

# Bottled Water

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## The growing cost of convenience

Drinking bottled water is more popular than ever.<sup>1</sup> But a growing trend towards single-use bottles comes at a cost to both the individual and environment. Environmentalists have been keen to highlight alternatives and ways to reduce the impact of plastic bottles. The London Assembly now has the opportunity to explore these alternatives and address the growing impact of plastic water bottles in the capital.

Energy is required to produce and transport bottled water. Many of the popular bottled water brands consumed in London are transported hundreds of miles from their source, often across county and national borders. It has been reported that the bottled water industry in the UK releases 350,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year.<sup>2</sup>

Brand	2015 UK sales (million litres) <sup>3</sup>	Distance from source to London (kilometres)
Evian	8.48	1050
Buxton Spring	7.26	260
Volvic	7.11	1420

Plastic waste is a threat to our environment. Despite the majority of bottles being recyclable, plastic bottles were in the top 10 most common items collected by the Marine Conservation Society's UK-wide Shoreline Clean 2016. In London, marine conservationists found that nearly half of plastic bottles collected in the Thames were water plastic bottles.<sup>4</sup> Considering the 450 year average time of decomposition, the growing cost of clean-up for London's plastic bottle consumption needs to be tackled.

Single-use water bottles cost Londoners money. The average cost of tap water in the UK is 0.1 pence per litre, compared to 65p for 1 litre of bottled water. While some consumers may actively prefer to buy bottled water, others may do so because of the lack of available drinking water. Research has shown that Londoners will most likely chose bottled over tap water when they are away from home.<sup>5</sup> In understanding the need to provide accessible drinking water to Londoners in public spaces, alternatives to single-use plastic bottles will be investigated by the committee.

<sup>1</sup> British Bottled Water Products, *Water Vital Statistics: Industry Data* <http://www.britishbottledwater.org/vital-statistics.asp> (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.

<sup>2</sup> Ecologist (11 April 2013) *Britain's love affair with bottled water – a national scandal?* [http://www.theecologist.org/News/news\\_analysis/1883516/britains\\_love\\_affair\\_with\\_bottled\\_water\\_a\\_national\\_scandal.html](http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/1883516/britains_love_affair_with_bottled_water_a_national_scandal.html) (available online). Accessed 27/01/2017.

<sup>3</sup> British Bottled Water Products, *Water Vital Statistics: Industry Data* <http://www.britishbottledwater.org/vital-statistics.asp> (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence with #Oneless campaign, ZSL.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence with #Oneless campaign, ZSL.

## Exploring the alternatives

Encouraging consumers to carry reusable water bottles and switch to tap water is one alternative to single-use plastic bottles. London Zoo and Selfridges have stopped selling single-use plastic bottles and only sell reusable bottles which visitors can fill up at newly-installed water fountains.<sup>6</sup> In other areas, Transport for London has installed public water fountains at Tower and Westminster Piers and Hammersmith Bus Station.<sup>7</sup> Despite these efforts, campaigners state the availability of accessible water fountains as inadequate, with reportedly one drinking fountain for every 100,000 Londoners.<sup>8</sup> Considering the demand created by lack of tap water in public spaces, the committee will also investigate ways in which the environmental impact caused by plastic water bottles can be reduced.

Increasing recycling would mitigate the impact caused by single-use water bottles. Campaigners have called for a deposit surcharge to be added to the price of all drinks containers. For example, a deposit would be returned to the customer once the bottles were returned to any shop taking part in the scheme, providing an added incentive to businesses due a possible increase in footfall.<sup>9</sup> Similar systems are already used in other cities across the world, including Germany, Croatia, Australian and American states.

The committee now has the opportunity to investigate the impact and possible alternatives to plastic bottled water in London. The investigation will include desk-research and one committee meeting in February 2017.

## Terms of Reference

- To examine the extent of plastic bottled water consumption in London and the environmental impact of plastic bottled water.
- To establish ways in which the Mayor could reduce the environmental impacts of plastic bottled water consumption in London.

## Invited guests

- Kinvara Carey, Natural Hydration Council, General Manager;
- Patrick Feehily, Assistant Director – Environment, Greater London Authority;
- Hugo Tagholm, Chief Executive, Surfers Against Sewage;
- Nick Davis, Founding Director, HydraChill; and
- Fiona Llewellyn, Project Manager, #Oneless campaign.

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<sup>6</sup> Zoological Society of London, #OneLess – the campaign to make London free of single-use plastic water bottles <https://www.zsl.org/conservation/habitats/marine-and-freshwater/one-less> (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.

<sup>7</sup> HydraChill, Latest news, <http://www.hydrachill.com/news.html> (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.

<sup>8</sup> Find a Fountain, FAQ, <http://www.findafountain.org/faq> (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.

<sup>9</sup> Marine Conservation, *Show your support for a Deposit Return System*, [https://www.mcsuk.org/what\\_we\\_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Pollution+and+litter+problems/Deposit+return+system](https://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Pollution+and+litter+problems/Deposit+return+system) (available online). Accessed 27/01/17.