



# HM Government of Gibraltar

---

Ministry of Education, Heritage,  
Environment, Energy and  
Climate Change

## PRESS RELEASE

No: 628/2017

Date: 23rd October 2017

---

### **Reducing Plastic Use**

HM Government of Gibraltar has joined forces with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the business community in a major initiative to reduce the use of plastic in Gibraltar.

The Department of the Environment and Climate Change, with the NGOs the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), the Nautilus Project and Environmental Safety Group (ESG) are joined in this initiative by a growing number of businesses.

Morrison's, Eroski and M&S have all agreed to substantially reduce the use of plastic bags and to do away with all single use plastic bags. Responding to work by the Nautilus Project, other retailers and other businesses have now stopped using plastic bags altogether. These are All Wrapped up, Gache Opticians, Gibraltar Arts and Crafts, Hearts Boutique, Purple Rain, Holland and Barrett, In Motion, NaturHouse, Newton Store, Pashmina, Riviera Maison, SM Seruya, Sonic Electronics, The Clipper, The Gibraltar Museum, The Health Store, Venice Perfumery, Tommy Hilfiger, Tommy Hilfiger Kids, SFA Homes, The Paint Shop, Trends and Bianca's.

Plastic is now well recognised as being a major environmental hazard. Not only is it a major constituent of litter both on land and in the sea, even in the remotest islands in all the oceans, but plastic is also known to cause the death of marine life including seabirds, turtles, whales and dolphins. Microfilaments, and microbeads of plastic are also a problem as they enter the food chain and it is likely to have an effect on human health.

The Government is encouraging the reduction of the use of plastic, having this year increased duty to 10p per bag. It will continue to do so actively and calls on consumers and businesses to respond actively.

At the press call, the NGOs and the Department of the Environment and Climate Change delivered awareness raising presentations and some of the businesses explained what they are doing to decrease the use of plastic.

Ministry of Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change

HM Government of Gibraltar • Duke of Kent House, Cathedral Square • Gibraltar GX11 1AA

t +350 20066491 (Centrex 4936) f +350 20066706 e mhe@gibraltar.gov.gi w gibraltar.gov.gi



Minister for the Environment and Climate Change John Cortes also announced that the Government will very shortly be legislating to ban the importation of products containing microbeads.

He stated, "I am incredibly excited in seeing how the Government, Business and NGOs have all recognised the importance of preventing plastic from getting into the environment and how we can all work together. This is something that is very real and relevant to Gibraltar given that we are virtually surrounded by sea that is rich in wildlife. This means that each and every plastic bag that gets into the sea could directly affect the wildlife around us. Our actions can and will make a difference, and I call on all businesses to join this movement and get rid of plastic."

### **Further information: The Dangers of Plastic**

Plastic Bags, first introduced in the 1970s, were designed to be disposable, single-use items that after their short-term convenience could be disposed of as solid waste along with food waste and any other household items. They are designed to be durable in order to allow for the carrying of heavy items. The downside of their design, in being made from plastic and especially the chemical bonds which make it so strong, is that these same bonds make them resistant to the natural process of degradation.

Considered as a symbol of consumerism, it is estimated that between 500 billion and one trillion plastic bags are used worldwide each year. Whilst a fair number end up in landfill sites, many more end up littering both our terrestrial and marine environments.

It is important to remember, that both our terrestrial and marine environments are not exclusively for our use. We share these spaces with a multitude of natural wildlife. Experts estimate that up to a million birds and 100,000 other marine fauna are killed each year as a result of plastic debris including plastic bags.

Leatherback, Green and Loggerhead turtles are found in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Leatherback turtles have seen their population numbers drop by 95%, partly due to plastic ingestion. Plastic bags appear to turtles as jellyfish, their staple diet, and being unable to distinguish between plastic bags and jellyfish, will consume these. The plastic blocks their digestive system and leads to their death from starvation. Currently all three species of turtles found in the Mediterranean are endangered. If plastic bag pollution continues, these species could very likely become extinct.

Several species of whales especially Baleen Whales such as the Fin whale (the second largest animal in the world) are filter feeders and inevitably ingest pieces of plastic as they feed on Krill. These whales are also being affected in great numbers due to the level of plastic present in our oceans.

In addition to the immediate effects of plastic bags and other plastic items on our wildlife, as plastic breaks down into smaller pieces this results in 'microplastics'. This then becomes easier for fish and



other marine life to digest, resulting in the introduction of plastics into the food chain and bio accumulating through this, with humans being the ultimate consumers.

Whilst emphasis is given to the effects of plastic on the natural environment and its wildlife, it must also be remembered that in encouraging the continued use of plastic bags and other plastic items we are also causing great harm to ourselves and our children even though the effects are not currently as obvious as those now seen to our wildlife.