
MEPs clamp down on wasteful use of plastic carrier bags

EU countries would have to reduce the use of the most common and most polluting plastic bags, under draft rules informally agreed between MEPs and Council, and backed by the Environment committee on Tuesday. Plastic carrier bag litter is a major environmental problem, known to pollute water bodies and aquatic eco-systems in particular.

"This is the first time ever we have agreed on ambitious measures to reduce the amount of plastic waste in the environment. This is good news for the environment and all Europeans who expected the EU to take ambitious action on plastic bags" said Margrete Auken (Greens/EFA, DK), who is steering the legislation through Parliament.

"As front-running countries have demonstrated, dramatically reducing the consumption of these disposal bags is easily achievable with coherent policy. Swiftly phasing-out these bags is a readily-implementable solution to the pervasive problem of plastic waste in the environment" she added.

Reduction targets

Member states would have the choice between two policy options: to include either measures ensuring that the yearly consumption level does not exceed, in average, 90 lightweight bags per citizen by 2019 and 40 by 2025, or alternatively, ensure that, by 2018, they are not handed over free of charge.

The European Commission shall evaluate the impact on the Environment of Oxo-degradable plastic materials, which fragments into small particles, and propose measures accordingly.

Next steps

The agreement between MEPs and the Council of ministers was approved by the Environment committee with 55 votes to 2 and 6 abstentions on Tuesday. It will be put to a vote by the full House during the 27-30 April plenary session in Strasbourg.

Background

Lightweight plastic bags thinner than 50 microns – the vast majority of plastic carrier bags used in the EU – are less reusable than thicker models and become waste more quickly. They are also more prone to littering the environment.

In 2010 every EU citizen used an estimated 198 plastic carrier bags, some 90% of which were lightweight. In a business-as-usual scenario, consumption of plastic bags is expected to increase further. Estimates also suggest that over eight billion plastic carrier bags became litter in the EU in 2010.

Further information

[Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#)

[Profile: Margrete Auken \(Greens/EFA, DK\)](#)


[Committee recommendation for second reading](#)


[Text of the agreement with Council](#)


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