

## **The Last Straw**

The BII (British Institute of Innkeeping) together with the ALMR (Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers), BBPA (British Beer and Pub Association) and the Morning Advertiser have launched an industry wide campaign to reduce the amount of plastic used in pubs and restaurants across the country.

Mike Clist CEO BII comments, "Recently many of us were glued to the television on a Sunday night watching the latest David Attenborough series "Blue Planet 2". The photography was, as always, stunning and we learnt so much about the planet we live on. The last of the series concentrated on the damage the use of plastics is doing to our seas and marine life if we don't, as a nation act now and try and curb the amount of plastic we use."

The United Nations currently warns that marine life is facing "irreparable damage" from the millions of tonnes of plastic waste which ends up in the oceans each year. They called it a planetary crisis - one which is ruining the ecosystem of the ocean.

For sea birds and larger marine creatures such as turtles, dolphins and seals, the danger comes from being entangled in plastic bags and other debris and particularly poignant for our industry mistaking plastic for food. Over time, plastic waste slowly degrades and breaks down into tiny micro-fragments which are also causing scientists major concerns.

Some facts about the crisis taken from the BBC web site are as follows :

79% of all plastics end up in landfill or in our oceans – estimated at 10 million tonnes of plastic every year.

480 billion plastic water bottles were sold in 2016 that is a million bottles a minute being sold – each of which will take 450 years to biodegrade.

The Marine Conservation Society found 718 pieces of litter for every 100m stretch of beach surveyed during their recent Great British Beach Clean Up.

If we do not change the way we live 12 billion tonnes will be in landfills and the natural environment by 2050

Environment Minister Therese Coffey told the BII: “We have made it clear in our 25 year plan for the environment that reusing and recycling plastics is critical if we are to stem the damage to our seas and wider natural environment.

“The hospitality industry is well-placed to help reduce unnecessary plastics, and it is encouraging to see some pubs, clubs and restaurants already taking action.

“We will continue to crackdown on plastics by eliminating all avoidable plastic waste through extending the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers, remove consumer single use plastics from the government estate, support the water industry to significantly increase water fountains and work with retailers on introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles.”

So, what could we do as a pub and casual dining industry to help our environment?

Clist again comments “I never want or need a plastic straw or stirrer with my drink yet time after time they come as standard when I order a soft drink or spirit and mixer in a restaurant or pub.

I remove them and quite often discard them on the table before I start my drink. Next time you go to a pub, look around and see how many others do just the same.”

"So as an industry could we change to biodegradable straws and stirrers? The answer is yes, because by only offering straws to those who require them the biodegradable alternatives become a viable option."

There are already a number of companies that have already announced they are banning plastic straws and we commend them for taking this initiative. Others have made plastic straws available on request but we urge them to take the extra step and remove them altogether. One company that provides alternatives is Fancy Straws in Norfolk ([www.fancystraws.co.uk](http://www.fancystraws.co.uk)) who refuse to sell anything but biodegradable products.

Oakman Inns was one of the first multi-unit operations to reduce the use of plastic straws back in April last year. Company founder Peter Borg-Neal said: "We did it overnight – we didn't wait for a few months to see how the wind was blowing. If people wanted a straw of course we provided it, and we now have a compostable straw supplied by Vegware. ([www.vegware.com](http://www.vegware.com))

"The bottom-line is that we did it because it was the right thing to do for everybody. The reality is that most people don't even ask for a straw, and those that do are given these new straws. What we all have to do is to make a start on getting these issues sorted out for ourselves."

Pubs in this country do so much for their local communities, acting as a focal point and a gathering place for their customers. They, raise millions for charity. All this is of great benefit to the customers using pubs today so let us join together as an industry and try and do something for the customers and generations of the future.

**If you are already committed to reducing the unnecessary use of plastics in your business, then tell us about it using #thelaststraw.**

**If you have a great story about how your customers are reacting to the news, then please contact Molly Davis ([molly.davis@bii.org](mailto:molly.davis@bii.org))**