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Competition and Markets Authority  
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## RE: Draft guidance on environmental claims on goods and services

1. With about 45,000 members in over 100 countries and a knowledge business that spans the globe, the Royal Society of Chemistry is the UK's professional body for chemical scientists, supporting and representing our members in large multinational companies and small and medium enterprises, universities, schools, government and regulatory agencies. We also draw on chemistry using professionals' expertise to provide advice to Government to help it achieve its ambitions, whether [regulating chemicals appropriately](#)<sup>1</sup> and responsibly, creating the right environment for chemical sciences from a range of backgrounds to flourish, campaigning for everyone to have an excellent chemistry education, [identifying priorities, opportunities and challenges in chemical science](#)<sup>2</sup>, or supporting the development of a [UK circular economy](#)<sup>3</sup>.
2. We welcome the CMA's focus on combatting misleading environmental claims and the principles described in the consultation document. We hear from our members and from the chemistry SMEs we work with that companies and individuals are seeking environmentally responsible goods and services. It is important that businesses know how to comply with their obligations under consumer protection law, and also that consumers are confident in the validity of the messaging that they interact with.
3. In answer to question 3.2, we believe it is important that business to business relationships are also covered. For instance, considering plastic products there are many actors along the value chain, including post use materials recycling and disposal. It is very important that labelling is clear for each stakeholder. If an item falsely claims it is 100% recyclable, it not only misleads the customer in their purchasing choices, but could also have knock on effects on the disposal routes. Many businesses are not equipped to police these claims themselves, so trust in any environmental claims made is essential.
4. Any assessment of 'green' credentials should be founded on transparent and independent scientific testing. This should go alongside improved labelling, to help consumers with decision making at point of purchase, but also when deciding how to deal with products at the end of their useful life. Good labelling is extremely important in this regard; a recent survey conducted by the RSC<sup>4</sup> suggested that due to the wide range of certification and labels consumers remain confused about what can or cannot be recycled, and furthermore they may make different choices if they knew more about the materials in their electronic devices. 59% of respondents said that knowing that some elements in mobile devices contained conflict elements, toxic ones, and rare elements would make them more likely to recycle. We agree with the point made in paragraph 3.80 concerning complete information to make informed choices, and advocate for clear labelling of electronics to include this information.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/new-perspectives/sustainability/sustainable-chemicals-strategy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/04-campaigning-outreach/campaigning/science-horizons/science-horizons-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/new-perspectives/sustainability/progressive-plastics/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/new-perspectives/sustainability/elements-in-danger/>

5. Our recent work on the sustainability of plastics accords with the examples you cite in Principles a) Claims must be truthful and accurate, and f) Claims should be substantiated.
- i. Example 3 on p15, highlights the importance of clarity in the meaning of terms such as 'compostable' and 'biodegradable' in product marketing, especially when related to end of life options. Our recent explainer on compostable and biodegradable plastics evidences this and may be useful to your work in this area.<sup>5</sup> We found that due to lack of available infrastructure the most common end of life destination for these materials is landfill or incineration. In practice there can be a disconnect between the standards for compostable plastic, and the way it is composted at the end of life. For example, the industrial composting standard requires 90% biodegradation in 6 months, but in reality, industrial facilities might turn over batches of waste in a matter of weeks. Standards and environmental claims should ensure they reflect the true treatment timescale of these materials, therefore avoiding a compost contaminated with not-yet-composted plastic.
  - ii. Similarly, considering 'oxo-biodegradable' plastics with additives to trigger degradation, discussions with experts in our community found there is a need for further research to understand the impacts of releasing them to the environment given the problematic legacy of oxo-degradable plastics.<sup>6</sup> With all new degradable plastics, it is important to understand their impacts and ensure they do not change the environment in unexpected ways, as set out in our recent report 'Science to enable sustainable plastics'.<sup>7</sup>
6. In answer to question 3.6 on further case studies, we believe there would be value in considering battery electric vehicles and the critical raw materials (CRMs) within them. This is a consumer product group where on-road performance measures are standardised but claims around the provenance and impact of CRM production are not. Although we do not know of any misleading claims at present, we have identified companies beginning to promote low impact formulations and supply chains for the materials used in their EVs and expect more in future.<sup>8,9</sup>
7. We hope this submission will support your development of this guidance and we would be happy to discuss further any of the issues raised.

Yours faithfully



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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/22-new-perspectives/sustainability/progressive-plastics/explainers/rsc-explainer-2---compostable-and-biodegradable-plastics.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/22-new-perspectives/sustainability/progressive-plastics/explainers/rsc-explainer-3---additives-for-degradable-plastics.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Pages 38-42 of this report cover biodegradable plastics: [https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/22-new-perspectives/sustainability/progressive-plastics/c19\\_t1\\_sustainability\\_cs3\\_whitepaper\\_a4\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/22-new-perspectives/sustainability/progressive-plastics/c19_t1_sustainability_cs3_whitepaper_a4_web_final.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.autocar.co.uk/car-news/industry/analysis-how-volvo-leading-hunt-ethical-ev-batteries>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.volkswagen-newsroom.com/en/stories/lithium-mining-what-you-should-know-about-the-contentious-issue-5867>