# FSA and FSS warn against ocean-bound plastics in food packaging over safety concerns



# FSA and FSS Advise Against Ocean-Bound Plastics in Food Packaging

The UK’s Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have recently issued a significant advisory against the use of ocean-bound plastics (OBPs) in food packaging. This directive comes in the wake of findings from the Joint Expert Group for Food Contact Materials, which raised serious concerns about the safety of these materials for consumer health.

The evaluation specifically targeted packaging used for perishable goods, including meat, poultry, and fish, which are staple items in supermarkets. After careful consideration of the data, both agencies concluded that there is currently insufficient evidence to confirm the safety of OBPs in food contact applications. They stated that the potential health impacts of these plastics remain unclear, prompting a precautionary approach advising businesses against their use. Notably, the guidance explicitly exempts recycled plastics sourced from controlled environments, such as those collected through UK kerbside collection systems, which have been subject to stringent safety standards.

Dr James Cooper, the FSA's Food Policy deputy director, acknowledged the environmental benefits of recycling plastics collected from the natural environment. He remarked, “We acknowledge the benefits of recycling abandoned plastic that has been collected from the open environment, especially plastic in danger of entering waterways or oceans. Such initiatives, if carried out appropriately, can protect the environment while supporting innovation and economic growth.” However, he expressed concerns about the current processes used for mechanical recycling of these environmental plastics, highlighting that they may not meet the necessary safety standards required for food packaging.

The potential hazards associated with OBPs are not confined to mere packaging material considerations. The Committee on Toxicity (COT) has outlined serious apprehensions regarding contaminants present in OBPs, which could include carcinogenic or toxic substances. With significant gaps in data concerning the origins and processing methodologies of OBPs, the committee has underscored the necessity for more extensive research. They advocate for further risk assessments to comprehensively evaluate the safety of OBPs before they are incorporated into food contact materials.

Moreover, the FSA and FSS have committed to continuing dialogues with industry stakeholders to alleviate concerns tied to food-grade recycled plastics. This includes discussions surrounding the presentation and labelling of such materials, aiming for clarity and transparency in consumer information.

This advisory comes as part of a broader trend observed within food safety governance, as agencies worldwide increasingly scrutinise the implications of using environmentally sourced materials in food contact applications. The commitment to safeguarding public health remains paramount, necessitating rigorous scientific evaluations and stakeholder engagement before endorsing the incorporation of innovative materials like OBPs into food packaging.

In conclusion, while the urgent need for sustainable solutions to plastic waste challenges remains, the leap towards using ocean-bound plastics in food packaging is currently met with caution. Until more definitive safety evaluations are conducted and evidence of their suitability is established, the FSA and FSS encourage businesses to explore alternative applications for these environmental plastics, reinforcing the principle that health and safety must prevail in the packaging choices made for consumer goods.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.packaging-gateway.com/news/fsa-fss-advise-against-ocean-bound-plastic/), [[2]](https://www.food.gov.uk/board-papers/annual-fsa-science-update-0)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.packaging-gateway.com/news/fsa-fss-advise-against-ocean-bound-plastic/), [[3]](https://cot.food.gov.uk/Position%20Paper%20by%20the%20Joint%20Expert%20Group%20on%20Food%20Contact%20Materials%20%28FCMJEG%29%3A%20Ocean%20Bound%20Plastic%20%28OBP%29)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://cot.food.gov.uk/Discussion%20paper%20on%20Ocean%20Bound%20Plastic), [[5]](https://cot.food.gov.uk/Joint%20Expert%20Group%20on%20Food%20Contact%20Materials%20%20Interim%20Position%20Paper%20on%20ocean%20bound%20plastic)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/june-2023), [[7]](https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/summary-of-responses-to-call-for-evidence-on-environmental-plastic-for-use-as-food-contact-materials)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.packaging-gateway.com/news/fsa-fss-advise-against-ocean-bound-plastic/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.food.gov.uk/board-papers/annual-fsa-science-update-0> - The UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has published its Annual Science Update, detailing ongoing risk analyses and evaluations of food contact materials (FCMs). This includes assessments of bamboo-plastic composites and environmentally sourced recycled plastics, such as ocean-bound plastics (OBPs). The FSA acknowledges the environmental benefits of recycling OBPs but emphasizes the need for comprehensive safety evaluations before their use in food packaging. The document outlines the FSA's commitment to ensuring consumer safety through rigorous scientific assessments and stakeholder engagement.
3. <https://cot.food.gov.uk/Position%20Paper%20by%20the%20Joint%20Expert%20Group%20on%20Food%20Contact%20Materials%20%28FCMJEG%29%3A%20Ocean%20Bound%20Plastic%20%28OBP%29> - The Committee on Toxicity (COT) has released a position paper on ocean-bound plastics (OBPs) used in food contact materials. The paper highlights concerns regarding potential contaminants in OBPs, including substances that are carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic to reproduction. It emphasizes the lack of sufficient data to assess the safety of OBPs in food packaging and recommends further research to address these uncertainties. The COT advises caution in the use of OBPs for food contact applications until comprehensive safety evaluations are conducted.
4. <https://cot.food.gov.uk/Discussion%20paper%20on%20Ocean%20Bound%20Plastic> - The Committee on Toxicity (COT) has published a discussion paper addressing the safety implications of ocean-bound plastics (OBPs) in food contact materials. The paper identifies significant data gaps, including the type and origin of OBPs and the presence of hazardous substances. It underscores the challenges in assessing the safety of recycled OBPs due to uncertainties about contamination levels and previous degradation. The COT calls for further research to fill these gaps and ensure consumer safety before OBPs are used in food packaging.
5. <https://cot.food.gov.uk/Joint%20Expert%20Group%20on%20Food%20Contact%20Materials%20%20Interim%20Position%20Paper%20on%20ocean%20bound%20plastic> - The Joint Expert Group on Food Contact Materials has released an interim position paper on ocean-bound plastics (OBPs). The paper expresses concerns about the safety of OBPs in food contact materials due to potential contamination and the lack of sufficient data. It highlights the need for comprehensive risk assessments and recommends that OBPs not be used in food packaging until their safety is established. The paper also calls for further research to address data gaps and ensure consumer protection.
6. <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/june-2023> - The First Steps Nutrition Trust's May 2023 newsletter discusses the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) advice against the use of plastic containers and utensils containing bamboo or other plant-based materials. The FSA has raised concerns about the migration of formaldehyde or melamine into foods from these composites, especially when used with hot or acidic foods or in microwaves. The newsletter emphasizes the need for further research to assess the long-term stability and overall risk of these materials in food contact applications.
7. <https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/summary-of-responses-to-call-for-evidence-on-environmental-plastic-for-use-as-food-contact-materials> - The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has published a summary of responses to its call for evidence on the use of environmental plastics, including ocean-bound plastics (OBPs), in food contact materials. The summary highlights concerns about potential contamination levels and the need for comprehensive risk assessments. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the source and processing of OBPs to ensure consumer safety. The FSA calls for further research to address these issues and to inform future guidance on the use of OBPs in food packaging.