

We simply cannot be trusted with plastic, so for the sake of our seas could we take away the choice?



Image from GreatBritishOceans.org

Campaigners want Blue Belt protection for huge marine areas controlled by Britain. But what about the plastic?

IT has been exciting to see [#BackTheBlueBelt](#) trending on social media, with new interest piqued by the [#BluePlanet2](#) series lending deserved promotion to a campaign to secure conservation protection for large parts of our abused, over-fished and littered oceans.

But why, in 2017, do I still find myself questioning how little we have done and are doing to tackle our hideous plastic problem, with such a vast amount of it mounting up in the sea? We cannot be trusted with plastic any more than children can be trusted with tidying up after themselves. Maybe even less so.

The UK still has a heavy dependence on being able to dump our waste on other countries. This lazy arrangement is about to come back and plague us because, from January, China (which puts more plastic in the sea than any other nation) will begin to turn away Britain's rubbish, and other nations may well follow:

https://amp.theguardian.com/environment/2017/dec/07/chinese-ban-on-plastic-waste-imports-could-see-uk-pollution-rise?_twitter_impression=true

And why, as a first world country, do we suffer from an apparent inability to stop the source of all our plastic?

We can all declare a few recycling credentials, for 'doing our bit'. Yet these little actions are still merely a choice. They shouldn't be.

CHOICES

Why do we not, at the very least, tax unsustainable behaviours and shopping decisions more heavily, to reflect their true environmental cost and make unfavourable options much more expensive? This could subsidise and foster better choices into becoming mainstream.

We could go further and ban some of the many luxury, non-perishable materials designed into non-sustainable purchases, where wiser alternatives exist, or are known to be viable.

If the UK government will not go far enough, then perhaps the answer lies at grass roots level, by petitioning local authorities to introduce bye-laws?

Plastic bans and higher tax may not work for everything, but think about all the single-use or disposable items we could reduce or delete from the aisles this way.

Research shows that most of us who claim to care about the environment still cause as much damage to the planet as those who don't, because of our first world lifestyles. Good will is never going to be enough. We need to have radical solutions imposed on us, as shoppers, traders, manufacturers and farmers.

As long as profit and purchasing power reign over individual choice, rather than policy or law, someone less green will always undermine the sustainable option. They will bag more sales, bigger profits and increased shelf space, forcing other farmers and manufacturers to follow the lowest common denominator trap, just to survive.

Imagine if certain single-use products (eg straws, plastic wrapping, plastic bottles) were either removed as an option or taxed so heavily that the better alternatives then became compellingly attractive to the majority, not the other way around.

ZERO WASTE

Someone has created a list of zero waste shops around the world, (<http://bepakt.com>) but they are too expensive to catch on at the scale needed, perhaps for this very reason.

Now imagine if each city created a zero-waste & sustainable shopping quarter, perhaps featuring heavily subsidised rents, cheap rates and tax discounts for traders, farmers and customers, fuelled by 100% green energy, and backed by bye-laws that supported a better future.

The big tax discounts these green quarters could enjoy would reflect the elimination of waste disposal costs, a zero or near-zero plastic burden, a calculated carbon cost, etc... and be subsidised by the tax on the bad guys.

Yes, imagine that!

* More information on the Back The Blue Belt campaign, led by a consortium of conservation bodies, is available here: <https://greatbritishoceans.org/home/>

The UK and its Overseas Territories at the heart of this campaign comprise the fifth largest marine area in the world, with the biggest coral atoll on earth, globally significant populations of albatross, whales and turtles, and about one quarter of the planet's penguins. Our seas suffer an extra 6.4million tonnes of plastic being dumped in them every year.

Alex Morss

December 2017

info@alexmorss.co.uk

www.alexmorss.co.uk