**APPG on Microplastics Meeting Minutes
20.04.2021**

**Attendees**
Alberto Costa MP- Chair of the APPG on Microplastics
Harriet Main, Parliamentary Assistant to Alberto Costa MP
Fiona Thomas, Research and Campaigns Officer, NFWI, APPG Secretariat
Francis Thomas, AMDEA
Dr Laura Foster, Marine Conservation Society
Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow
Ian Moverley, Whirlpool Corporation
Andrew Mullen, Beko
Christian Cullinane, Xeros Technology PLC
Dr Howard Dryden, Clean Water Wave
Dr Diane Duncan, Clean Water Wave
Dr Stephanie Terreni Brown, Clean Water Wave
Adam Root, Matter
Tanya Reed, Matter
Kevin Considine, Samsung PLC
Professor Richard Thompson, University of Plymouth
Sophie Mather, The Microfibre Consortium
Dr Mark Taylor, University of Leeds
Professor Andrej Krzan, Planetcare
Henry Swithinbank, Surfers Against Sewage
Gianluca Cecchinato, Whirlpool PLC
Rachael Miller, Cora Ball/Rozalia Project
Jennifer Trittschuh, Fisher and Paykel
Nadiya Catel-Arutyunova, British Retail Consortium
Avril Sainsbury, Cleaner Seas Group
Ruth Jones MP
Selaine Saxby MP
Carol Monaghan MP

**Minutes**

The Chair of the APPG on Microplastics (Alberto Costa MP) welcomed all attendees to the meeting and outlined the subsequent steps Harriet Main, Parliamentary Assistant to Alberto Costa MP and Fiona Thomas, Research and Campaigns Officer at the NFWI and the APPG Secretariat took following the previous meeting on the APPG for Microplastics.

The Chair outlined that Harriet and the APPG Secretariat had drafted proposed recommendations for attending stakeholders of the APPG on Microplastics to review and provide feedback.
The Chair explained that the draft recommendations would be included in a report reviewed by the group, in anticipation of making a submission to Government before summer parliamentary recess in July 2021.

Harriet Main, Parliamentary Assistant to Alberto Costa MP, gave an overview of the draft recommendations. Harriet explained that she and the APPG Secretariat had put together these proposals following previous policy roundtables organised by the APPG on Microplastics; evidence and opinions submitted by stakeholders to the APPG Secretariat and Harriet; and further one-to-one meetings with additional stakeholders.

The Chair invited Harriet to introduce recommendation one.

Harriet Main explained the origins of the draft recommendation, and outlined that she and the APPG Secretariat sought the feedback of the attending stakeholders as to the feasibility of implementing washing machine microplastic fibre filters within washing machines by 2030, or whether the proposed date should be amended.

Francis Thomas, AMDEA, outlined the AMDEA’s concerns on the feasibility of retrofitting microplastic fibre filters into washing machines by 2035. Francis explained that as manufacturers of washing machines have moved their business models strongly towards providing more durable, long-living appliances, it would not be unfeasible for an appliance to go on the market today and for it to still be functioning in 2035. Francis outlined that as appliance manufacturers would need to comply with legislation by the 2035 date, they would need to have knowledge of the standards, regulations, and technical specifications of the filter. Francis outlined that this is likely not to be feasible.

Dr Laura Foster, Marine Conservation Society, outlined that the Marine Conservation Society were disappointed to see that the draft proposal mandates for washing machine filters in new washing machines by 2030. Laura outlined that this would effectively amount to an extra five years of microplastic fibres released into the environment when the technology exists now to help to remedy the problem. Laura also outlined that legislation by 2025 would mean that the UK is in line with European markets, which global manufacturers of domestic appliances and washing machine products would already need to comply with.
Laura outlined that on the issue of retrofitting is a huge one, and outlined that the Marine Conservation Society have stated that they would like to see retrofitting on commercial washing machines due to their long lifespans.

Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow, outlined her concerns with the proposed retrofitting legislation due to the extent of monitoring and policing of retrofitting washing machine filters. Natalie expressed her doubts that the capacity to do this would not be there from DEFRA or the Environment Agency. Natalie suggested that it might be more expedient to push voluntary uptake of washing machine filters in domestic washing machines and within commercial washing machines.

Ian Moverley, Whirlpool, outlined that over 90% of UK homes own a washing machine, roughly equating to 25 million machines. Ian echoed Natalie’s concerns, and also outlined his concerns around getting filters to homes, who would be responsible for fitting the filters, and the health and safety risks of the consumer fitting washing machine filters themselves.

 Andrew Mullen, Beko, agreed that retrofitting washing machines would be very challenging. Andrew outlined that manufacturers believe that the 2025 aspiration in French legislation for washing machine filters within new washing machines is necessarily achievable. Andrew outlined that external filters are already available on the market, and these could be used for retrofitting filters onto washing machines and could be done without, or separate from, the washing machine manufacturers themselves.

Christian Cullinane, Xeros Technology PLC, outlined that he was impressed with the ground covered in the draft policy recommendations. Christian outlined that mandating washing machine filters in domestic and commercial washing machines would be a positive step, but the proposed date of 2030 should be brought forward to 2025, in line with European markets. Christian outlined that there are already products coming to market with washing machine filters installed, including Beko, suggesting that 2025 was a feasible target.

Howard Dryden, Marine Biologist, outlined that microplastics are very damaging and toxic to phytoplankton and zooplankton, and we have lost more than 50% of all of the life in the ocean, partially due to microplastics. Howard outlined that none of the effluent treatment systems are fitted with tertiary treatment to remove microplastics. Howard suggested that a ‘quick hit’ to helping to deal with the microplastic problem would be to have tertiary filtration systems.

Tanya Reed, Matter, echoed the points of Christian and outlined that as European markets will already be working towards a 2025 deadline of filtration, the timings for a UK 2025 date would be feasible.

Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow, asked if it was feasible, within the proposed legislation, to put in a mandate that any washing machine that is sold that does not have an internal filter must be sold with an external alternative in order to promote partnerships between existing design alternatives and global domestic appliance manufacturers. These could shorten the period of time needed to wait for this to be implemented.

Kevin Considine, Samsung, echoed Andrew and Ian’s concerns around retrofitting. Kevin outlined that he thought the focus of this recommendation was slightly wrong, and the recommendation should be focussed on making the polluter pay for that technology and the innovation in technology. Kevin outlined that a recommendation to add filtration units on washing machines only solves part of the problem.

Professor Richard Thompson, University of Plymouth, summarised that whilst all stakeholders seem to be in agreement that washing machine filters make sense, but all are questioning the degree to which they make sense. Richard outlined that as the source of microplastic fibre emissions is actually the design of the textiles in the first place. Richard outlined that as not everybody has the benefit of wastewater treatment plants, nor have the benefit of washing machines, ultimately the solution is best solved by moving to source. Richard urged stakeholders to think about a number of measures proceeding in parallel, rather than pitting solutions against each other.

The Chair summarised that all stakeholders believe that something needs to be done to help to reduce microplastic fibre emissions from washing machines, and washing machine filters would be part of this solution, built up in aggregate.

The Chair proposed that recommendation one should go forward, with the date of implementation for filters into new washing machines brought forward to 2025, and used as a tool to encourage the Government to have further discussions with on how to refine and implement this recommendation.

This was agreed.

Harriet Main outlined recommendation two, which would be to implement an extended producer responsibility scheme for textiles by 2025, and invited the group’s feedback on the draft recommendation.

Sophie Mather, Executive Director of The Microfibre Consortium, asked for an outline on how an EPR scheme for microplastic fibres would work. Sophie outlined that whilst this would fall into the same area as plastic and plastic packaging, the scale of what the scheme would assess would be a very different thing, and may not be feasible.

Kevin Considine, Samsung, outlined his support for extended producer responsibility, but echoed that if EPR is to be introduced, the APPG on Microplastics needs to be clear on what we would be asking the polluter to pay for?

Ian Moverley, Whirlpool, echoed Kevin’s point, and asked further questions on what we are asking the polluter to pay for, how to measure what the polluter is paying for, and the overview of the scheme.

Adam Root, Matter, outlined that he felt that there was a real opportunity to set up a textiles recycling element in order to effectively capture microplastic. Adam emphasised that this would need research, development and funding to create this waste stream, and in order to add value to microplastic. Adam outlined that he thought that this would encourage clothing manufacturers to consider further about what material they are producing with at the design phase. Adam outlined that there may be need to consider what constitutes microplastic and how the EPR scheme would work.

Dr Laura Foster, Marine Conservation Society, outlined that the APPG on Microplastics needed to be clear on the scope of an EPR scheme. Laura asked whether the APPG on Microplastics would be advocating around the concept of textiles and fashion, which would constitute further recycling bins for textiles. Laura outlined that the APPG on Microplastics was discussing this further in relation to microfibres and microfibre capture, so would be look slightly different in scope.
Laura discussed that should there be further reuse of clothes, there would be fewer microfibres as we understand that the first couple of washes are particularly detrimental to the amount of microfibres that are released. Laura referred the APPG on Microplastics members to the EU’s Single- Use Plastic Directive, which in addition to collection measures, discusses consumer awareness campaigns, clean-up costs, and the costs of recycling. Laura outlined that she felt that this would help to lead a further look for microfibre standards and shedding.

Adam Root, Matter, summarised that an EPR scheme would be to do with the clarity of responsibility- all stakeholders were pro the polluter paying, but it was how to effectively generate a solution.

Harriet Main outlined that the draft recommendations were discussed to be broad in order to set the direction of the draft policy report, and that she and the APPG Secretariat were happy to take thoughts and suggestions on what an EPR scheme would look like to incorporate into the next draft of recommendations.

The Chair summarised the discussion that recommendation two needed further research and work ahead of the next APPG on Microplastics, and asked stakeholders to submit responses on what an EPR scheme for textiles and microfibres could look like.

Harriet Main introduced draft recommendation 3, which focused on eco-labelling to indicate a presence of a microplastic fibre filter within a washing machine.

Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow, outlined that she would support increased transparency for the consumer. Natalie outlined that long-term, an eco-label to indicate the efficacy of different microfibre filters and different models of filter. Natalie suggested that this could be colour coded, or RAG- rated (red, amber, green)

Adam Root, Matter cited his previous experience and background as an engineer and on Energy Rating Performance labelling. Adam indicated that he was a strong advocate of putting in a standard that is really ambitious for manufacturers to be held to. Adam indicated that a label would be very simple to do from a practical point of view.

Tanya Reed, Matter, echoed Natalie and Adam’s comments, outlining that any filter would need to be able to state the efficacy of the product, but she agreed with eco-labelling in principle.

Francis Thomas, AMDEA, outlined that it might be problematic to tie proposed labelling onto existing energy labelling. Francis explained that a recent non-binding opinion in the EU Commission stated that an energy label with an EU flag could not be supplied in the same box energy label with the UK flag. Francis outlined that a legal opinion obtained by APPLiA stated that is incorrect and as long as there’s no consumer confusion by the two labels, they can both go in the same box. Francis outlined that should the labels vary, this could generate issues at the Northern Ireland border with machines with the UK flag not being permitted to go into Northern Ireland.

Christian Cullinane, Xeros Technology PLC, outlined that Xeros are very supportive of telling consumers about the presence of a filter and its efficacy. Christian outlined that Xeros feelt that sharing the percentage capture rate is an important factor to indicate that this would make a positive difference for the environment. Christian outlined that in order to be mindful of the concerns flagged by Francis, any labelling needs to be very clear and informative to the consumer.

Professor Andrej Krzan, Planetcare, outlined that he felt that the minimum requirement for a filtration system should be included in accompanying regulations. This would then have to be achieved by all producers. Andrej outlined that there could be a label on textiles regarding the shedding level of textiles. Andrej echoed the considerations expressed in the EPR discussion, and questioned what the main goal of the funds collected from Extended Producer Responsibility would be. Andrej suggested that funds collected from EPR schemes would be better focused on emissions reduction rather than recycling.

Andrew Mullen, Beko, outlined that evidence seen by manufacturers indicates that consumers don’t look at labels, especially since the vast majority of appliances have been purchased online.

Dr Mark Taylor, University of Leeds, asked that as tumble dryers directly emit airborne fibres into the environment, whether there was a reason why the APPG on Microplastics had not included recommendations that would address these microplastic fibres being emitted into the environment.

The Chair outlined that the APPG on Microplastics needed a focus for this enquiry in order for the finalised report to be read and digested by Government. The Chair asked all stakeholders to help shape the policy recommendations by submitting responses to the APPG Secretariat should there be anything they would like to influence.

Christian Cullinane, Xeros Technology PLC, outlined that there have been studies indicating that 80% of European consumers trust the labelling on their washing machines, and that manufacturers have been putting energy efficiency ratings onto their washing machines for years.

The Chair summarised that the majority of stakeholders feel that looking at a more substantive recommendation on how we deal with microplastic fibres is more important than labelling at this stage and whilst the report should mention labelling, it should not be a recommendation in of itself.

Harriet Main gave an overview of recommendation four, asking for an environmental quality standard for plastics.

Ian Moverley, Whirlpool, stated that it would be helpful for the group to decide on a standard of the definition of a microplastic and then decide the disposal for it.

Tanya Reed, Matter, outlined that Matter were fundamentally in agreement with having some standards, but Matter felt that they should be not just limited to water, but also to do with airborne microplastics too. Tanya outlined that this would need an approach for domestic, industrial and commercial microplastic fibres.

The Chair outlined that this could be discussed further in the body of the report.

Dr Laura Foster, Marine Conservation Society, outlined that currently under EQS, the Environment Agency doesn’t do any routine monitoring on microplastic. Ahead of getting to setting limits, Laura outlined that there needed to be baseline/initial monitoring to understand some of the route sources of where microplastics come from. Laura stated that this would be an important first step.

Henry Swithinbank, Surfers Against Sewage, outlined that the Environment Agency are already limited in time, funding and resources, and for the APPG on Microplastics to bear this in mind before the Environment Agency are asked to take on further responsibilities.

Gianluca Cecchinato, Whirlpool PLC, outlined that he thought that the key point was to have a common global washing machine filtration system.

Professor Richard Thompson, University of Plymouth, urged for recommendation four to capture everything and in terms of reducing emissions from sources, particularly yarns in textiles.

Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow, outlined that she thought using the word microfibre rather than fibre is potentially creating an artificial point of contention. Natalie outlined that she thought there was a lot of work that the APPG on Microplastics could do by looking at the issue of textile fibre release as a whole. Natalie outlined that there was a long way to go before we know exactly on what level is a baseline standard for microplastic fibre emissions into the environment. Natalie suggested that one of the best ways to monitor how successful some of these measures are is by looking at the end of pipe assessment of what is coming through the pipe, and is about pairing up these quality standards with what is trying to be measured. Natalie outlined that there were lots of avenues to go on this, and the recommendation could be split up.

The Chair summarised the discussion on recommendation 4, outlining that most stakeholders clearly feel that there is a need to have a set of standards, but what these standards are and which body should be to monitor the standards is yet to be agreed. The Chair stated that there needed to be a starter for 10 for Government to pick up to have conversations with other relevant stakeholders on this issue, but it may not be the case that the Environment Agency would be the ultimate body to oversee this monitoring.

Harriet Main introduced recommendation five, asking for feedback from stakeholders on whether there would be scope for a waste stream for the collection of microplastic fibres.

Professor Richard Thompson, University of Plymouth, outlined that there are inappropriate ways of disposing of microfibres, especially letting them flow into waste water. Richard outlined that some guidance on this would be helpful. Richard asked whether there was a better way to group/structure the policy recommendations in order to make the overarching aspirations of the group clear.

Kevin Considine, Samsung PLC, explained that within existing WEEE regulations, there is a requirement for producers to provide information to users. This ensures that when consumers buy an electronic device in person or online, there will be information on how you could correctly dispose of this device. Kevin suggested that new standards wouldn’t be needed, it would just be a requirement under the WEEE regulations that information is provided to consumers in whatever format is seen as feasible and productive.

Tanya Reed, Matter, outlined the aspiration of a fully circular economy and the opportunity to put some systems in place and paid for those producer responsibility schemes.

Francis Thomas, AMDEA, outlined that standards documents produced by the National Standards Body in the UK are chargeable. Francis outlined that any information that consumers need to access needs to be free of charge.

Dr Mark Taylor, University of Leeds, outlined that the standards that come out of BSI, there is a requirement in the standard for what marking and labelling must go on a product. Mark outlined that these standards would need to be on any washing machine microfibre filters.

Sophie Mather, The Microfibre Consortium, outlined that they would love to see more funds coming to manufacturing and the design level. Sophie highlighted that work at the design stage is feasible, but the Government needs to provide further funding on this. Sophie highlighted the work of The Microfibre Consortium with minimal funds, and outlined that work could be accelerated in this space with further money. Sophie outlined that putting the responsibility back to the supplier to generate funds is not going to necessarily work because they’re already pulled in lots of different directions.

The Chair summarised the discussion on recommendation five, outlining that more work needed to be done to clarify the details of the recommendation.

Harriet Main gave an overview of recommendation six and seven; appointment of a Minister for Plastics; and consumer education on microplastics.

Adam Root, Matter, outlined that a Minister for Plastics would be too narrow in scope and instead would support a Minister for Pollution, should this be a position with real teeth and power of implementation. Adam outlined the work of NGOs in this space, flagging the work of Common Seas and the Marine Conservation Society. Adam outlined that to solve the problem of microplastic pollution properly, there needs to be focus on research and development and educational programmes.

Kevin Considine, Samsung PLC, outlined that currently producers are funding communication campaigns to all sections of society through the WEEE regulations. Kevin suggested that this would be a better focus than education through schools due to the capacity of school teachers. Kevin outlined that the WEEE regulations and the UK WEEE system currently gives a framework for which there could be a communications strategy for educating consumers about plastic. Kevin outlined that education through the WEEE regulations would be funded by an extended producer responsibility scheme based on who the polluter is.

Sophie Mather, The Microfibre Consortium, agreed that a Minister of Pollution would be a better fit than Minister of Plastics as microplastic pollution is a cross-cutting problem that goes across all fibre types. Sophie agreed that there was a need for education on microplastic pollution to be right across the supply chain. Sophie outlined the work of The Microfibre Consortium to facilitate the development of a cross-industry roadmap on this topic, and education would be a part of the road map. Sophie outlined The Microfibre Consortium’s belief that if manufacturers can be educated about fibre fragmentation from the raw material all the way through to garment as well as the design communities at the brand and retail level with an aligned approach, this would be very necessary and welcome.

Christian Cullinane, Xeros Technology PLC, outlined that a focus on pollution would be a better fit rather than a Minister of Plastics. Christian supported the reflections on the need to have cross-organisational education on microplastics. Christian outlined that due to the limited engaging/emotive natural visuals of microplastic fibre pollution, education is vital to raise awareness of microplastic pollution. Christian outlined the role of legislation to raise awareness of microplastic fibre pollution.

The Chair outlined that it would be politically easier to say to the Prime Minister to have a Minister for Plastics than a Minister of Pollution, due to the public awareness of plastics and the ongoing need for further amounts of plastic in future.

Dr Natalie Welden, University of Glasgow, outlined the need for education on microplastics in schools to be curriculum linked. Natalie referred to the Scottish ‘curriculum for excellence’, and discussed the need to create teacher packs which remove the need for teachers to do all the research and groundwork into the topic. Natalie outlined that this would make it easier for teachers to put this into their teaching schedules at applicable points. Natalie outlined that as there is plenty of expertise within the university sector from citizen science projects, and the NGO sector, this is an idea that could be worked on immediately.

Harriet Main, Parliamentary Assistant to Alberto Costa MP, outlined that a curriculum-linked focus on microplastics education was an approach that the APPG Secretariat and Harriet had researched and would support.

Henry Swithinbank, Surfers Against Sewage, outlined that a link to plastics education and on climate change would be really effective. Henry reflected on whether or not there would be the appetite within Government/Members of Parliament to become the Minister of Pollution. Henry suggested a step down from this would be to ask for an overarching policy on plastic pollution with the aim to reduce all forms of plastic pollution.

The Chair reflected that Nadhim Zahawi MP volunteered to be the unpaid COVID-19 Vaccines Minister for the UK, which is a huge logistical undertaking. The Chair felt there would be 1-2 volunteers able to take on the role of an issue that we understand is a major environmental problem.

Professor Richard Thompson, University of Plymouth, outlined that the way that the world has designed, used and disposed of plastics has crept up on us as a problem. Richard outlined that there is a need to find a way to reflect on this, and try and use it as a guide to make better use of our planet. Richard outlined that there are plenty of environmental science evidence about the issue, but little evidence about the solutions and the trade offs between solutions, and which solution to apply best in which circumstances. Richard outlined that he felt that we needed more evidence on the solutions to this before a Minister of Plastics/Pollution is implemented.
Richard outlined his views on education, and stated that both education across all sectors and a public awareness communications campaign was needed to raise awareness of microplastic fibre pollution. Richard reflected that the circular system needed for thorough plastics recycling isn’t currently available, and a widespread public education campaign would guide people towards a slightly broken system. Richard felt that instead, the UK is ready for wider scale education about the issues, and this needs to be done across the supply chain, working together with producers and consumers.

The Chair gave this concluding summary of the discussion, outlining the APPG’s proposed next steps.
The Chair praised the wide cross-section of stakeholders taking part in the discussions, but outlined that a wide diversity of opinion could lead to a lack of direction for the APPG group. The Chair asked the stakeholders that, where they can, to coalesce around agreement in a report.

The Chair stated that Harriet Main and the APPG Secretariat would be in the process of redrafting the recommendations and producing a first draft of a policy report by the end of May. This would be circulated to stakeholders ahead of an APPG meeting in June, and then presented to Government/Parliament through debates and parliamentary questions from September 2021.

Adam Root, Matter, offered his and his organisation’s help with the report.

Professor Andrej Krzan, Planetcare, thanked the Chair for his drive and ambition in pushing the work of the APPG on Microplastics forward.

The Chair thanked all participants and closed the meeting.