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# Do you want to save the turtles? Don't ban plastics – ban littering

IKE any good Londoner, I used the fantastic summer weather to kayak from Limehouse to Hackney, discovering that part of the city by water.

As a fairly experienced river and sea kayaker, I was taken aback by how full of litter London's waters are.

At around the same time, the national and global debate on how to tackle marine plastic pollution was gathering momentum, amplified by shocking pictures of turtles injured by straws and other plastics.

The EU has outlined its plans to outlaw single-use plastics, and the UK government has signalled that post-Brexit Britain will have a very simple approach: ban them. Besides the widely discussed plans to prohibit straws and plastic balloon sticks, the UK is also looking into banning single-use plastic cutlery and plates, while environment secretary Michael Gove appeared to suggest he was considering a ban on disposable nappies.

However, the EU and the UK government have both missed one crucial fact: just two per cent of total marine plastic pollution is caused by citizens of Europe and the US combined. The UK likely contributes around a tenth of one per cent to global marine pollution.

Embracing compostable products as the silver bullet is also not an honest approach. To reap the perceived benefit of compostable products, which typically cost more than traditional containers, we would need to ensure that the packaging will indeed be composted after use, and not littered or thrown into non-compostable trash.

Politicians seems to be confused. If the aim is to clean up our oceans, we should be trying to reduce litter, not

**Fred Roeder**



banning the practical products some people throw away.

Walking across London Bridge, one dearly misses any clean – let alone recycling-friendly – way of getting rid of rubbish. The easiest way for London's residents and many visitors is to drop trash on the street or in the river. No wonder that kayaking in the Thames is an unpleasant experience.

London heavily reduced the availability of rubbish bins due to the fear of terrorist attacks dating back to the era of the IRA. With the threat of terrorism still very much on the political radar, we simply do not have enough bins.

But there are ways of balancing safety with the city's waste disposal needs.

Some places, such as the Tube, offer transparent plastic bags that ought to prevent bombs but still let people throw away their rubbish. During the Olympics, Boris Johnson increased the

**There is little point in symbolically focusing on the 0.1 per cent of marine pollution that the UK contributes**

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number of bins on the Tube by 25 per cent to cope with additional waste.

And this hasn't been the only attempt to find creative ways to solve London's litter problem. The innovative and bomb-proof Renew recycling receptacles (paid for by displaying digital ads to Londoners) introduced in 2012 were a great idea, but commercially flopped just one year after rollout.

Instead of trying to ban various plastics, policymakers should instead help consumers to dispose and recycle at a high degree. Modern recycling technologies allow us to reuse plastics once they have been disposed. Getting Londoners better access to rubbish bins and recycling facilities is the single best way to encourage them to use them.

At the same time, we should enforce anti-littering laws and fine those who break them, instead of punishing consumers who use single-use plastics and dispose of them responsibly.

That will clean up our streets and our rivers. But when it comes to the oceans, there is little point in symbolically focusing on the 0.1 per cent of marine pollution that the UK contributes – we should ask how to tackle the rest of it.

Developing countries with weak property rights and low environmental standards are the main cause for marine litter. Pushing internationally for stronger property rights in countries such as China, Indonesia, or Brazil, and helping them invest in better technologies, will do much more for sea turtles than banning balloon sticks from British birthday parties.

Plastic isn't the problem. Litter is. It's time for politicians to realise that.

• Fred Roeder is managing director of the Consumer Choice Center.

## DEBATE

Will our growing enthusiasm for low-alcohol drinking change the very culture of the City?

If New York is the city that never sleeps, London has always been the city that never stops drinking. When I first moved here from NYC, I thought I could drink – and then I became friends with some Brits.

But I've seen a real shift over the past few years. And there's a raft of low-alcohol (and, indeed, no-alcohol) entrepreneurs who've noticed too, tempting people away from their pints – especially 16-24-year-olds, 25 per cent of whom are teetotal, according to the Office for National Statistics.

As this younger group filters into the workforce and the old-school boozers continue to filter out, bars and pubs are going to have to change their game. It's already happening.

As a young man in the mid 1960s, it took me some time to adjust to the City's lunchtime drinking habits when entertaining clients.

It went like this: a large gin and tonic, half a bottle of Pomerol to wash down a prime fillet steak, two large Grand Marniers, then reeling back to the office to execute the “thank-you” trade, before visiting the Flying Horse for a couple of pints of Bass prior to heading home.

The advent of Big Bang, hugely influenced by the US investment banks, put this culture of lunchtime drinking to the sword. But even the trans-Atlantic culture shift didn't dry out the City – it just changed the time schedule, as drinking, food and revelry became evening events. Little has changed.

**YES**

**CHRISTI TRONETTI**



No one is saying that the pub is dead. Londoners will always want to unwind after a brutal work week, enjoy a cosy Sunday roast with friends, or raise a glass to welcome a new co-worker.

But we're finally getting the “less is more” message. Things in the City will start to look very different now that the beer goggles are off.

• Christi Tronetti is marketing director at creative agency isobel.

**NO**

**DAVID BUIK**



Today, “low-alcohol drinking” is increasing in popularity, but there is little evidence of this trend in the Square Mile, where the juice of Bacchus plays slightly more than a spear-carrying role in City life. It survived the Americans, and it can survive this new trend.

But never at lunchtime – there's a time and a place for indulgence.

• David Buik is a market commentator at Core Spreads.

**CITYAM.**

Fountain House,  
3rd Floor, 130 Fenchurch Street,  
London, EC3M 5DJ  
Tel: 020 3201 8900  
Email: [news@cityam.com](mailto:news@cityam.com)



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**A Better City for All**

**This is Me** aims to reduce the stigma of mental health by sharing employee stories to improve workplace wellbeing. With over 500 organisations collaborating on this double award-winning campaign, we have reached almost 1 million people and it's time for you to get involved.

Learn more in our webinar about the **This is Me** Storytelling campaign, as well as how to overcome common problems!

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