



Summary

As global consumption continues to increase, there is more pressure than ever on the earth's decreasing resources. However, there are growing inequalities in the world with European citizens consuming far more than our fair share of resources. That's why we urgently need to transform the way we consume and manage resources in Scotland.

Consumer Scotland has a vital role in achieving the goals shared across Parliament of reducing overconsumption, meeting our environment and climate targets, and supporting consumers to access less environmentally damaging choices.

Friends of the Earth Scotland encourages members of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee to **support amendment 22**, which gives Consumer Scotland a mandate to promote a reduction in the consumption of natural resources.

The need to reduce waste

As well as putting pressure on earth's decreasing resources, our increasing consumption is having a devastating impact on countries in the global south.

We currently consume as if we had three planets available to produce the resources we use and absorb the waste we create. It's clear that something needs to change.

Scotland's material consumption accounts for 68% to 74% of our entire carbon footprint, meaning that reducing the amount of resource we use will contribute significantly to efforts to tackle the climate emergency. It's estimated that a more circular economy, with less resource consumption, would save Scotland 11 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 – a quarter of our current total.¹

From the millions of tonnes of plastic waste that is exported to South East Asia each year, to the mining of lithium for batteries from the Congo to power our smartphones and laptops - reducing consumption of natural resources

would also reduce the burden we place on people in other countries by keeping materials circulating in our economy for longer. It would also reduce the amount of waste that litters our streets and countryside, pollutes our waters and injures our wildlife.

Reducing the way we consume resources, and in turn the way we make products, brings economic opportunities and innovation to both existing businesses and new start-up companies.

Problem with Plastic

Plastic is a particular problem, polluting at every stage of its lifecycle, from when the oil and gas is extracted to produce it, to what happens to it when it reaches the end of its life, as it litters our streets, pollutes our beaches and directly harms birds and wildlife. It's a symbol of the throwaway culture in our current linear economy, as well as being a major contributor to climate change. The more plastic we produce and consume, the more greenhouse gas emissions we release to the atmosphere.

¹<https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/CarbonImpactsOfTheCircularEconomy>

From 1988 to 2016, the top ten plastic waste exporters (which includes the US, Japan and the UK) exported 168 million tonnes of waste, most of which ended up in China². In 2018, China introduced a ban on the import of plastic waste but now nearby countries including Indonesia and Thailand are facing increased plastic waste imports as the problem has just moved from one country to another.

Consumer Scotland's role

All sectors have been asked to play their part in achieving our national climate and environmental targets, and the last year has seen an increasing awareness from people of the impact of their actions on the planet. But this has struggled to translate into a reduction in resource consumption, with reports that reuse rates among major retailers consistently represent around just 1-2% of sales.³

If we want to reduce waste, tackle climate emissions, and move to a more circular economy, there is a clear need for a body advocating and advising on how we can reduce the burden that our daily consumption places on global natural resources.

There have been successful examples of nationally lead reductions in our consumption of natural resources, such as the 2014 plastic bag charge which resulted in an 80-90% drop in plastic bag uptake. Consumer Scotland has a vital role to play in advocating for and guiding the replacement of other single use items in a managed way.

The circular economy context

While we cannot preempt what may or may not be in upcoming legislation, it is unthinkable that

in the same year Parliament will debate a Circular Economy Bill it would set up a consumer advocacy and advice body that has no mandate to support consumers to reduce the resources they consume.

Even without the Circular Economy Bill, there is a clear trend and consensus in favour of moving away from our current linear economy, where raw materials are extracted from the earth, made into products, then discarded in a throwaway culture. Consumer Scotland must be a body fit for the future, addressing the issues that consumers care about and contribute to achieving our national goals.

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²<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-plastic-exports>

³<https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-expect-panel-environmental-charging-measures-ecom-recommendations-single-use-disposable-beverage-cups-july-2019/pages/4/>