

**Hannah Pauline Blumhardt**

**Submitter Type:** Individual

**Source:** Web Form

**Overall Position:** Support

**Overall Notes:**

**Clause**

1. Do you agree with the Government's proposal to prohibit the manufacture and sale of personal care products containing microbeads (eg, body scrubs, facial cleaners, toothpastes) to reduce their impacts on New Zealand's environment and human health? Why/why not?

**Position**

Yes

**Notes**

I support the banning of microbeads in personal care products, which is overdue. The impact of microbeads on the environment is incredibly concerning to me. The fact that these beads are ingested by sealife that humans later consume, including shellfish, is very worrying. We still do not have adequate evidence about the impact of human ingestion of plastic via the vector of seafood, though some studies have suggested long-term effects on brain function, and a possible relationship with the onset of Alzheimer's disease. The ingestion of microbeads is obviously a problem for marine life - it is unclear how microbeads move up the foodchain, but studies suggest that bigger animals eating smaller animals that have ingested microbeads (or other plastics) is a problem, indicating that microbeads can have a cumulative and multiple impact (underscoring the urgency of regulating them). It is relevant to note that New Zealand's marine birds are at grave risk because of plastics in the ocean, though the precise impact of microbeads, as opposed to other plastics, is unclear. However, overall the science is unequivocal that microbeads are harmful in the natural environment (even if exact quantification of this harm is not yet available), so a ban is more than appropriate. Furthermore, a move to ban microbeads will foster a culture of non-tolerance towards plastics in the ocean, which hopefully can be leveraged in the future to address other unnecessary forms of plastic waste. I also believe it is important that the Government move to ban/regulate microbeads (rather than simply allow a market-based solution), in part because it will be more efficient, effective and measurable than voluntary regulation, but secondly because State-level action will assist in the legitimisation and normalisation of microbeads' regulation in the international sphere. This is important because, even if New Zealand bans microbeads, if products using them are still being manufactured and sold overseas, these bits of plastic can still get into our oceans and coastal areas (microbeads do not respect international borders). Thus, it is important to consider the ways in which we can influence other countries to phase out these products also - leading the way with a ban is one way to do this. Finally, I support a ban because it will increase consumer awareness about microbeads and the severity of the threat they pose to environmental and human health. This 'awareness-raising' function of a ban is important, in light of the fact that the proposed regulation will not cover importation and use in New Zealand. Hopefully a ban for manufacture and sale will raise consumer awareness with the collateral effect of reducing importation and use of these products too.

**Clause**

2. What are your views on the Government narrowing or widening the definition of the scope of personal care products containing microbeads to be prohibited from manufacture and sale in New Zealand?

**Notes**

I am in favour of the Government taking a wider, rather than narrower, definition of the scope of personal care products containing microbeads. I think that the risk of unintentionally covering necessary products with the ban can be addressed in other ways. For example, creating a list of products excluded from the ban, where evidence is provided of their necessity for medical reasons. Ideally, thorough research would be undertaken before the ban, such that any possible necessary products would already be included on this updateable list. Given the lengthy timeframe to phase in the ban, this should be more than possible. I note that the list is unlikely to be long, if there is currently no evidence of any New Zealand companies manufacturing products with microbeads. Consequently, I believe that the environmental benefit of taking a wider definition of the scope of personal care products far outweighs the risk of temporarily capturing necessary products by a wide definition. In this vein I question why the Government is proposing the adoption of the narrower US-inspired definition of "rinse-off" personal care products. I think "rinse-off" is an unnecessary addition to the definition "the point is the pointless inclusion of bits of plastic into any personal care product (ultimately microbeads get into the environment regardless of whether they go down the drain immediately, or later). In this respect I also think that, for the avoidance of doubt, the definition should clearly extend to cosmetics (not just products that are used for washing/cleaning). I wish to add, at this point, that it is laudable that the Government is taking steps to ban the manufacture and sale of microbeads in New Zealand, given the scientific evidence of the clear harm they cause. However, I hope that this will be the beginning of further evidence-based regulation of wasteful and unnecessary plastic products, i.e. a sensible starting stepping-stone towards more ambitious regulation of plastic waste, and not just a low-hanging fruit to be taken in lieu of more difficult/challenging (but nevertheless harmful) plastic products.

**Clause**

3. Do you currently manufacture, sell or use any personal care products containing microbeads? Please specify.

**Position**

No

**Notes**

I do not use packaged, commercial personal care products, so am certain that I do not use any personal care products that contain

microbeads.

**Clause**

4. Do you currently manufacture, sell or use any personal care products containing microbeads for medically prescribed uses or purposes? Please specify.

**Position**

No

**Notes**

**Clause**

5. Do you currently import any personal care products containing microbeads into New Zealand, either for sale or personal use? Please specify.

**Position**

No

**Notes**

For the same reasons as at Q) 3.

**Clause**

6. Are you aware of any personal care products containing microbeads for any purpose that could be considered an essential or critical use?

**Notes**

No, but I strongly favour Government frontloading the research on this question before implementation of the microbead regulation, in order to remove the concern about inadvertently capturing essential/critical products in the ban, and therefore enable the widest definition possible (see discussion in my answer to Q 2).

**Clause**

7. Do you currently manufacture, sell or use any alternatives to personal care products containing microbeads (or components therein), which are designed and used for the same purpose(s)? Please specify.

**Position**

Yes

**Notes**

I use used coffee grounds for exfoliation - I live in Wellington and there are used coffee grounds everywhere. I have seen small scale sale of coffee ground body scrubs and would not be surprised if a start-up springs up soon somewhere in the Capital (given the sheer quantity of used coffee grounds floating around).

**Clause**

8. Do you consider the alternatives to personal care products containing microbeads (or components therein) to be reasonably practicable, readily available, and similarly priced for existing personal, business or other uses? Why/why not?

**Position**

Yes

**Notes**

I have not seen a convincing case for the use of microbeads for the purposes they are currently put towards in personal care products (I exclude from this discussion any possible discoveries about their indispensable use in critical medical products). I simply find it hard to accept that toothpaste with bits of plastic, or facewash with plastic exfoliant, is a non-negotiable addition to a product, or that our lives will be missing something if we do not have those products. I imagine that a lot of the time people are using products with microbeads in them, without even knowing that they contain them, which is why global campaigns were necessary to inform people. I am not convinced that consumers (as opposed to businesses) would consider microbeads, or their purported uses, indispensable. In a broader sense, we could simply do without a lot of the products that contain microbeads in the first place. For these reasons, I cannot see that consumers are going to feel majorly aggrieved if products claiming to do things that microbeads allow them to do, are no longer available, when dozens of products without microbeads will still be on store shelves. To this point I note the consultation document's finding that no New Zealand manufactured personal care products use microbeads. Furthermore, with a little creativity, one can achieve more satisfactory results without having to buy many of these products. To raise again the example in Q 7, I note that used coffee grounds are free and readily available. I would hope a ban on microbeads would start public conversations about safe, natural and cheap alternatives.

**Clause**

9. Is there any reason why the alternatives would not be reasonably practicable, readily available, or similarly priced for personal, business or other uses? If so, would you consider operating against the policy intent and importing personal care products containing microbeads from overseas?

**Position**

No

**Notes**

NOTES: Personally, I would not import personal care products from overseas to circumvent the policy because I support the ban and phase out of microbeads. The only reason I could see for someone doing this would be a) if they need the product for critical reasons (this would be a sign of poor regulation-making if the Government didn't exclude such products from the ban) b) are particularly

wedded to a microbead-containing product, which they would be unwilling to give up (I don't see why the possible existence of such a person should be a reason to obstruct the making of the regulation, however) c) if someone took ideological offense to the proposal and started importing microbead products as some sort of political point.

**Clause**

10. What would be the impact on you or your business if personal care products containing microbeads were prohibited for manufacture and sale in New Zealand and the alternatives were not reasonably practicable, readily available, or similarly priced?

**Notes**

No impact.

**Clause**

12. Are there any other considerations for administration and enforcement of the proposed regulations that have not been outlined in the Administration and enforcement section in the Managing microbeads in personal care products consultation document?

**Notes**

The Government should produce a list of current products for sale in New Zealand containing microbeads, to assist retailers to be as informed as possible, to avoid inadvertently selling products containing microbeads (or any other way to increase information about microbead-containing products - such as labelling, etc).

**Clause**

13. What are your views on the Government's proposed timeframe for entry-into-force of the regulations under the Waste Minimisation Act to prohibit the manufacture and sale of personal care products containing microbeads?

**Notes**

The consultation document states "sometime in 2018", which could mean 1 year, or the best part of 2 years from now. Given the limited number of personal care products containing microbeads in New Zealand, and the absence of any manufacturers of personal care products with microbeads in New Zealand, I would expect that the phasing out time required should not be particularly long. Accordingly, I do not think the timeframe for entry-into-force should be much later than 1 year from now (i.e. beginning of March 2018). I am of the view that reducing plastics in the ocean (of which microbeads are a part) is urgent. We should be able to tackle the low-hanging fruit, like microbeads, as quickly as possible, otherwise that leaves little hope for addressing more difficult plastic-waste-related challenges.

**Clause**

14. Are there any issues about the proposed timeframe for entry-into-force of the regulations that the Government should consider?

**Notes**

N/A

**Clause**

15. Are there any ways the Government could help industry or consumers transition away from personal care products containing microbeads ahead of the regulations' entry-into-force?

**Notes**

Yes, provide information about alternatives and also produce materials that will inform retailers about what products to avoid selling, so that they are not inadvertently caught out (is it possible to do some sort of microbead black-list??) Also, something like the accreditation/labelling scheme proposed in Australia, that would mean that no microbead products could be imported to New Zealand without being labelled as such?

**Clause**

16. Do you have any further comments you wish to make about the Government's proposal?

**Notes**

Simply that I support the proposal, hope that it will be as ambitious as possible (i.e. widest definition of scope possible), and hope that it represents the beginnings of a consistent and far-reaching evidence-based plastic (and other waste) reduction policy, not the end.