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# Characterisation, Quantity and Sorptive Properties of Microplastics Extracted From Cosmetics

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1 **Characterisation, Quantity and Sorptive Properties of Microplastics Extracted**  
2 **From Cosmetics**

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10 **This is the Authors pre-print version of the unpublished manuscript.**  
11 **As such it is not the final version. Please refer to Marine Pollution**  
12 **Bulletin to read the final article.**

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### **Abstract**

24 Cosmetic products, such as facial scrubs, have been identified as potentially  
25 important primary sources of microplastics to the marine environment. This study  
26 characterises, quantifies and then investigates the sorptive properties of plastic  
27 microbeads that are used as exfoliants in cosmetics. Polyethylene microbeads were  
28 extracted from several products, and shown to have a wide size range (mean  
29 diameters between 164 to 327  $\mu\text{m}$ ). We estimated that between 4594 – 94500  
30 microbeads could be released in a single use. To examine the potential for  
31 microbeads to accumulate and transport chemicals they were exposed to a binary  
32 mixture of  $^3\text{H}$ -phenanthrene and  $^{14}\text{C}$ -DDT in seawater. The potential for transport of  
33 sorbed chemicals by microbeads was broadly similar to that of polythene (PE)  
34 particles used in previous sorption studies. In conclusion, cosmetic exfoliants are a  
35 potentially important, yet preventable source of microplastic contamination in the  
36 marine environment.

37

38 Keywords:

39 • Microplastic; Exfoliating Microbeads; Polyethylene; Ocean pollution;  
40 Contaminant

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47 **1. Introduction**

48

49 Plastics provide a diverse range of inexpensive, lightweight, strong, durable and  
50 corrosion-resistant products (Thompson *et al.*, 2009b). The success of plastics as  
51 materials has been substantial and they are used in a wide range of applications.  
52 This versatility, together with their low cost, has resulted in the annual worldwide  
53 production of around 300 million tonnes (Plastics Europe. 2014). Approximately 50%  
54 of production is used to make packaging, much of which is used in disposable  
55 applications. This creates a major waste management problem, with plastics  
56 accounting for approximately 8-10% of all the waste generated in the UK (Barnes *et*  
57 *al.*, 2009; Hopewell *et al.*, 2009).

58

59 Around 700 species of marine organism have been reported to encounter marine  
60 debris in the natural environment, with plastic debris accounting for over 90% of  
61 these encounters (Gall and Thompson, 2015). Large plastic items, such as  
62 discarded fishing rope and nets, can cause entanglement of invertebrates, birds,  
63 mammals, and turtles (Carr, 1987; Eerkes-Medrano *et al.*, 2015; Fowler, 1987; Laist,  
64 1997) but the marine environment is also contaminated with much smaller  
65 microplastics particles (defined by NOAA as <5mm). These have been reported at  
66 the sea surface (Law and Thompson 2014), on shorelines (Claessens *et al.*, 2011),  
67 and on the sea bed (Van Cauwenberghe *et al.*, 2013). The sources of microplastics

68 include fragmentation of larger items (secondary sources), and direct inputs of  
69 microplastic sized particles, such as microbeads used in cosmetics and pre-  
70 production pellets (primary sources). It is important to understand the relative  
71 importance of these sources as well as the size and abundance of microplastic  
72 particles released, since this will influence encounter rate and availability to biota  
73 (Cole et al 2011; Teuten et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2009a).

74

75 There is growing evidence that the amount of microplastics in marine waters is  
76 increasing, with unknown ecotoxicological consequences (Goldstein et al., 2012).  
77 Fendall and Sewell (2009) reported on microbeads used as “scrubbers” in cosmetics  
78 products, which they described as being up to 500  $\mu\text{m}$  in diameter, being released  
79 into the natural environment and potentially available to organisms. Ingestion of  
80 microplastics, has been reported for a wide range of marine organisms including  
81 deposit and suspension feeders (Browne et al., 2008; Graham and Thompson, 2009),  
82 crustaceans (Murray and Cowie, 2011), fish (Boerger et al., 2010), marine mammals  
83 (Denuncio et al., 2011), and seabirds (Avery-Gomm et al., 2012; Van Franeker et al.,  
84 2011). However, the extent, if any, to which chemicals sorbed onto, or incorporated  
85 into plastics can desorb from plastic particles, and transfer to the tissues of marine  
86 organisms is less clear. Recent experimental trials provide evidence for the role of  
87 plastics in the transfer of chemicals with subsequent adverse physiological effects  
88 (Besseling et al., 2013; Rochman et al., 2013), but studies based on bioaccumulation  
89 models concluded that the transfer of contaminants from plastics to marine  
90 organisms upon ingestion is of limited importance compared to other pathways  
91 (Gouin et al., 2011; Koelmans et al., 2013).

92

93

94

95 Microplastics have been used to replace natural exfoliating materials (for example,  
96 pumice, oatmeal, apricot or walnut husks) in cosmetics and have been reported in a  
97 variety of products such as hand-cleansers, soaps, toothpaste, shaving foam, bubble  
98 bath, sunscreen, shampoo and facial scrubs (Fendall and Sewell, 2009; Gregory,  
99 1996; Zitko and Hanlon, 1991; UNEP, 2015).

100

101 Industry uses the terms 'microbeads' to describe microplastic particles present as  
102 ingredients in personal care and cosmetic products; they may also be called  
103 microspheres, nanospheres, plastic particulates (UNEP, 2015). Around 93% of the  
104 'microbeads' used in cosmetics are polyethylene (PE), but they can also be made of  
105 polypropylene (PP), PE terephthalate (PET), polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) and  
106 nylon (Gouin et al., 2015; Eriksen et al., 2013; UNEP, 2015). Microbeads are likely to  
107 be transported to wastewater treatment plants, where some will be captured in  
108 oxidation ponds or sewage sludge. However, due to their small size, it is anticipated  
109 that a substantial proportion will pass through filtration systems and enter aquatic  
110 environments (Fendall and Sewell, 2009).

111

112 Leslie et al. (2013), examined wastewater treatment plants that discharge into the  
113 North Sea, the Oude Maas River or the North Sea Canal and reported that the  
114 treated effluent contained on average 52 pieces of microplastics/L. Eriksen et al.

115 (2013) also reported substantial amounts of multi-coloured microplastic spheres in  
116 surface waters of the Laurentian Great Lakes of the United States which were  
117 suspected to originate from consumer products. This provides evidence that  
118 microplastics are not all captured in sewage sludge of wastewater treatment plants  
119 and is of broad concern, since treated effluent from sewage disposal sites is  
120 discharged into a range of water bodies, including into inland waters, estuaries and  
121 the sea (DEFRA, 2002).

122

123 Gouin et al. (2011) estimated that the per capita consumption of microplastic used in  
124 personal care products for the U.S. population, based on the usage of PE  
125 microplastic beads used in personal care products, was approximately 2.4 mg per  
126 person<sup>-1</sup> per d<sup>-1</sup>, indicating that the U.S. population may be emitting an estimated 263  
127 tonnes per yr<sup>-1</sup> of PE microplastic (Gouin et al., 2011). To set this into perspective, in  
128 terms of its contribution to marine litter, this annual quantity is approximately  
129 equivalent to 25% of the total mass of plastic that is estimated to have accumulated  
130 in the North Atlantic Subtropical Gyre (Law et al., 2010; Gouin et al., 2011).

131

132 Facial scrubs are one type of cosmetic which contains microplastics as exfoliating  
133 agents. Due to this, such products could contribute microplastics contamination to  
134 the marine environment. Despite concerns about the potential for products  
135 containing microbeads to represent a major source of microplastics to the  
136 environment, only one study has measured microplastics in facial scrubs (Fendall  
137 and Sewell, 2009), and there are no peer reviewed publications confirming the type  
138 or quantity of microplastic polymers used in facial scrubs. Here we examined six

139 brands of facial scrubs manufactured by three companies and describe the  
140 microplastics (plastic microbeads) present, in terms of polymer type, colour, size,  
141 weight and abundance. We also investigated the sorptive properties of the  
142 microplastics in relation to the potential for transport of the POPs phenanthrene (Phe)  
143 and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and compared them with commercially  
144 available PE particles previously used in adsorption/desorption studies of persistent  
145 organic pollutants (POPs) (Bakir et al., 2012, 2014a, b; Teuten et al., 2007).

146

## 147 **2. Methods**

### 148 **2.1 Sample preparation**

149

150 Six major brands of facial scrubs were chosen, based on their prevalence in major  
151 supermarkets close to Plymouth UK. All of the products listed in their ingredients that  
152 they contained PE. Four replicates of each product were purchased, with each  
153 replicate sourced from a different supermarket to provide a representative sample.

154 Since the specific brand names of the products are not of particular relevance, they  
155 were labelled A-F.

156

157 Each facial scrub was a viscous liquid (A to D contained 150mL of product, E  
158 contained 125mL). The contents were subjected to vacuum filtration to obtain the  
159 plastic particles. The procedure required mixing each product in approximately 1L of  
160 boiling water, followed by vacuum filtration over Whatman N°4 filter paper, then  
161 drying at 30°C to constant weight. Once dry, the particles were weighed by Precisa



162 2200C weighing scales and the residues were transferred into separate glass vials.  
163 A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the data, using R studio, to test whether the  
164 amount of microplastics per unit volume extracted differed between products ( $p <$   
165  $0.05$ ). This was followed by a *post-hoc* Nemenyi-Test to find which specific products  
166 significantly differed.

167

## 168 2.2 Visualisation and identification

169

170 Microplastics from each product were identified using Fourier transform infra-red  
171 spectroscopy (FTIR), using a Hyperion 1000 microscope (Bruker) coupled to an IFS  
172 66 spectrometer (Bruker). The spectra obtained were compared to a spectral  
173 database of synthetic polymers (Bruker I26933 Synthetic fibres ATRlibrary).

174

175 Some non-plastic residues were extracted and separated from the plastic particles  
176 using Endecotts woven wire sieves of varying mesh size. The mass of plastic  
177 particles was recorded.

178

179 A Malvern Mastersizer 2000 laser particle sizer (MM2) was used to measure the  
180 size-frequency distributions (SFDs) of the extracted plastic into sixty-eight different  
181 sized bands with logarithmic spacing (range  $0.015 \mu\text{m}$ , to  $2000 \mu\text{m}$ ; Woolfe and  
182 Michibayashi, 1995). The resultant particle size distributions were expressed as a

183 volume weighted mean from an average of twenty five measurements per product.

184 The mean for each product was then calculated.

185

186 The number of plastic particles in each product,  $N$ , was estimated, assuming the

187 particles were of spherical shape, using the following equations:

188 i)  $Vt = \frac{Mt}{D}$     ii)  $V(\text{avg particle}) = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$     iii)  $N = \frac{Vt}{V(\text{avg particle})}$

189 where  $Vt$  is the total volume of plastic extracted,  $Mt$  is the total mass of plastic

190 extracted,  $D$  is the density,  $V(\text{avg.p})$  is the mean volume of one particle,  $N$  is number

191 of particles, and  $r$  is the radius.

192

193 For each product: equation i) allowed calculation of the total volume of microplastic

194 extracted; equation ii) allowed calculation of the average volume of a microplastic

195 particle from each product; by dividing the total volume of microplastic by the

196 average volume of a microplastic particle, equation iii) allowed calculation of the

197 approximate number of particles in each product. Particles were then visualised by

198 scanning electron microscopy (JEOL, 7001F), imaging to describe both whole

199 particles and their topography.

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207 2.3 Sorption of pollutants to plastics

208

209 As part of a separate, but related study, microbead exfoliants were extracted from  
210 shower gel and used to examine the adsorption of POPs by microbeads. The  
211 microbeads from the shower gel products were extracted and identified by FTIR  
212 following the same methods in sections 2.1 and 2.2. As these microbeads were  
213 extracted from different brands of exfoliant products, they are labelled X, Y & Z.  
214 These microbeads were exposed to Phe and DTT; the results were then compared  
215 with sorption to ultra-high-molecular-weight (UHMW) PE particles used in a previous  
216 sorption study (Bakir et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2012).

217

218 Adsorption experiments were conducted in an ISO9001 accredited radioisotope  
219 facility at the Plymouth University. <sup>3</sup>H-Phe and <sup>14</sup>C-DDT were selected as  
220 contaminants in this study to allow simultaneous quantification and to compare with  
221 past studies (Bakir et al., 2012). 10 mg of either UHMW PE or the extracted  
222 microbeads were placed into three glass centrifuge tubes (50 mL) and 5 µL of <sup>14</sup>C-  
223 DDT and 16 µL of <sup>3</sup>H-Phe were added to the walls of the tubes. The solvent was  
224 allowed to evaporate and 25 mL of seawater (35 psu, 59.3 ± 0.26 mS) was added  
225 and the tubes were equilibrated for 48 hours (Bakir et al., 2014a) in the dark at 18 °C  
226 under continuous horizontal, rotary agitation at 220 rpm. All experiments were  
227 carried out in triplicate. The concentration of contaminant was determined in the

228 aqueous and solid phase by counting the  $\beta$  decay from the  $^{14}\text{C}$ -contaminant by liquid  
229 scintillation counting (LSC) as outlined in Bakir et al. (2012). The amount of  
230 contaminant in each phase was quantified using a calibration curve prepared by  
231 counting known amounts of the contaminant.

232 The single point distribution coefficient, single point  $K_d$ , was calculated using the  
233 equation:

$$234 \text{ (iv) } K_d = [q_e]_{\text{solid}} / [C_e]_{\text{aq.}}$$

235 where  $q_e$  is the amount of contaminant adsorbed onto plastic ( $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ ) at equilibrium  
236 and  $C_e$  is the contaminant concentration in the aqueous phase at equilibrium ( $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ ).

237

#### 238 2.4 Statistical analysis

239

240 A two-factor ANOVA, with contaminants and the microbead type considered as fixed  
241 factors, was used to characterise any significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the  
242 distribution coefficients calculated from the sorption of Phe and DDT onto  
243 microbeads. Cochran's test was used to ensure that the data fulfilled the pre-  
244 requisites for parametric analysis and the appropriate data were  $\ln(x+1)$  transformed.  
245 Student-Newman-Keuls (SNK) tests were then used to identify any significant terms.  
246 The tests were carried out using GMAV5 software (Underwood et al., 2002) and are  
247 presented in the supplementary information.

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249

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252

### 253 **3.0 Results**

#### 254 **3.1 Extraction and Identification**

255

256 All of the products contained microplastic particles of PE, which was in agreement  
257 with their stated ingredients. Product C also contained green and yellow particles  
258 that were slightly larger than the PE microbeads. These could not be identified by  
259 FTIR using the Bruker spectral database and were removed from the samples via  
260 sieving and are not included in any of the calculations. The collected solids from  
261 product C also contained micro-‘glitter’. These ‘glitter’ particles were small and could  
262 not be removed from the filter paper for further analysis. However, ‘glitter’ is  
263 commonly manufactured from plastic, such as PE.

264

265 The weight of microplastic extracted varied significantly between products (Kruskal-  
266 Wallis test,  $p = 0.0012$ , Fig 1); the products which were significantly different from  
267 each other were C and E ( $p = 0.0009$ ); D and E ( $p = 0.0463$ ) (*post hoc* Nemenyi-  
268 Test).

269

270

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273

### 274 3.2 Size-Frequency Distributions

275

276 Microplastics from the facial scrubs showed polydispersed size ranges, each with  
277 logarithmic bimodal distributions (Fig 2). Product B had the largest size range (10µm  
278 to >2000 µm), whereas product A was the most homogenous, ranging from 8µm to  
279 56µm, with the largest proportion of smaller particles. Size frequency by volume  
280 distributions were used to calculate the mean diameters for each product. Products  
281 D-F had similar volume-weighted mean diameters, which were 288.80 µm, 289.63  
282 µm and 293.48 µm respectively. The particles in product B and C were larger, with  
283 mean diameters of 326.83 µm and 317.91 µm, while product A was much smaller  
284 with a mean diameter of 163.82 µm. The volume-weighted mean diameters were  
285 used to estimate the number of particles in each product. Since the absolute density  
286 of the extracted plastics was not known, we calculated estimates using a range of  
287 standard densities. For PE these were, high (0.959 g/cm<sup>3</sup>), medium (0.940 g/cm<sup>3</sup>)  
288 and low density (0.910 g/cm<sup>3</sup>).

289

290 Particle diameter, rather than the average weight in each product, was found to have  
291 the greatest effect on abundance estimates. Product E had on average 11.47 g of  
292 PE in each bottle, with a mean particle size of 289.63 µm, resulting in an estimated  
293 6423 particles per mL. Whereas product A had less PE by weight with, on average,

294 6.11g in each bottle, but resulted in an estimate of 18906 particles per mL because  
295 the mean size was smaller (163.82  $\mu\text{m}$ ); being the highest quantity in any of the  
296 products. Product C had the second largest PE particles (317.91  $\mu\text{m}$ ), but the lowest  
297 particle abundance, with only 919 particles per mL. This data implies that the  
298 products tested could each contain between 137,000 and 2,800,000 microparticles  
299 (Figure 3). The quantity of particles was calculated using data for the volume mean  
300 diameter, however the size particle distribution had a tail of smaller particles, hence  
301 the particle abundances calculated are likely to be underestimates.

302 The shape and surface topography of the extracted microplastic particles was  
303 visualised by scanning electron microscopy. For all the brands, the extracted  
304 microplastics had a variety of shapes, including ellipses, ribbons, and threads, as  
305 well as irregular fragments (Fig 4). An exception was product F, which in addition to  
306 irregular shaped pieces, also contained smooth, blue, PE spheres that were  
307 substantially larger than the rest of the particles, but represented a small proportion  
308 of the total amount of plastics present. Some of these spheres were fragmenting (Fig  
309 4).

310

311 The colour of microplastics used in the different products also varied (Table 1). All  
312 products contained white microplastics, but products A, D, E and F also contained  
313 coloured particles. The coloured microplastics in products D-F were larger than the  
314 white plastics, but were less abundant. The white and pink microplastics in product A  
315 were of similar size to each other.

316

317 3.3 Sorption of persistent organic pollutants

318

319 Visualisation of microbeads extracted from products X, Y, and Z showed they could  
320 be differentiated between “smooth” and “rough” forms. This particle shape  
321 differentiation was also observed in products A-F, where A-E contained "smooth"  
322 particles and product F contained both "smooth" and "rough" forms (Fig 4). Therefore,  
323 we considered sorption onto both morphologies. Results showed that microbeads  
324 extracted from the cosmetic products were able to sorb Phe and DDT from seawater  
325 (Fig 5). Sorption capacity for all plastics was significantly higher for DDT compared  
326 to Phe ( $p < 0.05$ , Table 2). The “rough” microbeads were more efficient at adsorbing  
327 POPs from seawater than “smooth” ones, probably due to increased surface area.  
328 The “rough” microbeads were also more similar in shape, surface texture and  
329 sorptive property for POPs to PE particles used in previous experiments (e.g. Bakir  
330 et al., 2012, 2014a, b; Teuten et al., 2007). There were some significant differences  
331 between adsorption by microbeads and adsorption by PE particles and the direction  
332 of these effects was that microbeads from cosmetics tended to adsorb lower  
333 concentrations of POPs than PE particles. However, broadly speaking, it would  
334 appear that results from previous studies on transport of chemicals by sorption on to  
335 plastic are comparable with the transport potential on microbeads.

336

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339



340 4.0 Discussion

341

342 Microplastics found within cosmetics such as facial scrubs, will routinely be washed  
343 into sewers as a direct consequence of consumer use. Due to their size, a  
344 considerable proportion is likely to pass through preliminary sewage treatment  
345 screens (typically coarse, >6 mm, and fine screens, 1.5–6 mm) (Water Environment  
346 Federation, 2003). Effluent containing the microplastics would then be discharged  
347 into inland waters, estuaries and the oceans. A recent study reported that treated  
348 effluent from three sample sites in the Netherlands contained on average 52  
349 microplastic particles/L (Leslie et al., 2013). Microbeads used as exfoliants in facial  
350 scrubs are likely to be an important primary source of microplastics contamination,  
351 due to the quantity of plastic used in each product.

352 When considering the potential consequences of the release of microbeads to the  
353 environment, if any, it is important to consider both the mass of plastic, and the  
354 number and size of the particles; the latter will have direct influence on the  
355 probability of encounters with wildlife.

356

357 The common application of facial scrub exfoliants is once per day, and it has been  
358 estimated that they are used by around 1.1 million women in the UK (Statista, 2013).  
359 Focussing on the products used in this study (A-F), and assuming that the typical  
360 daily amount used is 5mL, between 4594 – 94500 microplastic particles would have  
361 the potential to pass into the sewage system per use.

362 In terms of the mass of plastic entering the marine environment, previous work by  
363 Gouin et al (2011) estimated that users in the U.S emit 2.4 mg of PE person<sup>-1</sup>.d<sup>-1</sup>,  
364 amounting to an emission of 263 tonnes yr<sup>-1</sup>. This estimate is calculated from data  
365 on liquid soap consumption, and assumes that only 15% of the market is shared by  
366 companies that use microplastic beads in their liquid soaps. However, many brands  
367 do use exfoliating microbeads. Assuming that three out of four body exfoliants  
368 contain microplastics (Marine Conservation Society, 2012), and that an estimate that  
369 25% of the microplastic is caught by the sewage system, the UK population could  
370 emit to the natural environment 40.5 – 215 mg of PE person<sup>-1</sup>.d<sup>-1</sup>, or between 16  
371 and 86 tonnes yr<sup>-1</sup> (population of the UK in 2013: 64.1 million, (The World Bank,  
372 2013) just from facial exfoliants. In order to set these quantities into context, by way  
373 of comparison, between 2009 and 2014 inclusive, in its annual weekend beach clean,  
374 MCS typically collect around 9 tonnes of litter per year (over an average length of  
375 115km of UK shoreline).

376 The presence of microplastics in sewage sludge has been reported previously by  
377 Browne et al. (2011), who found that former sewage disposal-sites on the seabed in  
378 UK waters contained more microplastics than non-disposal reference sites,  
379 highlighting the potential for microplastics to accumulate in aquatic habitats. The  
380 occurrence of microplastics within the marine environment is now well documented  
381 in the water column, at the sea surface and sediments (Law and Thompson 2014).  
382 Microplastics also account for around 10% of all reports of ingestion of marine  
383 debris, highlighting their importance as a component of marine debris (Gall and  
384 Thompson, 2015). Their size makes them accessible to organisms with a range of  
385 feeding methods, including: filter feeders (mussels, barnacles), deposit feeders  
386 (lugworms) and detritivores (amphipods, sea cucumbers) and zooplankton (Wright et

387 al., 2013a; Graham and Thompson, 2009; Thompson et al., 2009; Browne et al.,  
388 2008). However, studies that quantify the abundance of microplastic predominately  
389 report elongated fibres. This may in part be due to the relative ease of detection of  
390 pieces with these shapes, since they differ from many natural particles found in  
391 sediments. Hence, the prevalence of microplastics with non-fibrous shapes (Fig 4),  
392 for example microbeads from facial scrubs, may be under-reported in environmental  
393 sampling (Desforges et al., 2014; Lusher et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2015).

394

395 There is no way of effectively removing microplastic contamination once it is in the  
396 environment. The materials are too dispersed, the scale is too vast, ecological  
397 damage would be caused by any remediation (tiny organisms would likely be  
398 removed along with the microplastics), and the costs would be extremely high  
399 (UNEP, 2015). Since plastic is highly resistant to degradation, the abundance of  
400 microplastics in the ocean is assumed to be increasing, thus increasing the  
401 probability of ingestion by biota (Law and Thompson, 2014). The majority of  
402 microplastics extracted from the facial products herein were white or blue. It has  
403 been suggested by Wright, et al. (2013b) that these colours are similar to various  
404 types of plankton, a primary food source for surface feeding fish, which are visual  
405 predators.

406

407 A further potential problem associated with microplastics contamination is the  
408 possibility of transport of hydrophobic contaminants by microplastics: such  
409 contaminants have been found to sorb onto their surface of plastics and may transfer  
410 to biota upon ingestion (Avio et al., 2015; Bakir et al., 2014b; Teuten et al., 2007).

411 Previous studies have shown that PE particles have the potential to sorb and  
412 concentrate a range of hydrophobic contaminants. This is of interest because these  
413 contaminants can be released in conditions resembling those in the gut of an  
414 organism (Bakir et al., 2014b) . However, at present, the environmental importance  
415 of plastics as a vector in the transport of contaminants is not known. Here we show  
416 that microbeads were able to adsorb greater amounts of DDT than Phe when both  
417 chemicals were present in a mixture. This was in agreement with previous work  
418 indicating that plastic showed a preferential affinity for DDT when present with Phe in  
419 a binary mixture (Bakir et al., 2012). The size and shape of microbeads was also  
420 found to be an important factor in their sorptive property for POPs and smooth  
421 microbeads were found to adsorb lower concentrations of POPs than rough ones.  
422 Rough microbeads were found to be most similar in their sorptive properties for  
423 POPs to commercially available PE used in chemical transport studies (e.g. Bakir, et  
424 al., 2012, 2014b; a; Teuten, et al., 2007). However, both types of microbeads were  
425 broadly similar in their sportive properties to the microplastics used in previous  
426 studies. Hence, on the basis of the experimental work here, it seems likely that  
427 conclusions regarding the potential role of microplastics as possible vectors in the  
428 transport of POPs in the environment could also be applied to transport by  
429 microbeads from cosmetics.

430

431

432 Rochman et al. (2013) investigated the transfer of hydrophobic organic compounds  
433 (PAHs, PCBs and PBDEs) from PE to the fish, Japanese medaka (*Oryzias latipes*)  
434 and the subsequent health effects. Plastic particles were exposed to natural marine

435 conditions, as opposed to laboratory exposures used in most previous studies.  
436 Environmental exposure will be highly dependent on the sites selected, which can be  
437 prone to variation. Results suggested the ingestion of virgin PE particles caused  
438 physiological stresses. However, the ingestion of contaminated PE particles led to the  
439 transfer of adsorbed contaminants, causing liver toxicity and pathology (Rochman et  
440 al., 2013). Laboratory studies using microplastic particles of polystyrene (Besseling et  
441 al., 2013) and PVC (Browne et al., 2013) have also indicated the potential for transfer  
442 of harmful chemicals with subsequent effects on biota. The present study showed that  
443 plastic particles present in cosmetics can be of varying size and shape and have  
444 differential affinities for sorption of POPs. Further work would be needed investigate  
445 the presence of chemicals such as pigments and dyes in microbeads, and their  
446 potential, if any, for migration from the polymer in either water or gut conditions.

447

448 The uneven topography of microplastics used in cosmetics could also provide  
449 habitats for diverse communities of microorganisms. A study by Zettler et al. (2013)  
450 described the presence of a rich eukaryotic and bacterial microbiota living on PE  
451 microplastic samples collected from the North Atlantic subtropical Gyre. Scanning  
452 electron microscope (SEM) images showed microbial cells embedded in pits on the  
453 plastic surface, and suggested that some members of this community could be  
454 accelerating the physical degradation of plastic; however this remains to be  
455 confirmed. The communities found on the plastic particles were distinct from  
456 surrounding surface water, indicating that plastic provides a novel habitat. Other  
457 studies have highlighted the potential for microplastic to act as vectors for microbial  
458 pathogens (Harrison et al., 2014).

459

460 Currently, there are reported to be eighty facial scrubs in the UK market, which  
461 according to their product labelling, contain plastic material amongst their ingredients  
462 (Beat the Microbead, 2015). However, some companies have indicated that they will  
463 voluntarily phase out microplastics from their products. This could possibly be due to  
464 research indicating the negative consequences of microplastics within the  
465 environment; Fendall and Sewell (2009) stated that the presence of microplastics in  
466 facial cleansers, and their potential use by millions of consumers world-wide, should  
467 be of increasing concern, whilst Andrady (2011) also reported that there is an urgent  
468 need to assess the future impact of increasing microplastics levels on the world's  
469 oceans. There have also been associated public awareness campaigns (eg. Beat  
470 the Microbead and Scrub it Out), urging consumers to boycott such products.

471

472 However, for the global market, usage statements vary within and between  
473 companies, with some stating they will remove all microplastics from all their  
474 products, while others say only PE will be removed. In some regions, legislation has  
475 been introduced; for example, Illinois and California (U.S.A) have banned the  
476 manufacture and sale of cosmetics that contain plastic microbeads, with similar  
477 legislation being proposed for New York, Michigan, and Ohio (but not yet adopted)  
478 (Driedger et al., 2015).

479

480 In conclusion, the present work characterised the microplastics in facial scrubs by  
481 describing the polymer type, colour, size, weight and abundance. This allowed for  
482 estimation that between 4594 and 94500 particles could be released into the  
483 environment per use. We also estimate that the UK population is emitting 40.5 – 215  
484 mg of PE person<sup>-1</sup>.d<sup>-1</sup>, resulting in a total of 16-86 tonnes yr<sup>-1</sup>. Particle size, rather

485 than the average weight in each product, was found to be important as it had the  
486 greatest effect on abundance estimates. Their small size also renders microbeads  
487 accessible to a wide range of organisms, and may facilitate the transfer of  
488 waterborne contaminants or pathogens. There are alternatives to the use of plastics  
489 as exfoliating particles (UNEP 2015); hence these emissions of microplastic are  
490 avoidable. Given the quantities of plastic particles reported here, and current  
491 concerns about the accumulation of microplastics in the ocean, it is important to  
492 monitor the extent to which manufacturers do voluntarily opt to remove microplastics  
493 from their products. Such monitoring will help to establish whether there is a need for  
494 further legislation.

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**Tables**

507

Product	Colour of Microplastic Present
A	White and Pink
B	White
C	White
D	White and Light Blue
E	White and Dark Blue
F	White and Dark Blue

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514 **Table 1.** *Colour of microplastics found within six facial scrub products.*

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Particle type	POP	Aqueous phase	Glass wall	Solid phase	Total recovery
Product X beads	DDT	12	8	59	78
	Phe	43	1	24	68
Product Y particles	DDT	7	8	91	106
	Phe	13	3	65	81
Product Z beads	DDT	20	26	33	79
	Phe	64	2	6	73
Product Z particles	DDT	3	8	90	101
	Phe	11	5	60	75
UHMW PE	DDT	2	6	87	94
	Phe	7	2	80	89

530

531 **Table 2.** Recovery (%) of phenanthrene (Phe) and DDT following sorption  
532 experiments onto PVC and PE (average values displayed,  $n = 3$ ).

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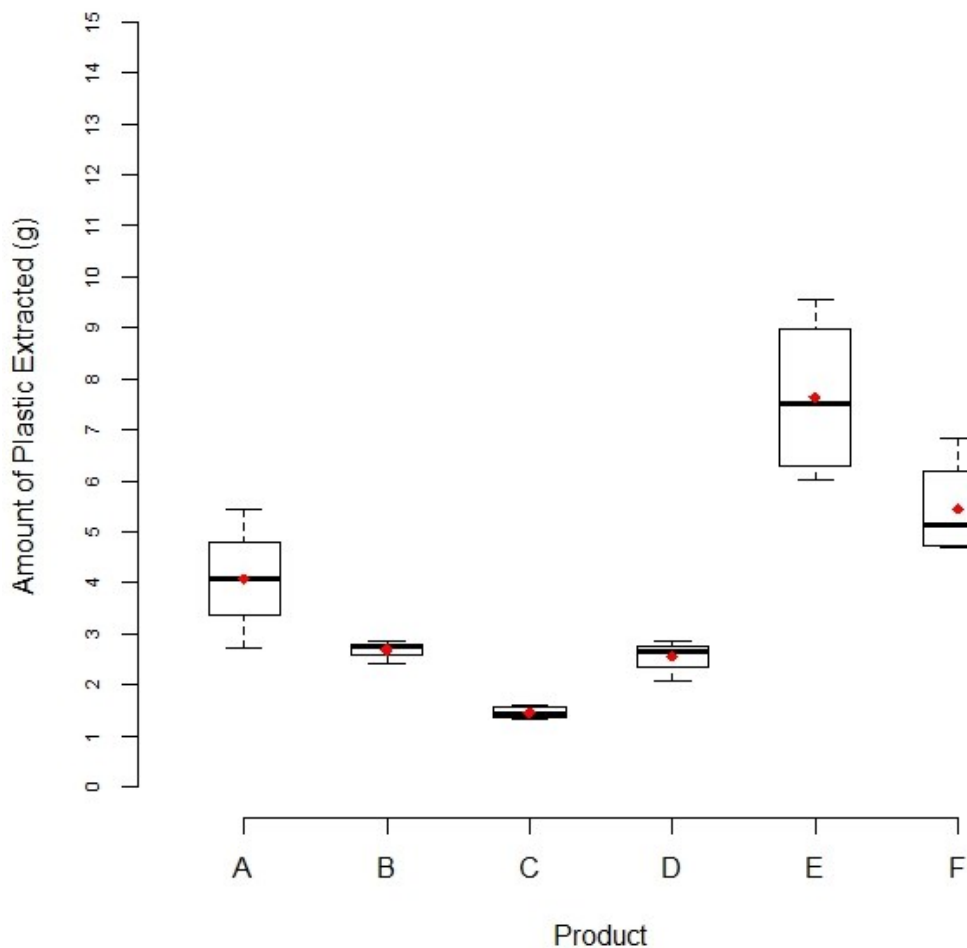
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## Figures

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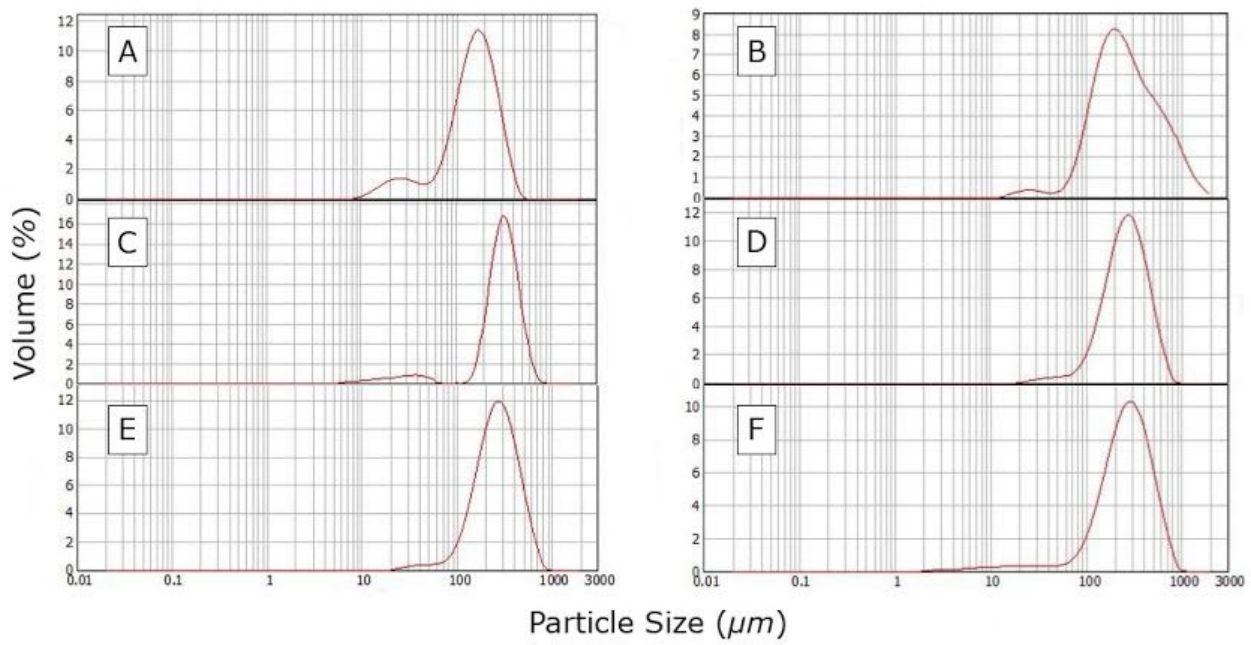
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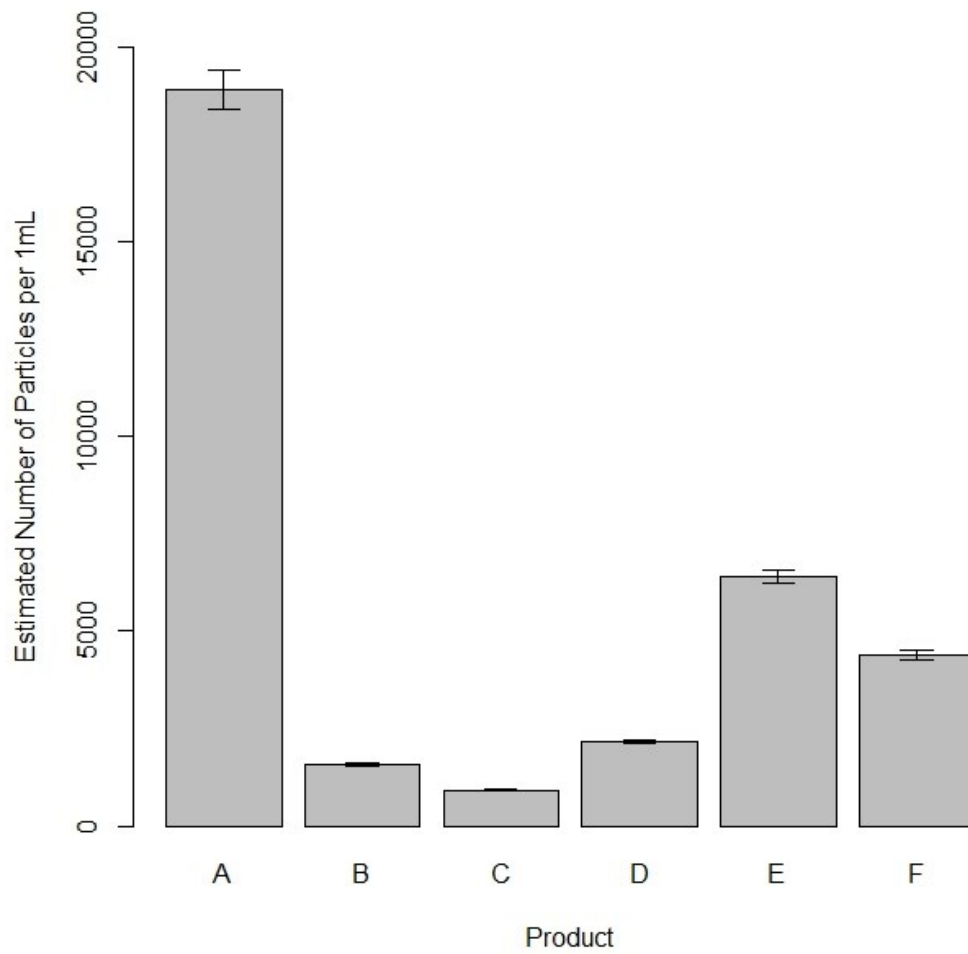
550 **Fig 1.** Total mass of plastic microbeads extracted from six facial scrubs (A-F) per  
551 100 mL. Diamond symbol indicates  $\bar{x}$  (n=4). The tails show both the  
552 maximum and minimum mass obtained, and the box represents the upper  
553 and lower quartiles. There were significant differences between the amount  
554 of microplastic in each of the products ( $p < 0.05$ ).



555

556 **Fig 2.** Particle size distribution of PE microbead particles extracted from six facial  
557 scrubs (A-F). Determined using a Malvern Mastersizer 2000, laser particle  
558 sizer.

559

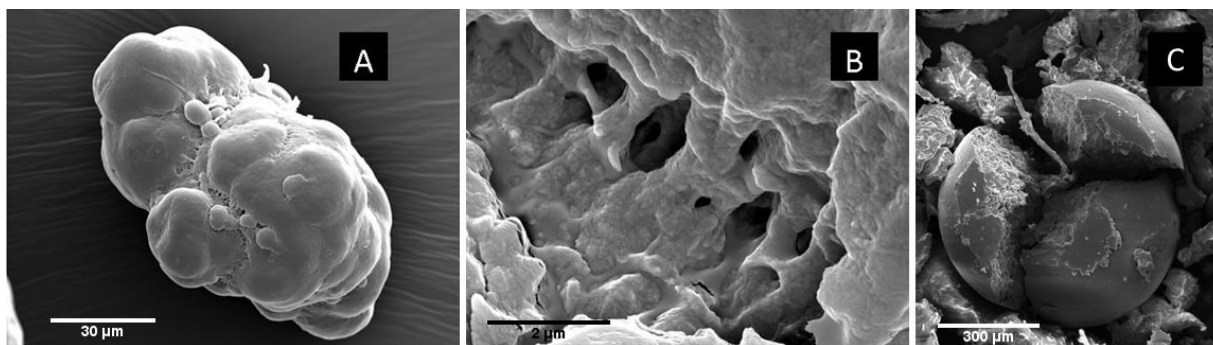


560

561 **Fig 3.** Estimates for the number of PE microbead particles in six brands of facial  
562 scrubs per 1mL. Calculated using data from the volume weighted mean (n =  
563 3,  $\pm$ SD; correlating to the spread of the different amounts of particles  
564 calculated for high, medium and low density PE).

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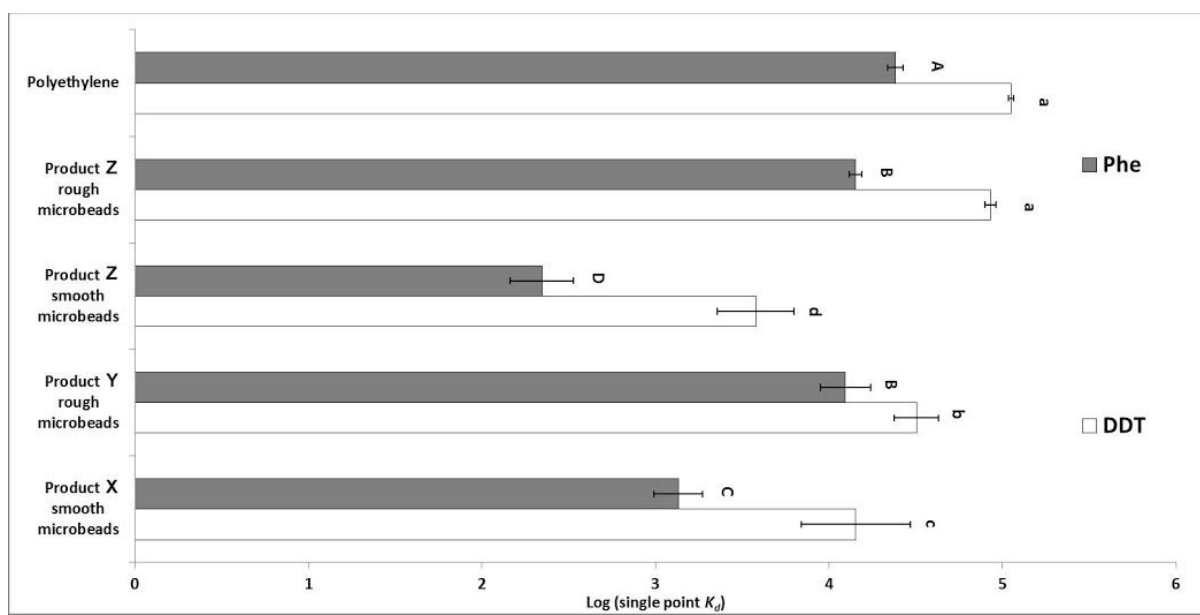
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567

568 **Fig 4.** A-Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) of a typical rough facial scrub plastic  
 569 microbead particle (9000X magnification). B- SEM of surface microbead  
 570 topography (16000X magnification). C- SEM of a broken smooth spherical  
 571 plastic microbead from 'product F' (900X magnification).

572



573

574 **Fig 5.** Single point distribution coefficients ( $K_d$ ) for the sorption of a mixture of  
 575 phenanthrene (Phe) and DDT onto PE particles and rough and smooth PE-  
 576 microbeads extracted from cosmetic products ( $n=3$ ,  $\pm$  SD). For each  
 577 contaminant, treatments with the same letters (A-C for Phe and a-d for DDT)  
 578 were not significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ).

579

580

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583

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