

# MEMORANDUM FROM THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL IN RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO WASTE MANAGEMENT IN ENGLAND

## Introduction

1. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is one of the UK's seven Research Councils. It funds and carries out impartial scientific research in the sciences of the environment and trains the next generation of independent environmental scientists. Details of NERC's research centres, marine delivery partners and research programmes are available at [www.nerc.ac.uk](http://www.nerc.ac.uk).
2. This response is based on input from NERC's National Oceanography Centre (NOC).

### Introduction

3. With the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) stepping back from some of its Waste Management duties, it is important to ensure that links between waste management policies remain coherent and that both marine policies such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Waste Management work both together and alongside research programmes such as JPI-Oceans to reduce terrestrial waste entering the Marine environment.

### Question 1: Comment on the ability of existing recycling policy measures to ensure that England reaches the EU target of recycling 50% of household waste by 2020

4. No comment.

### Question 2: Comment on whether England's national recycling targets should be higher than those stipulated by the EU; and the pros and cons of compulsory household waste recycling

5. No comment.

### Question 3: Comment on the role of businesses and households in municipal waste recycling and recovery

6. No comment.

### Question 4: Comment on whether England has the right balance of waste treatment technologies between anaerobic digestion, incineration with energy recovery and gasification to produce fuel/heat/power

7. No comment.

### Question 5: Comment on the extent to which increasing the capacity of thermal treatment plants could impact England's municipal waste recycling rates

8. No comment.

### Question 6: Comment on whether anaerobic digestion is the best option available to deal with food and other biowaste

9. No comment.

**Question 7: Comment on whether the Government's Anaerobic Digestion Strategy and Action Plan has substantially increased the use of AD**

10. No comment.

**Question 8: Comment on the feasibility of the introduction of a ban on landfill and/or incineration in England**

11. No comment.

**Supporting comments and information**

12. Within DEFRA's Waste Management Plan for England<sup>1</sup> which was referred to on the Parliamentary inquiry pages<sup>2</sup> as related information, there is a section on Marine Waste Arrangements. Within this Marine Waste Arrangements section there is no mention of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)<sup>3</sup>.
13. The MSFD aims to achieve Good Environmental Status in UK waters by setting targets for a range of descriptors, one of which includes Marine Litter (Descriptor 10). Marine litter is a difficult descriptor to fully quantify as not all beaches are assessed for litter and there are indirect costs to marine litter, including economic ones from loss of tourism and damage to ecosystems. The MSFD Part One sets out for Descriptor 10, that plastics are the main source of marine litter both on beaches and in the seas and that land based sources of litter contribute up to 80% of all litter reaching the marine environment.
14. The MSFD is a European Directive with countries across the whole of Europe adopting the policy at national level. The MSFD encourages strong cooperation at regional level (e.g. through OSPAR in the case of the UK) and as such when dealing with monitoring measures and developing mechanisms to achieve Good Environmental Status in the marine environment countries must work together. In the case of Marine Litter (Descriptor 10) such transnational cooperation is important because litter in the marine environment does not stay confined to national waters.
15. Actions within the research community are already underway to improve international cooperation and coordination of work into the effects and ecological impacts of marine litter. For example, the Joint Programming Initiative for oceans (JPI-Oceans)<sup>4</sup> have a pilot action on the Ecological aspects of microplastics and improving methodologies for extraction of microplastics in the marine environment<sup>5</sup>.
16. Consequently, with DEFRA stepping back in its handling of some waste management issues due to cost saving measures and handing over to private industry, the following points need to be considered:
- Ensure that there is an awareness of the interlinking policies and plans that DEFRA is responsible for, including the Waste Management Directive, the Waste Management Plan for England and the MSDF.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/265810/pb14100-waste-management-plan-20131213.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/265810/pb14100-waste-management-plan-20131213.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/waste-management-in-england/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/waste-management-in-england/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/marine-strategy-framework-directive-measuring-progress-in-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/marine-strategy-framework-directive-measuring-progress-in-uk)

<sup>4</sup> [www.jpi-oceans.eu/prognett-jpi-oceans/Home\\_page/1253960389368](http://www.jpi-oceans.eu/prognett-jpi-oceans/Home_page/1253960389368)

<sup>5</sup> [www.jpi-oceans.eu/prognett-jpi-oceans/Ecological\\_aspects\\_of\\_microplastics/1253990736873](http://www.jpi-oceans.eu/prognett-jpi-oceans/Ecological_aspects_of_microplastics/1253990736873)

- Ensure that the companies that DEFRA is passing responsibility to are informed of the marine policies, e.g. the MSFD and the Coastal Access Act that waste management decisions may impact upon.
- Ensure that someone is championing the links between the different policies to ensure that joined up and coherent actions are taken to mitigate waste from land reaching the marine environment.
- Ensure that the industrial / business partners dealing with the waste management issues in England, as directed by DEFRA, take note of any European level work. It is this research that will help to inform the future policies for waste management coming down from Europe to a national level.
- Ensure that the work being contracted out of DEFRA to industry ensures that it complies with both national and EU policies and is in line, where appropriate, with the best practices from other European nations.
- Ensure that the link between industry and research at national and international level is sustained in the face of DEFRA's reduced responsibilities into waste management in England.