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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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15 February 2023

Dear Dr Sahota,

Thank you for your letter of 9 December to the Secretary of State about plastics and wet wipes in the tidal Thames. I am replying as the Minister responsible for environmental quality and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

The Government is committed to tackling the issues caused by wet wipes, and officials are currently exploring options to eliminate the use of products harmful to the environment and make sure that where wet wipes are necessary, truly sustainable options are available. Our policy objective is to develop a combined approach that considers sewer misuse, plastic pollution, and marine litter.

We know wet wipes cause considerable damage to sewers when disposed of incorrectly. Research suggests that blockages in sewers cost the water industry £100 million a year in England and Wales, and wet wipes make up some percentages of these blockages.

The Government has conducted a call for evidence on commonly littered and problematic plastic items, and this included potential regulatory options around wet wipes. These options include a ban on the sale of wet wipes containing plastic, a mandatory 'flush-ability' standard (e.g., wet wipes that can prove they meet a certain standard are safe to flush), mandatory labelling on packaging (e.g. to indicate the presence of plastic and/or correct disposal methods), and an extended producer responsibility scheme for wipes containing plastic (e.g. where the cost of removing wet wipes from sewers is placed on producers).

The Government's response to the Call for Evidence noted that we want to make sure policy measure take a holistic approach and do not simply shift to alternative materials in wet wipes, which could in turn cause equal levels of environmental harm and sewage blockage. Our aim is to develop a combined approach that takes account of the impacts on our sewer system, plastic pollution, and marine litter.

For more information, please see the Government's response [here](#). The Government is carefully considering the impact of wet wipes and more information on this will be available in due course.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write about this important issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow', with a stylized, cursive script.

**REBECCA POW MP**