

Putting an end to marine litter is everyone's business

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Opinion

Combatting marine litter means developing a true circular economy, writes Alain Cadec.



Alain Cadec | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

Plastic litter generates considerable marine pollution - at least hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste. Political action is crucial to stop this scourge.

First, we must give ourselves the means to reach our target of reducing marine litter by 30 per cent by 2020.

This starts with full implementation of EU waste legislation, which includes the directive on plastic bags, the framework on marine environmental policy and the directive on port facilities for ship-generated waste and cargo residues. In addition, the European maritime and fisheries fund supports programmes that aim to prevent or reduce fishing gear lost at sea.

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Meanwhile, Horizon 2020 finances action plans to combat marine waste. We must also strengthen international cooperation on localising areas in which the presence or quantity of marine litter could be a danger to the environment or public health. This is key to setting up efficient waste policies.

Combatting marine litter also means establishing a true circular economy that allows for efficient recycling.

We must mobilise all actors: the plastics industry, users of the sea and public authorities. I sponsor the Waste Free Oceans (WFO) foundation, which has developed a remarkable waste recycling model; fishermen collect plastic waste and pass it on to companies specialised in recycling. This allows waste to be used in a new production cycle - this is a true virtuous cycle.

These types of projects go far beyond the environmental dimension. This is a new type of industry, one that is both environmentally friendly and competitive, and offers concrete and durable solutions to dealing with marine litter. This sector presents obvious potential for job creation.

Managing marine litter is everyone's business. Of course, it concerns the plastics industry, but also sea users and public authorities at all levels.

It is important to forge partnerships with fishermen, because they are the sea users that are best equipped to collect marine litter.

A plastic waste collection and recycling sector could easily fit in with blue growth. Fighting marine pollution is our shared responsibility, and we all have a role to play.

About the author

Alain Cadec (EPP, FR) is the Chair of Parliament's fisheries committee

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