

Updating the UK Plan for Shipments of Waste

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# Introduction

The UK Plan for Shipments of Waste implements the UK government policy of self-sufficiency in waste disposal, by prohibiting imports and exports of waste to and from the UK for disposal. This policy is subject to some limited exceptions which are outlined in the UK Plan. The UK Plan was last updated in 2012. The UK Plan is now due another update, to reflect the UK’s departure from the EU in 2019, in addition to certain policy and minor technical changes.

# Background

Four policy changes are proposed, and we would like to hear your views on these proposals.

The first proposed change brings the UK Plan into line with the government’s Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material (NORM)[[1]](#footnote-1) waste strategy. The NORM strategy allows for the repatriation of UK-generated NORM waste where wastes have been exported to another country for treatment. This allows NORM contaminated waste to be treated at the most appropriate facility whilst supporting the UK to be self-sufficient in the disposal of its own waste. The change will add an exception to the UK Plan to allow for the repatriation of UK-generated NORM waste for final disposal. Additionally, the NORM strategy requires that radioactive waste should not be shipped to or from the UK except for the recovery of re-usable materials or for prior treatment. The change will also add detail to existing exceptions in the UK Plan to specify the conditions under which NORM waste can be imported and exported from the UK.

The second proposal is to add a caveat to the existing requirements in the UK Plan for shipments which involve interim treatment processes. There have been instances where wastes destined to be exported for disposal required an interim disposal operation which was available within the UK; however, the UK Plan currently allows for interim disposal operations to be carried out abroad. This may not be the best environmental option and should be discouraged where there is treatment capacity in the UK. An addition to the UK Plan will address this issue by specifying that interim disposal operations should be carried out in the UK where there is UK capacity.

The third proposed change is to remove an exception relating to contaminated river sediments. This exception was added to the UK Plan in 2012 at the request of the River Tyne Sediment Steering Group (RTSSG). The exception has, however, never been utilised. We have consulted informally, and we understand that there are now domestic disposal options for this waste. We would therefore propose to remove this exception on the basis that it is no longer needed.

The fourth proposal is to introduce a new exception to allow the export of mercury waste and mercury-contaminated wastes for disposal. There are currently no suitable facilities within the UK for the disposal of this waste. Previously, we have permitted the export of mercury waste for disposal under the exception for:

*Shipments to and from Member States or EFTA countries of hazardous waste, or contaminated river sediments that are classified as non-hazardous waste, produced in such small quantity overall per year that the provision of new specialised disposal installations would be uneconomic.*

The government is committed to addressing the harmful effects of mercury on human health and the environment. We have received requests to export mercury wastes under the above exception in increasing volumes. This reflects progress towards the elimination of legacy mercury waste in the UK. We therefore propose to create an exception specific to mercury wastes and mercury-contaminated wastes. We expect these shipments to diminish over time. Should UK facilities become available for the disposal of mercury wastes we would review the need for the exception.

We have also updated the UK Plan to reflect the UK’s departure from the European Union in 2019 and the end of the transition period. This primarily involves replacing references to EU legislation with references to the relevant legislation[[2]](#footnote-2). Finally, we have made further minor technical amendments to the UK Plan: for example, by updating the list of UK Overseas Territories and the contact details section. These changes can be seen in the document Draft Updated UK Plan for Shipments of Waste, also on CitizenSpace.

# Consultation questions

## Section A: About you

### Question 1: Do you want your responses to be treated as confidential? Yes/No

### Question 2: What is your name?

### Question 3: What is your email address?

### Question 4: Are you responding

### On behalf of an organisation?

### As an individual?

### Question 5: What is the name of your organisation (if applicable)?

## Section B: About the proposed changes

### Question 1: What are your views on the proposal to update the UK Plan to make it consistent with existing government policy which allows the repatriation of UK-generated NORM waste and specifies criteria for other shipments of NORM waste?

### Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposal to require that any interim disposal operations on wastes being exported for disposal should be carried out in the UK, where there is capacity?

### Question 3: Do you agree with the proposal to remove the exception which currently allows the export of contaminated river sediments for disposal?

### Question 4: What are your views on the introduction of a specific exception which will allow the export of mercury waste and mercury-contaminated wastes for disposal?

### Question 5: We have made amendments to the UK Plan to reflect the UK’s departure from the European Union and the end of the transition period. Do you have any views on these amendments?

### Question 6: We have made minor technical amendments throughout the UK Plan for example to update contact details and the list of overseas territories. Do you have any concerns regarding these minor technical amendments?

### Question 7: Are there any other matters covered by the UK Plan that you would like us to consider?

# Responding to this consultation

We welcome your views and comments on the proposals to update the UK Plan for Shipments of Waste. Please submit your response using the online survey provided on Citizen Space (an online consultation tool), through the following link <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/international-waste-shipments/updating-the-uk-plan-for-shipments-of-waste>.

We will analyse the responses to this consultation and publish a government response. This analysis will further inform the drafting of the final revised UK Plan.

1. Strategy for the management of Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material (NORM) waste in the United Kingdom (2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These references may require further updating at the time of final publication of the plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)