



Environment MEPs clamp down on wasteful plastic carrier bags

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety [11-03-2014 - 11:18]

EU states would have to reduce the consumption of most common and polluting plastic bags by 80% by 2019, under draft rules backed by the Environment Committee on Monday. To this end, MEPs recommend using economic instruments such as taxes and levies, marketing restrictions or bans. Plastic carrier bag litter is a major environmental concern, known to affect water bodies and aquatic eco-systems in particular.

"MEPs have voted for EU legislation that would deliver a significant and swift reduction in single-use plastic bags. As front-running countries in the EU and beyond have demonstrated, dramatically reducing the consumption of these plastic bags is easily achievable with a coherent policy. Swiftly phasing-out these bags is a very low-hanging fruit on the list of solutions to the pervasive problem of plastic waste in the environment" said lead MEP Margrete Auken (Greens/EFA, DK), whose report was approved by 44 votes to 10, with 6 abstentions. The text will be put to a vote at the 14-17 April plenary session in Strasbourg.

"MEPs also supported provisions to ensure mandatory pricing of plastic bags in the food sector, as well as a strong recommendation to do so in the non-food sector, too. Putting a price on single-use bags is a proven and highly effective policy tool for reducing their excessive consumption" she added.

50% reduction by 2017, 80% by 2019

MEPs say that lightweight plastic bags with a thickness below 50 microns, which represent the vast majority of plastic carrier bags consumed in the Union, are less reusable than thicker models and become waste more quickly. They are also more prone to littering and to end up scattered in the environment. Member states would have to reduce their consumption by at least 50% by 2017 and by 80% two years later. They should take measures, such as taxes, levies, marketing restrictions or bans, to ensure that shops do not provide for plastic bags free of charge, except for very light ones, used to wrap loose foods such as raw meat, fish and dairy products.

Plastic bags used to wrap foods such as fruits, vegetables and confectionery would be replaced by 2019 by carrier bags made of recycled paper or biodegradable and compostable bags. Requirements concerning compostable and biodegradable packaging should be amended, MEPs say.

Background

In 2010 every EU citizen used an estimated 198 plastic carrier bags, some 90% of which were lightweight; these are less frequently re-used than thicker bags and more prone to littering. In a business-as-usual scenario, consumption of plastic bags is expected to increase further. Estimates also suggest that in 2010, over 8 billion plastic carrier bags became litter in the EU.

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#plasticbags #environment

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