

MEPs praise new single-use plastics rules to tackle marine litter

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News

MEPs and the European Commission have welcomed Parliament's adoption of "ambitious" measures to tackle marine litter coming from the 10 single-use plastic products most often found on European beaches.



Photo Credit: Press Association

The rules, which not only cover single-use plastics, but also abandoned fishing gear and oxo-degradable plastics, place the EU "at the forefront of the global fight against marine litter," according to the Commission.

The move is part of the EU's much-vaunted plastics strategy and seen as an "essential element" of the commission's circular economy action plan.

At the Strasbourg plenary, 560 MEPs voted in favour of the agreement, with 35 against and 28 abstaining.

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The new measures include a ban on plastic forks, knives, spoons, plates, straws, cotton buds, balloon sticks, oxo-degradable plastic and food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene.

Member States, under the newly-adopted rules, must reduce the amount of drinking cups and food packaging containing plastics by 2026.

Plastic bottles must be collected and recycled, 77 percent of which by 2025 and 90 percent by 2029 and they must contain a minimum recycled content of 25 percent by 2025 for PET bottles and 30 percent by 2030 for all plastic bottles.

Reaction to the outcome of the vote was swift, with commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, who is responsible for sustainable development, saying: “We have taken an important step to reduce littering and plastic pollution in our oceans and seas. We got this, we can do this. Europe is setting new and ambitious standards, paving the way for the rest of the world.”

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Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, responsible for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, added: “Once implemented, the new rules will not only prevent plastic pollution, but also make the European Union the world leader in a more sustainable plastic policy.”

“The European Parliament has played an essential role in laying the foundation for this transformation and in giving a chance to the industry to innovate, thus driving forward our circular economy,” he added.

EU commissioner for environment, maritime affairs and fisheries, Karmenu Vella, said the plastics measure was “one of the most called for and supported EU initiatives among European citizens.”

Vella said, “Our main task will be to ensure that these ambitious measures are quickly implemented in practice, which will be common work for public authorities, producers and consumers alike.”

MEPs were equally enthusiastic, with German MEP Karl-Heinz Florenz, EPP spokesman on the issue, warmly welcoming the vote.

"We needed to do something to reduce plastic litter in our environment. There is enough plastic waste in our seas to fill an area as big as Central Europe", said Florenz.

"Nevertheless, we also have to see a valuable resource in plastic waste. Replacing disposable plastic with innovative alternatives and reusable products would not just be good for the planet but it would also be an economic opportunity", said Florenz, explaining that about 95 percent of the value of plastic is lost, which amounts to between €70bn to €105bn per year.

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MEP

"Europe needs to take this opportunity and lead. We have to be innovative and make new materials available and change the way we produce and consume plastic."

"Look at take-away coffee cups: currently, they all contain a thin plastic lining. This will change, innovation is on its way. This conduct creates jobs. It enables growth", Florenz added.

Belgian ALDE deputy Frederique Ries said: "This legislation will reduce the environmental damage bill by €22bn - 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."

The vote was also welcomed by ECR MEP Mark Demesmaeker, who negotiated the measures on behalf of his group.

He said: "More than 80 percent of the litter found on our beaches consists of plastic. About half of this comes from disposable products. Without action, more plastic than fish will swim in our seas by 2050. We must change course and these ambitious measures are a step in the right direction."

He said an "eye-catching" new clause is that by 2029, Member States will have to collect 90 percent of plastic single-use drink bottles.

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Demesmaeker MEP

"This measure will have a major impact. Also towards CO2 reduction. For every tonne of plastic that we recycle, we take a car off the road."

"Plastic beverage bottles are the most commonly-found disposable plastic on our beaches. In addition, the European Parliament was able to convince the Member States that by 2030 all beverage bottles should consist of 30 percent recycled plastic."

Dutch Greens MEP Bas Eickhout said: "The EU has finally woken up to the fact that we need to radically change our approach to the production and usage of plastics in our daily lives."

"Mountains of plastic trash have for decades degraded our environment and clogged our seas and this Single-Use Plastics Directive might be a first step towards reversing that trend."

“We are tired of hearing empty promises from industry, claiming to tackle the problem. Instead of cutting back on plastic production it has soared year after year. This move will result in the banning of single-use plates, cutlery, stirrers and other items that often end up littering our shorelines.”

Eickhout said, “We need to be frank with ourselves that our love affair with a waste-based culture must end.”

“If human beings hope to avoid going the way of the single-use coffee cup, we’ll have to act creatively and industriously to come up with new circular models that can help us to live sustainably and in harmony with our environment.”

About the author

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