

The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing as a coalition of concerned parliamentarians and NGOs to draw your attention to the Microplastic Filters (Washing Machines) Bill, tabled by Alberto Costa MP on Tuesday, 29 October 2024, under the Ten Minute Rule. This Bill proposes a vital step in combating microplastic pollution by mandating the installation of microplastic filters in all new washing machines. We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you ahead of the Bill's second reading on 7th March 2025, to discuss its critical importance.

The APPG on Microplastics appreciated the opportunity to meet with your predecessor, George Eustice, during his tenure as Secretary of State. That meeting underscored the importance of collaborative efforts between government, industry, and the wider public in tackling microplastic pollution. Since then, significant progress has been made, including: an expectation on industry to develop filters in the previous government's Plan for Water, a Rapid Evidence Assessment, and broader policy discussions. These efforts have established a solid foundation for further action, but decisive legislative steps are essential to address this growing environmental crisis.

Microplastic fibres, shed from synthetic textiles during washing, infiltrate aquatic ecosystems, harm biodiversity, and ultimately enter the human food chain. While the fibres are largely captured at wastewater treatment plants, they will find their way back to nature through the use of biosolids used as fertilisers. The prevalence of untreated sewage spills further exacerbates the issue by reintroducing microplastics into the environment. The under-researched but alarming health implications of microplastics—including their adsorption of toxins and harmful chemicals like PFAS—demand immediate and decisive action.

In 2021, the APPG on Microplastics published the Microplastic Policies for Government report, setting out a mixture of six short, medium, and long-term solutions to reduce

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microplastic fibre leakage into the environment. The report included contributions from global washing machine companies, washing machine filter manufacturers, domestic appliance trade associations, clothing consortiums, and environmental groups.

A key ask from the report and subsequent collective advocacy has been the inclusion of microplastic fibre capture filters in all new washing machines. This technology is readily available and has already proven effective in reducing microplastic emissions at the source. However, for such solutions to be widely adopted, legislation is essential.

We understand that cost to the consumer is an important consideration, but research indicates that mandating filters would result in only a minimal price increase for washing machines. Moreover, introducing a technical standard for microplastic filtration—supported by the UK government—would create a level playing field for manufacturers and drive innovation. Such a standard would ensure consistent performance across products, reduce implementation costs, and encourage widespread adoption. This systems-wide approach aligns with the government’s broader environmental goals and public commitments to tackling pollution.

As you are aware, members of the Women’s Institute (WI) and other concerned citizens have long been vocal about the environmental and human health risks posed by microplastic pollution. In 2017, WI members overwhelmingly voted to raise the alarm of microplastic pollution and have since then worked tirelessly to call for change, develop research and promote better washing practices to minimise microfibre release. Since 2020, the WI has served as the secretariat to the APPG on Microplastics, raising awareness of the issue in Parliament and working with stakeholders to develop concrete policy solutions.

We are very keen to support you and DEFRA toward our shared interest to protect human health and look forward to progressing this area of work together.

We look forward to hearing from you to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,