

## **The David Attenborough Effect**

As David Attenborough turned 92 this week, he has been in the news being celebrated for his incredible life. We wanted to discuss one element of that legacy which has been having a colossal effect on society's views of sustainability and environmentalism within the UK recently.

Since the airing of the recent series of 'Blue Planet' on the BBC. There has been a noticeable uplift in community awareness and engagement with plastic reduction and biodiversity protection.

The format was simple, it was an hour-long show divided into two sections. The first 45-minutes showed the beauty of the blue planet with unrivalled production values letting people see inside this hidden world in such detail never seen before – it was engrossing and beautiful. The second part was a 15-minute segment at the end about how the people filmed it, how the crew accomplished the feats and the difficulties that stood between them.

One particular clip that resonated with me was the footage of the mother Whale carrying her dead baby around days after it had passed away. The mother had been unknowingly consuming plastic, which had tainted her bloodstream and poisoned the calf who was feeding on her. Each episode had a moment like this that would grab people's attention. The final episode was a call to action to protect the ocean and its inhabitants. It was incredibly beautiful, completely distressing and very effective.

This dramatic display shook people from their apathy and got them to engage with the issue. Social media feeds lit up during and after the shows with trending topics like 'beat plastic pollution', 'make a difference' and 'climate action'. It was the most watched TV show in the UK in 2017 with 14 million people viewers tuning in to watch it.

While the footage was often tragic, the enduring message has been incredibly positive and uplifting.

Since its airing there has been an unprecedented increase in social activism and discussion around sustainability. Blue Planet brought it right to the top of the political agenda. And it is easy to see the correlation with topics trending on social media and the airtimes of his show.

There are those who would disagree, but the facts speak for themselves with The Scottish government banned plastic straws, The BBC is banning all plastic across all sites of their company and other companies are doing the same. Retailing giant Iceland is going plastic free, just like Pizza Express, Wagamama and JD Wetherspoons – just to name a few of the brands included.

At the time of this article being written news broke about a ban on wet wipes in the UK. There has even been a boom in eco-tourism due to the show's popularity according to the chief executive of the Association of British Travel Agents. And there is no question that it is linked to blue planet, many press releases from these companies referencing it directly.

Producers of the show are already making foreign language versions of the show to export to other countries and hopefully have the same effect in other parts of the world.

It is for this incredible show and the input of David Attenborough that sustainability and environmentalism are entering the mainstream. For that alone, he should be remembered as a giant of the field, one who has genuinely ushered in positive change. Luckily Sir David also has a lifetime of incredible achievements to boast.

# Attenborough: World 'changing habits' on plastic

**The world is beginning to tackle the threat of plastic waste, according to the renowned broadcaster Sir David Attenborough.**

"I think we're all shifting our behaviour, I really do," Sir David said in an interview with the BBC.

Describing plastic pollution as "vile" and "horrid", he said there was growing awareness of the damage it can do.

"I think we are changing our habits, and the world is waking up to what we've done to the planet," he said.

Sir David was speaking as he and the BBC's Natural History Unit (NHU) were announced as the winners of the prestigious Chatham House Prize for their Blue Planet II series of documentaries.

Chatham House, a foreign affairs think-tank based in London, awards the prize to people or organisations making a significant contribution to improving international relations.

Its director, Dr Robin Niblett, described plastic pollution as "one of the gravest challenges facing the world's oceans".

He said Sir David and the BBC Studios Natural History Unit played "an instrumental role in helping to put this issue at the forefront of the public agenda".

"Blue Planet II spurred a passionate global response and generated clear behavioural and policy change."

The series revealed how plastic items - estimated to total more than 150 million tonnes - are drifting in the world's oceans and causing the deaths of one million birds and 100,000 sea mammals each year.

In one of the most moving scenes, albatrosses were seen feeding their chicks a diet of plastic which would doom them to die.

The head of the NHU, Julian Hector, said he believed the programmes had "struck a chord" with the public because they showed "the interaction of plastic and the natural world".

"We're emotionally engaging the audience, giving them a connection with life histories, the behaviours, the plans that these animals have got, and how plastic in that case is getting in their way, reducing their chicks' survival."

For Sir David, these sights are "very powerful - they speak to parental instinct"; and they seem to have helped motivate people to take action.

"It's the beginning, and people in all parts of society are aware of what's happening, and it's vile, it's horrid and it's something we are clearly seeing inflicted on the natural world and having a dreadful effect and there's something they can do about it.

"So in a way it's a bit of a litmus test to see if the population care about it and people do."

Sir David said that techniques needed to be devised for handling plastic waste.

"We still need to know how to dispose of the wretched material, surely if we can invent it, somebody somewhere is going to be able to deal with it, to deal with these mountains of this appalling material."

# Michael Gove ‘haunted’ by plastic pollution seen in Blue Planet II

**Environment secretary’s action plan, due in new year, may include plastic bottle deposit scheme and standardised recycling policy**

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Cutting plastic pollution is the focus of a series of proposals being considered by the UK environment secretary, [Michael Gove](#), who has said he was “haunted” by images of the damage done to the world’s oceans shown in David Attenborough’s Blue Planet II TV series.

The government is due to announce a 25-year plan to improve the UK’s environmental record in the new year. Gove is understood to be planning to introduce refundable deposits on plastic drinks bottles, alongside other measures.

The environment secretary is also understood to be considering a proposal to encourage retailers to use fewer types of plastic, as well as another to move councils towards a standardised recycling policy.

The current patchwork of regimes means many types of plastic are not collected from households, depending on where in the country those households are. Together, the two measures will seek to ensure that a greater proportion of the packaging used in the UK can be recycled.

Gove wants an improvement in the rate of recycling, which has reportedly been slipping recently.

“The secretary of state wants to make recycling as easy as possible for households. That is why we will look to accelerate making local authority recycling schemes as consistent as possible through the resources and waste strategy,” a spokeswoman for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said.

The department indicated Gove was planning to overhaul the system of recycling targets to focus more on environmental impact than on the weight of material collected. And the drinks bottle deposit scheme would form part of an expected attack on single-use plastics, such as straws and coffee cups, which will seek to reduce the overall amount of plastic being used.

The news came as a coalition of animal welfare and environmental charities warned that more than 100,000 tonnes of plastic packaging would be thrown away and not recycled this Christmas.

The charities, which include Friends of the Earth, the RSPCA, the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts, estimated that the UK would use 300,000 tonnes of card packaging.

Gove has told journalists he was moved by the scenes in Blue Planet II, which featured marine life struggling to cope with the amount of plastic litter pumped into the seas and oceans by humans.

According to the Times, he is planning to shift the focus of recycling targets towards materials such as plastic and aluminium by moving away from the weight-based measurements favoured by the EU.

Those have led to some councils showing more willingness to collect heavier – though not necessarily as environmentally damaging – materials, such as grass clippings. Gove reportedly

hopes that, by shifting the focus on to environmental impact, he can convince councils to concentrate on collecting the other materials.

Moreover, he plans to encourage councils to standardise what they do and do not collect from households, to end the regional disparities across the UK that are believed to be caused by differing contracts between local authorities and waste firms.

The environmental campaign group Greenpeace welcomed the proposals, which are due to be formally set out next year. Its spokeswoman, Louise Edge, said: "It's a good sign that Michael Gove is thinking about a multi-pronged approach which includes cutting disposable plastic at the source while also making it easier for people to collect and reuse it."

Martin Tett, from the Local Government Association, told [BBC](#) News the standardised recycling regulations would not work on their own. "What we need is packaging that is easily recyclable – this would not only make waste disposal easier for our residents, but save considerable amounts of money and energy, while protecting our environment," he said.