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Plastic Oceans: MEPs back EU ban on polluting throwaway plastics by 2021

- single-use cutlery, cotton buds, straws and stirrers to be banned
- MEPs added oxo-plastics, certain polystyrenes
- reduction measures for plastics where no alternatives available
- measures against cigarette filters and lost fishing gear

Single-use plastic items such as plates, cutlery or cotton buds, making up over 70% of marine litter, will be banned under plans backed in the Environment Committee.

Single-use plastic products such as cutlery, cotton bud sticks, plates, straws, beverage stirrers and balloon sticks will be banned from the EU market from 2021, under draft plans approved on Wednesday by the Environment and Public Health Committee.

In the report drafted by Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE), adopted with 51 votes to 10, with 3 abstentions, MEPs added to this list: very lightweight plastic bags, products made of oxo-degradable plastics and fast-food containers made of expanded polystyrene.

National reduction targets

The consumption of several other items, for which no alternative exists, will have to be reduced by member states in an “ambitious and sustained” manner by 2025. This includes single-use burger boxes, sandwich boxes or food containers for fruits, vegetables, desserts or ice creams. Member states will draft national plans to encourage the use of products suitable for multiple use, as well as re-using and recycling.

Other plastics, such as beverage bottles, will have to be collected separately and recycled at a rate of 90% by 2025.

Cigarette butts and lost fishing gear

MEPs agreed that reduction measures should also cover waste from tobacco products, in particular cigarette filters containing plastic. It would have to be reduced by 50% by 2025 and

80% by 2030.

One cigarette butt can pollute between 500 and 1000 litres of water, and thrown on the roadway, it can take up to twelve years to disintegrate. They are the second most littered single-use plastic items.

Member states should also ensure that at least 50% of lost or abandoned fishing gear containing plastic is collected per year, with a recycling target of at least 15% by 2025. Fishing gear represents 27% of waste found on Europe's beaches.

Extended producer responsibility

Member states would have to ensure that tobacco companies cover the costs of waste collection for those products, including transport, treatment and litter collection. The same goes for producers of fishing gear containing plastic, who will need to contribute to meeting the recycling target.

Quote

Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE), rapporteur, said: "Europe is only responsible for a small part of the plastic polluting our oceans. It can and should, however, be a key player in finding a solution, leading at a global level, as it has done in the past in the fight against climate change. Prohibit, reduce, tax, but also replace, warn; the member states have many options to choose from. It is up to them to choose wisely and up to us to keep pushing for more. "

Next steps

The report will be put to a vote by the full House during its 22-25 October plenary session in Strasbourg.

Background

According to the European Commission, more than 80% of marine litter is plastics. Together they constitute 70% of all marine litter items. Due to its slow decomposition, plastic accumulates in seas, oceans and on beaches in the EU and worldwide. Plastic residue is found in marine species – such as sea turtles, seals, whales and birds, but also in fish and shellfish, and therefore in the human food chain.

While plastics are a convenient, adaptable, useful and economically valuable material, they need to be better used, re-used and recycled. When littered, the economic impact of plastics encompasses not just the lost economic value in the material, but also the costs of cleaning up and losses for tourism, fisheries and shipping.

Further information

Single-use plastics and fishing gear: Reducing marine litter (Briefing, 09-07-2018)
Marine litter: single-use plastics and fishing gear (Briefing, Ex-ante impact assessment Unit, 09-07-2018)
Legislative observatory file
Video photo and audio on circular economy (free use)

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