

marine plastic pollution are found per mile of beach.

Plastic bottles are a particularly notable offender, with on average 150 found per mile of beach. So, too, are plastic-lined coffee cups, of which a staggering 2.5 billion are thrown away every year. On Thursday, Parliament's environmental audit committee suggested a "latte levy" of 25p on every cup and a total ban altogether by 2023 unless recycling improves.

Slowly, it feels the tide is beginning to turn. Last month, Michael Gove, the Environment Secretary, said he was "haunted" by scenes of plastic pollution in *Blue Planet II* and stressed the need for urgent action. By 2020, France will be the first country to ban all plastic cups, plates and utensils.

This week China announced it will take no more of Britain's plastic after being inundated with 2.7 million tons since 2012, and many other countries are resolving to reduce their usage after producing an estimated 100,000 tons of unrecycled plastic packaging over Christmas alone - making the isolated Cornish outpost of Penzance an unlikely beacon in the war on waste.

To win its coveted status, awarded by the campaign group Surfers Against Sewage (established in 1990 to clean up the water around Britain's beaches), Penzance Town Council passed a motion pledging its support to all plastic-free initiatives in the town. A steering group has also been

established, and regular beach cleans organised where 30 bin bags are filled with rubbish in a single morning. Churches, Brownies, the Women's Institute and six schools have all pledged to reduce plastic use.

Initially, 13 out of some 400 businesses in the town announced they would be removing single-use plastics. At the end of the month, Rachel Yates is organising a plastic-free clinic to persuade others to get involved. "We're up to 30 businesses now," she says. "And we don't intend to stop."

Emily Kavanaugh, co-chairman of Penzance Chamber of Commerce, who runs cosmetics shop Pure Nuff Stuff, was among the first to sign up. The 51-year-old stresses that it is a far



✦ HOW TO REDUCE PLASTIC USE ✦

● **Refuse to be given plastic carrier bags - including "bags for life" - and always take your own cloth bags.**
 ● **Stop buying bottled water and use a refillable flask.**
 ● **Buy a reusable coffee mug.**
 Today 2.5 billion

takeaway coffee cups are thrown away each year. Many places offer a discount if you take your own cup. Pret a Manger recently announced 50p off every coffee served in a reusable cup.
 ● **Stop buying soap and shower**

gel in plastic bottles and go back to bars.
 ● **Buy fruit and veg at a grocer or farm as they use less packaging.**
 ● **Findmea milkman.net can direct you to local dairies that will deliver returnable glass bottles.**

have signed up is Fraser's Fish and Chip shop and Jubilee Pool, while Penwith College has started banning polystyrene trays and plastic cutlery in its canteen. The Open Air Theatre in Penlee Park, which this year celebrates its 70th anniversary, has also removed all single-use plastics from its bar.

Dave Hunter, its 62-year-old events manager, admits there is an extra cost to buying properly recyclable cups, cutlery and compostable pots. But this, he says, is far outweighed by the positive reception from its 12,000 visitors a year - many of whom actively requested better recycling facilities.

"I am convinced this is going to make a difference," he says. "People's mindsets are changing. I look at my eight-year-old granddaughter and already she consciously thinks about litter far more than I did at her age."

Back on the shoreline, Rachel Yates also contemplates how times have changed. As a child, she would play on this same beach by the sewerage pipes washing human waste out into the sea before the practice was eventually brought to a halt.

"We always used to fall ill because of the filthy water we were swimming in, but it was just normal back then," she says in amazement.

Perhaps one day we will look back on our current plastic habit with similar incredulity.

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