

## Plastic in the ocean: the facts, effects and new EU rules



Plastic waste in our oceans poses an environmental risk ©AP Images/European Union-EP

**Find out key facts about plastic in the ocean with our infographics, as well discover their impact and how the EU is acting to reduce plastic litter in the seas.**

The results of today's single-use, throw-away plastic culture can be seen on sea shores and in oceans everywhere. Plastic waste is increasingly polluting the oceans and according to one estimation, by 2050 the oceans could contain more plastic than fish by weight.

New EU rules, [adopted by MEPs on 27 March 2019](#), tackle lost fishing gear and the 10 single-use plastic products most widely found on European shores. Together these two groups account for 70% of marine litter. These new rules were also [approved by the Council](#) in May 2019.

## SINGLE-USE PLASTICS REDUCING MARINE LITTER



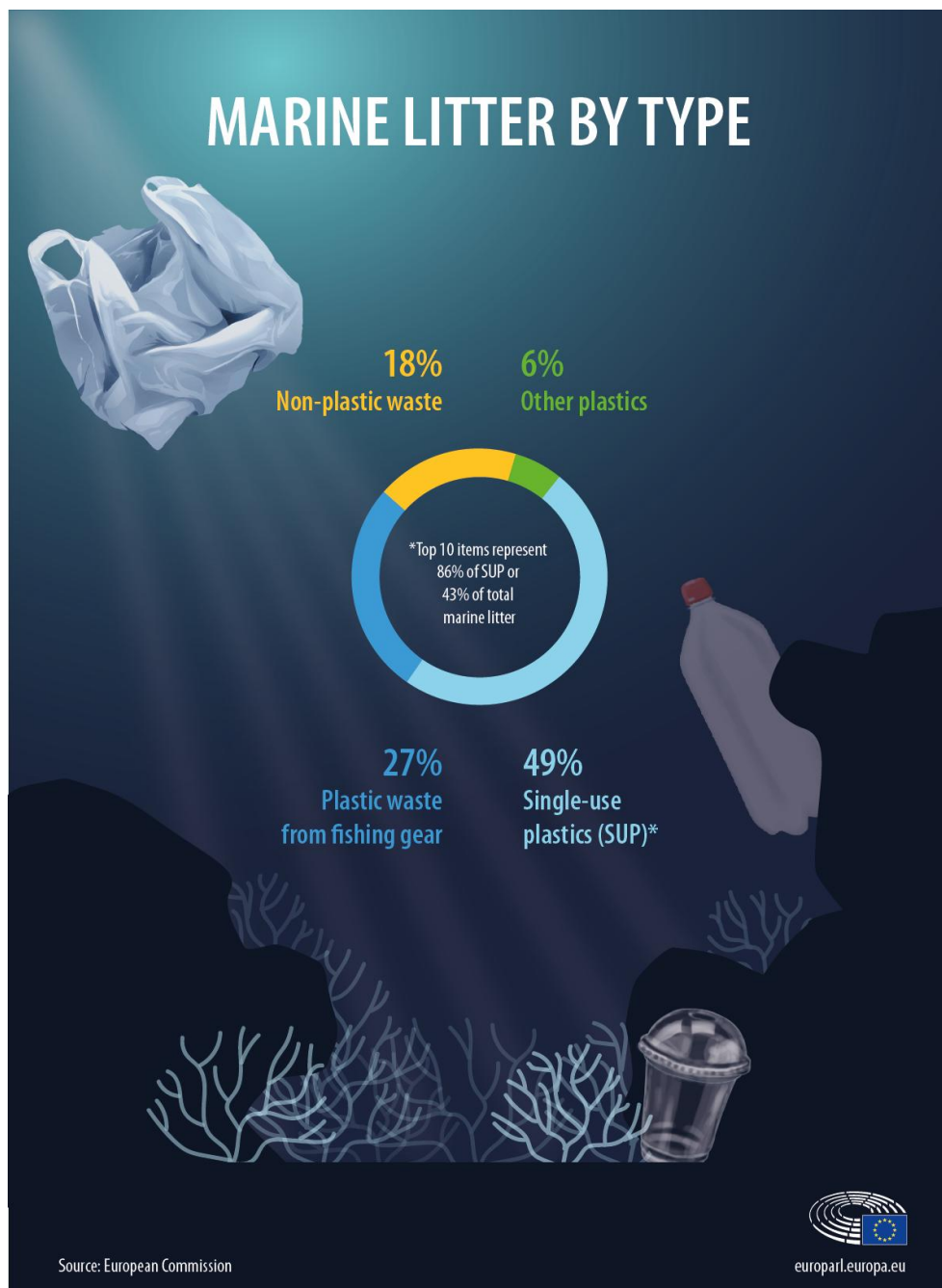
Infographic on key facts and issues caused by plastic waste in the ocean

### Problem

Plastic doesn't just make a mess on the shores, it also hurts marine animals who get entangled in larger pieces and mistake smaller pieces for food. Ingestion of plastic particles can prevent them from digesting normal food and might [attract toxic chemical pollutants to their organisms](#).

Humans eat plastic through the food chain. How this affects their health is unknown.

Sea litter causes economic losses for sectors and communities dependent on the sea but also for manufacturers: only about 5% of the value of plastic packaging stays in the economy – the rest is literally dumped, showing the need for a approach focussed more on recycling and reusing materials.



Infographic on plastic and non-plastic marine litter by type

**What needs to be done?**

The most effective way to tackle the problem is to prevent more plastic getting in the ocean.

Single-use plastic items are the biggest single group of waste found on sea shores: products such as plastic cutlery, drink bottles, cigarette butts or cotton buds make up almost half of all sea litter.

## TOP 10 SINGLE-USE PLASTIC ITEMS FOUND ON SEA SHORES

- 1 Drink bottles, caps and lids
- 2 Cigarette butts
- 3 **Cotton buds sticks**
- 4 Crisp packets/sweet wrappers
- 5 Sanitary applications (sanitary towels, tampons etc.)
- 6 Plastic bags
- 7 **Cutlery, straws and stirrers**
- 8 Drinks cups and cup lids
- 9 Balloons and **balloon sticks**
- 10 Food containers, including fast food packaging

Items in **yellow** could soon be banned as non-plastic alternatives are now available.



The infographic features a dark blue background on the left and a yellow background on the right, separated by a wavy line. On the right side, various plastic items are illustrated in white and yellow. Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 are shown in white, while items 3, 7, 9, and 10 are shown in yellow. The items include a drink bottle, cigarette butts, cotton buds, a crisp packet, a sanitary towel, a plastic bag, cutlery, a drink cup, a balloon, and food containers.

Source: European Commission

  
europarl.europa.eu

List of top 10 single use plastic items found on beaches

### The new measures

A total ban is proposed for single-use plastic items for which alternatives in other materials are already readily available: cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws, drink stirrers and balloon sticks. MEPs also added oxo-degradable plastic products and fast food containers made out of polystyrene to the list .

For the rest, a range of other measures was approved:

- Extended producer responsibility, especially for tobacco companies, in order to strengthen the application of the polluter pays principle. This new regime will also apply to fishing gear, to ensure that manufacturers, and not fishermen, bear the costs of collecting nets lost at sea.
- Collection target of 90% by 2029 for drink bottles (for example through deposit refund systems)
- A 25% target for recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025 and 30% by 2030
- Labelling requirements for tobacco products with filters, plastic cups, sanitary towels and wet wipes to alert users to their correct disposal
- Awareness-raising

For fishing gear, which accounts for 27% of sea litter, producers would need to cover the costs of waste management from port reception facilities. EU countries should also collect at least 50% of lost fishing gear per year and recycle 15% of it by 2025.

### **More on what the Parliament does to fight plastic pollution**

[EU strategy to cut plastic waste: more recycling, ban on microplastics](#)

[EU restricts the use of plastic bags to protect the environment](#)

### **Find out more**

[Check progress on the legislative proposal](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Briefing](#)