
Parliament and Council agree drastic cuts to plastic pollution of environment

- Single-use cutlery, cotton buds, straws and stirrers to be banned from 2021
- Oxo-plastics and certain polystyrene also banned
- A reinforced application of the “polluter pays” principle

Single-use plastic items such as plates, cutlery, straws and cotton buds, will be banned in the EU under plans provisionally agreed between Parliament and Council, on Wednesday.

Lead MEP Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE) said: "Citizens expected only one thing from the European Union, that it adopts an ambitious directive against disposable plastics responsible for asphyxiation of the seas and oceans. This is done with our agreement closed at 6:30 this morning. It will reduce the environmental damage bill by €22 billion - the estimated cost of plastic pollution in Europe until 2030."

"Europe now has a legislative model to defend and promote at international level, given the global nature of the issue of marine pollution involving plastics. This is essential for the planet and this is what millions of concerned Europeans are asking us to do."

The following products will be banned in the EU:

- Plastic cutlery (forks, knives, spoons and chopsticks)
- Plastic plates
- Plastic straws
- Cotton bud sticks made of plastic
- Plastic balloon sticks
- Oxodegradable plastics and food containers and expanded polystyrene cups

The provisional agreement also provides for:

- A reinforced application of the polluter pays principle, in particular for tobacco, through the introduction of extended producer responsibility (EPR)
- An EPR regime for fishing gear to ensure that manufacturers, and not fishermen, bear the costs of collecting nets lost in the sea
- A 90% collection target for plastic bottles by 2029
- A 25% target for recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025 and 30% by 2030
- Mandatory labelling on the negative environmental impact of cigarettes with plastic filters thrown in the street, as well as for other products such as plastic cups, wet wipes and sanitary napkins

Next steps

The provisional agreement will have to be endorsed by both Parliament and Council to become law. The Environment committee will vote on the text in January 2019.

Background

According to the European Commission, more than 80% of marine litter is plastics. The products covered by these restrictions constitute 70% of all marine litter items. Due to its slow rate of 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 considered a convenient, adaptable, useful and economically valuable material, they need to be used better, 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.

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Photo: plastic products covered by these restrictions constitute 70% of all marine litter ©AP images/European Union - EP