Open University, 2017 NFWI Annual Meeting*

## What are microplastic fibres?

Microplastic fibres are small plastic fragments 5mm or smaller that are shed from synthetic clothes when laundered and end up in the sea and wider environment. The scale of the problem is large; millions of people wash their clothes every week,

shedding these tiny particles that are too small to be caught by the machine’s filters, flowing into the sewage system and eventually into the ocean.

Due to their small size microplastic

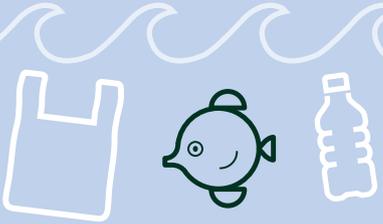
fibres are readily ingested by aquatic life, filling up their stomachs which can eventually cause death. We also know that these fibres are ending up in the food we eat, the long term effects of which are not yet clear.



**OVER A MILLION**  
tonnes of clothing was  
purchased in the UK  
in 2016



**36 BILLION**  
loads of clothes are  
washed every year  
across Europe



**BY 2050**  
there could be more  
plastic in the sea than  
fish

## What is the current situation:

The problem of pollution from microplastic fibres is not well-known, so there is an urgent need to raise awareness. Initiatives to tackle the problem are at an early stage, and more research is needed to understand this complex issue and to guide the development of solutions. For example, we need to understand

why different fabrics release differing amounts of fibres during the washing process.

We need to better understand the scale of the problem by developing tools to measure microplastic levels throughout the water supply. Water companies are starting to consider

ways to sample for microplastics at waste water treatment plants.

Initiatives such as the Guppy Bag and CoraBall aim to capture the fibres in washing machines, but more research is needed to understand how effective these are at tackling the problem.

# What's the wider context?

Plastic production has surged over the past 50 years, from 15 million tonnes in 1964 to 311 million tonnes in 2014, and is expected to double again over the next 20 years. Today nearly everyone, everywhere, every day comes into contact with plastics. Each year, at least 8 million tonnes of plastics leak into the ocean – which is equivalent to dumping the contents of one garbage truck into the ocean every minute.

The rise of 'fast fashion' has seen mass-produced clothing designed for instant gratification but that carries with it hidden environmental

and social impacts. The pressure to produce imitations of the latest trends quickly and at low prices, means that garments are produced ever more quickly, and at a lower cost.

Manufacturing clothes from raw materials puts pressure on natural resources and produces vast amounts of effluent and other waste products. Low prices also mean quality is compromised, and, with an emphasis on fast moving styles, clothes are designed to be cheap and disposable. The surge in demand for disposable clothing has a host of negative impacts for people and the planet.

The NFWI is concerned that the sheer volume of cheap, throwaway clothing being produced and purchased could contribute to the release of microplastic fibres.

The fashion industry has been built on a linear model, one where clothing is made, used and then disposed of in landfill. A circular economy is an alternative way of looking at how we dispose of items, it thinks about ways in which we can reuse resources and use them for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value from them.

# What the campaign is calling for:

Delegates voted overwhelmingly to support the resolution to campaign for research and the development of solutions to prevent the detrimental environmental impact microplastic fibres are having on the environment. The campaign is not about calling for synthetic clothing to be banned, but for more research to understand the problem in more depth, and to support the development of solutions. At this stage there is no one clear solution identified that will solve the problem, which is why research into a range of areas is so crucial.

This research could include developing a deeper understanding about why textiles perform differently when washed, informing

the development of new types of materials or textiles with a lower impact, or ways to prevent fibres being released into the water supply.

The campaign is also about educating our communities and raising awareness of the issue amongst members and the wider public.

**At a national level:** The NFWI has a key role to play in bringing key stakeholders together to consider the challenges and solutions to the problem and representing the perspective of consumers. The NFWI will encourage further research into the area to enable a deeper understanding of which solutions are the most effective for tackling microplastic fibres. We are also keen to see further activity to measure

the problem – perhaps by sampling for microfibrils in waste treatment facilities.

**At a regional level:** WIs and federations can hold awareness days in their communities to raise awareness of the issue.

**At a local level:** The campaign will educate members on the scale of the issue and what you can do to reduce the amount of microplastic fibres entering the ocean. Acting as agents of change, members will consider their own consumption and washing habits, encouraging others within their community to do the same. Members can also learn about the wider context of plastic waste and its worldwide impact.

# TURNING THE TIDE ON OCEAN POLLUTION SINCE 1927

*The End Plastic Soup campaign follows a long history of WI action to protect our oceans and tackle waste – stemming from the WI's earliest days.*

**1927**

The WI called for national and international action to help protect our seas and fish from oil pollution from ships.

**1954**

A resolution passed to start a national anti-litter campaign which led to the formation of the organisation, Keep Britain Tidy in 1955.

**1958**

A resolution calling for immediate action to improve inadequate sewerage systems was passed, aiming to prevent the pollution of watercourses and seashores.

**1971**

A resolution calling for action to develop perishable plastic packaging materials was passed by members, prompted by concerns about the impact of non-perishable containers on beaches and animals.

**1978**

The WI began a campaign looking into pollution and the dangers this posed to marine life, calling for closer monitoring and control internationally.

**1988**

A further resolution was passed urging the government to reduce water pollution.

**2005**

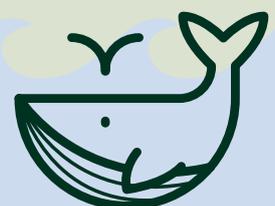
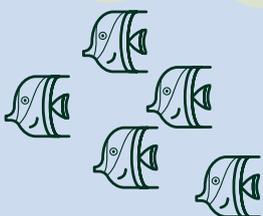
The WI called for action to reduce the amount of waste in the production and packaging of consumer goods.

**2011**

The WI began work on a campaign to raise awareness of the impacts of the 'fast fashion' industry, encouraging members to think about the social and environmental impacts of this 'disposable' clothing, including the impact of washing clothes.

**2017**

End Plastic Soup campaign launched to protect the ocean from contaminating micro plastic fibres



# Get involved – things you can do

## **1 Learn more and raise awareness**

Watch 'A Plastic Tide', Sky's documentary looking at the scale of ocean plastic waste and how it is entering the food chain. It is available to watch on Sky's website and via

**YouTube:** <http://thewi.uk/aplastictide>

## **2 Engage with your local MP**

We are asking members to write to their local MP to let them know about our new campaign and to ensure the issue is on the political agenda. We have a template letter that you can send to your MP, please contact the Public Affairs Department if you are interested in receiving the template.

## **3 Register your interest in taking part in research**

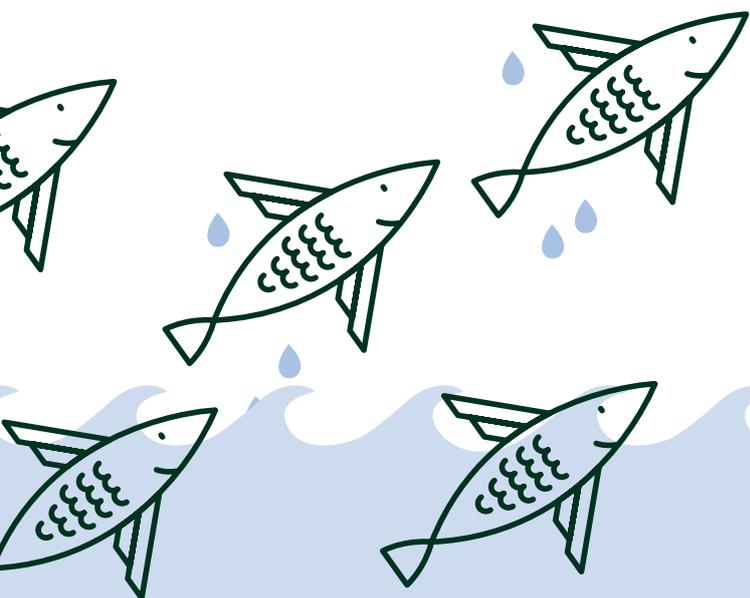
The NFWI is exploring opportunities for members to take part in research and testing to build the evidence base about the release of microplastic fibres through the washing process, and possible solutions. If you are interested in taking part please contact the Public Affairs Department.

## **4 Hold an End Plastic Soup awareness day**

We are encouraging federations and WIs to hold awareness days in their own communities to promote the campaign. This will encourage members and the public to think more about how they could change their own washing habits to play their part in tackling the problem, consider how clothing can be recycled and the need for action from industry and retailers. As part of the day you could:

- Hand out our checklist leaflet which highlights how you can change your washing habits to help release fewer microplastic fibres when washing at home. Please get in touch if you would like to receive copies of the leaflet.
- Share sewing skills to get the best use out of your clothing, by repairing tears and updating old items. You could also upcycle old clothing you no longer wear into something useful – like a carrier bag or cushion cover. There are lots of project ideas online, or you can find information on the Love Your Clothes website at: <http://www.loveyourclothes.org.uk/refashion-upcycle>
- Hold a quiz to test your knowledge about the issue and check your clothing labels to see what fabric you are wearing. More information on the next page.

Please let us know if you are planning to organise an End Plastic Soup awareness day so we can support you with the event and send you a template press release that can be sent to local media to further raise awareness of the issue. Remember to send in photographs of your event too!



# QUIZ:

## How much do you know about pollution from microplastic fibres?



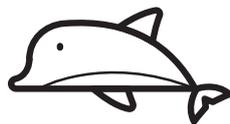
*The answers are at the bottom of the page.*

1. How many thousands of microplastic fibres are released from a load of polyester-cotton blend fabric when washed?
2. How many thousands of microplastic fibres are released from a load of polyester fabric when washed?
3. How many thousands of microplastic fibres are released from a load of acrylic fabric when washed?

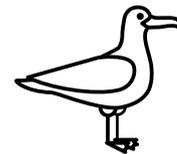
4. Which of these sea creatures have been found to have ingested microplastic fibres?  
*Tick all that you think are applicable.*



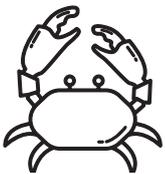

Fish




Dolphin



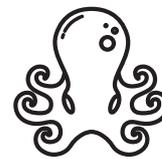

Birds




Crab




Shrimp




Octopus

5. What percentage of human-made materials that are found on the coastline are microplastic fibres?

After you have completed the quiz, you can take this activity further and check your clothing labels to see what fabric you are wearing.

4. Fish, crab, shrimp and birds have been recorded to ingest microfibres, the effects of these entering the food chain are not yet known.  
5. 85%

1. 137,951 fibres released from polyester-cotton blend  
2. 496,030 fibres released from polyester fabric  
3. 728,789 fibres released from acrylic fabric

# Change your own clothes purchasing and washing habits.

At a national level the NFWI will be pushing for action to tackle the problem of the release of microplastic fibres at source, but we can all make a difference by taking action at home.

## **Wash well**

The EU Mermaids Ocean Clean Wash research project has developed a range of actions that you can take to reduce the release of fibres from washing clothes.

### **Checklist:**

- Wash less – Only wash clothes when they need it. Items that are not worn close to the skin often do not need washing after just one wear. This will also prolong the life of your clothes.
- Fill up your washing machine to the max: washing a full load results in less friction between the clothes and, therefore, less fibres are released.
- Use washing liquid instead of powder: the 'scrub' function of the grains of the powder result in loosening the fibres of clothes more than with liquid.
- Wash at a low temperature: when clothes are washed at a high temperature some fabrics are damaged, leading to the release of fibres.
- When cleaning the dryer, do not flush the lint down the drain, throw it in the bin.
- Avoid long washing cycles: long periods of washing cause more friction between fabrics, which can result in more tearing of the fibres.
- Avoid using detergents with a high ph and oxidising agents

## **Wear well – shop smarter and buy less**

*Before buying a new item of clothing ask yourself these questions:*

- Do you love it? Be choosy, don't compromise for designs you don't really like just because they are in style.
- Does it fit well?
- Does it go with the rest of your wardrobe?
- Is it well made? Avoid clothes that do not look like they will wear and wash well.

This checklist is available as a leaflet for your awareness days, please contact the Public Affairs Department for copies.



## Contact us

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