

The last word

Barry Twig believes plastic is perfect. But who dare tell the public?



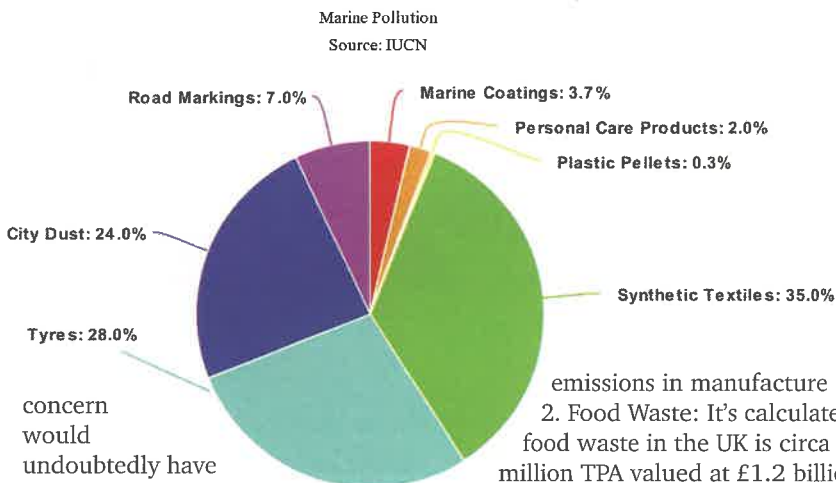
Barry Twig
Chairman
NATIONAL FLEXIBLE

David Attenborough is a national treasure. Not only is he an outstanding naturalist, he has become an icon worldwide for nature conservancy. However, comments on plastic pollution in the World's oceans, featured on the Blue Planet II, unleashed a UK tidal wave of anti-plastic paranoia which grows ever higher as time passes.

This does not suggest that either he, or the programme, were wrong to focus on plastic pollution in the oceans, but what the programme failed to do was identify the source of the pollution. As a consequence, plastic has been subjected to a campaign of vilification by both the media and our politicians. Virtually all of which is based on ignorance not science. For example:

Plastic Pollution in the Oceans

A survey carried out in 2016 by a California research team, concluded that between 8 and 9 million tonnes of plastic waste was being dumped in the Earth's oceans every year. Blue Planet II repeated these figures. What they didn't say was that 90 percent of this material was deposited by just 10 rivers, all in South East Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent. The largest polluter by far was China with some 3.3 million tonnes (40 percent), Indonesia and Vietnam circa 1.2 million tonnes with India over 1 million tonnes. All these highly populous countries deliberately dispose of much of their domestic waste into rivers and tidal waters as a policy and not by accident. If David Attenborough and his team had told us that at the time, then the focus of the public



concern would undoubtedly have been on applying pressure to these countries to stop the practice of ocean dumping. Instead we were left with the erroneous impression that all the World's seas are awash with plastic.

Micro Plastics

Despite the introduction of legislation against micro plastics in cosmetics and other products in 2019, this is an area where the developed world will continue to contribute to pollution - and the chart below indicates why: the bulk of micro plastics entering our rivers and seas are synthetic fibres from washing clothes along with synthetic rubber tyres. The bulk of these deposits can only be stopped by better filters on washing machines and redesign of tyre compounds. Neither is likely to happen short term.

Demand to Replace Plastic

The demand to replace plastic, particularly plastic packaging, originates from the misleading conclusions drawn from Blue Planet II. This creates major environmental problems.

1. Global Warming: All the alternative packaging materials capable of replacing plastic, be they paper board, glass or tins, use far more of the Earth's resources and generate much higher CO²

- emissions in manufacture
 - 2. Food Waste: It's calculated that food waste in the UK is circa 10 million TPA valued at £1.2 billion. This waste is responsible for no less than 20 percent of the UK's CO² emissions. Food waste in countries where food packaging is not widely used have up to 50 percent of their fresh food wasted
 - 3. Packaging Waste: A paper bag is 3-4 times the weight of a plastic bag, a glass bottle 5-6 times the weight of a plastic one, whilst cans weigh up to 8-10 times more than a plastic pouch. All these alternatives add to the weight and volume of packaging waste produced year by year
 - 4. Transport: This extra weight results in thousands more vehicle movements when plastic is replaced
- There is insufficient room here to elaborate on these points but all are based on reports produced by independent credible authorities. Approximately 80 percent of all plastics are recyclable including 100 percent of plastic bottles. Plastic is the perfect material for packaging. It is inert, low cost, and lightweight and the least environmentally damaging of any of the alternatives.
- It's time the public were told. Perhaps we should ask David Attenborough and the BBC?

Submissions and comments for 'The Last Word' to: eamonn.duff@mediaone.co.uk