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**Joint Expert Group on Food Contact Materials**

**Interim Position Paper on ocean bound plastic**

1. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is currently undertaking work on the potential use of plastic materials intercepted before entering the oceans (henceforward referred to as ocean bound plastic) in food packaging applications and have sought an initial opinion of the Joint Expert Group on Food Contact Materials (FCM JEG). The FSA was and remains interested in whether recycled ocean bound plastic could be utilised in food packaging, either directly or behind a functional barrier and whether exclusion could be guaranteed of substances that are mutagenic, carcinogenic or toxic to reproduction (CMR).
2. Compliance with the current EU/UK regulations and legislation requires certification that recycled plastic is free of CMR substances. The FCM JEG noted that there is currently a lack of specific data/studies on the presence of CMR substances in ocean bound plastic. Assessment of manufacturer applications to the FSA which include recovered ocean bound plastic would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. The FCM JEG noted that ocean bound plastic is unlikely to have any information about potential contamination and the extent of any previous degradation and so the presence of CMR substances in the material is unknown. This would result in uncertainties around the safety of the recovered plastic. In addition, ocean bound plastic is predominantly sourced from countries with poor waste management infrastructures, adding further to the uncertainties. At present it is unclear whether packaging applications incorporating ocean bound plastic could be further recycled (depending on the material type). Given the uncertainties and potential difficulties to obtain compliance, the Group considered the use of recovered/recycled ocean bound plastic in food contact applications rather than virgin or other approved recycled plastics was unlikely to provide advantages currently.
3. The FCM JEG acknowledged the potential environmental benefits and the need to recycle ocean bound plastics. However, as food packaging only accounts for a relatively small percentage of total plastic applications and given the lack of evidence on the presence or absence of CMR substances in these materials, the Group considered that other applications for ocean bound plastic would pose less risk potential to human health than food contact materials.
4. Based on the information/evidence available to the FCM JEG at the time of the interim assessment, the FCM JEG considered it would not be possible to demonstrate that levels of CMR substances in ocean bound plastic would be sufficiently low to allow its use in food contact material applications, directly or behind a functional barrier.

## **FCM JEG Interim Position Paper**

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# **Annex 1**

# **Abbreviations, definitions and other technical information**

CMR Substances that are mutagenic, carcinogenic or toxic to reproduction

OBP Ocean bound plastic

Whilst there is no accepted definition, there are examples of definitions in the literature, one of which is [What is Ocean Bound Plastic? - Ocean Bound Plastic Certification (obpcert.org)](https://www.obpcert.org/what-is-ocean-bound-plastic/)

EU European Union

FCM JEG Joint Expert Group on Food Contact Materials

FSA Food Standards Agency