

## Q&As

### **1. What are microbeads?**

Microbeads are plastic beads (generally polyethylene) less than 5mm in size, manufactured for specific purposes, including for use in personal care products (such as bath products, facial scrubs and cleansers, and toothpastes). They are added to products to give texture, act as an abrasive or provide visual interest, and are designed to be rinsed off and washed straight down the drain.

### **2. Why are microbeads a problem?**

When used in personal care products, microbeads can enter the environment, mainly through effluent discharged from wastewater treatment plants. These plants are only able to capture some of the microbeads and the remainder make their way into the natural environment

Like other microplastics, microbeads are persistent, non-biodegradable and accumulate over time in the natural environment. Microbeads are pervasive and very difficult to remove once in the marine or freshwater environment.

A recent study found that some young fish have been found to prefer tiny particles of plastic to their natural food sources, effectively starving them before they can reproduce. They have also been found in shellfish consumed by humans, raising questions about potential impacts on human health.

### **3. What products will be covered by the proposal?**

We have not yet devised a specific definition for the scope of personal care products containing microbeads that will be affected by the proposed regulations. This is because there is limited information available in New Zealand on the full range of products containing microbeads.

Our preference is to define the scope of products as broadly as possible but this will be explored through the consultation.

### **4. What are some of the alternative products that people can look for?**

There are suitable natural alternatives to microbeads already being used, such as ground nut shells and apricot kernels. The key is to know what you are looking for when choosing your products. For the most part polyethylene and polypropylene are the main PCCPs used as microbeads.

### **5. What is the proposed timeframe for the ban?**

The Government proposes that, the new regulations under section 23(1)(b) of the WMA, they would come into force in July 2018.

### **6. What are other countries doing to ban microbeads?**

The United States has introduced a ban on personal care products containing plastic microbeads under the Microbead-Free Waters Act, which takes effect from 1 July 2017 for manufacturing and 1 July 2018 for interstate commerce.

Canada is also taking action to ban microbeads by adding them to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act's list of toxic substances, which has very broad criteria for toxicity.

The UK Government announced on 2 September 2016 that it would introduce a legislative ban on the sale of plastic microbeads in cosmetics and other toiletries by the end of 2017.

The Australian Government has formally notified the public that during 2016-17 it will consider whether some form of accreditation or regulation might be appropriate for plastic microbeads and products containing them. This follows the Federal Minister for the Environment's statement that the federal government will take action to implement a ban on plastic microbeads at some point in 2018, if it is clear by 1 July 2017 that the industry voluntary phase-out will be not effective.