

24th August 2018

The European Strategy for Plastics and the Commission Proposal for a Directive on the Reduction of the Impact of Certain Plastic Products on the Environment

Friends of the Earth Malta (FoE Malta) welcomes the publication of the *Proposal for a Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment* by the European Commission and has put together in this document, comments to strengthen it.

Following the consultation session hosted by ERA on the 10th of August 2018, FoE Malta has the following recommendations. Our main overall points are the following:

- **Put single use plastic reduction and reuse first:** Ensure that the prevention and reduction of single-use plastics and incentivising reusable alternatives are priorities, in line with the waste hierarchy, notably by:
 - Supporting the proposed market restrictions and extending the list of products covered to include plastic lollipop sticks, expanded polystyrene and very lightweight plastic bags;
 - Setting EU wide quantitative consumption reduction targets for food containers and cups for beverages and their lids, of 50% by 2025 and 80% by 2030, and reduction targets of 30% by 2025 and 50% by 2030 for beverage bottles;
 - Ensuring reusable menstrual products are made widely available in the EU; and
 - Requiring reusable tableware for instore consumption in food and drink outlets.
- **Don't fall for bio-based or biodegradable plastics:** Avoid the substitution of single-use plastics by bio-based and/or biodegradable single-use plastics which are still detrimental to the environment. We urge that any form of bio-based plastic has proper labelling so there is a differentiation between all the different types of plastic, whether they are compostable in home composters or industrial composters, what the origin of the polymer is, if there is a percentage of fossil fuels used in producing the plastic, if they are completely safe for the environment or still produce micro-plastic pieces.
- **Strengthening of EPR measures:** Support strong Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, including for fishing gear. Schemes must include full cost coverage i.e. of waste collection, subsequent transport and treatment, clean up of litter, hazardous chemicals management and awareness raising measures. In addition, modulation of fees should be introduced in order to incentivise better product design and better use of materials.
- **High collection, better marking/labelling and strengthened product requirements:** Ensure high collection rates are achieved, inappropriate disposal is reduced and public awareness is increased by supporting deposit-refund schemes and better marking/labelling requirements, including of the available alternatives to single-use items and the presence of hazardous chemicals. Ensure that the requirement to 'connect the cap' applies to all beverage bottles and that a minimum recycled content target of 30% by 2025 is introduced.

The above are the overall recommendations, more specific comments on the proposed directive as requested by ERA are below.

1. Consumption Reduction on food containers and beverage cups

FoE supports this but thinks there needs to be **specific EU wide targets**. Reduction targets should be established for the products listed in Part A of the Annex (food containers and cups for beverages), namely a 50% reduction by 2025 and an 80% reduction by 2030. The comment in the directive “any necessary measures” is too vague and this needs to be strengthened with targets.

2. Restrictions on Placing on the Market (Ban) for cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws and stirrers, and balloon sticks;

Extend the Market Restrictions to other products such as:

- **Very lightweight plastic bags** - the 2015 EU Directive on lightweight plastic carrier bags allows Member States to exempt very lightweight plastic carrier bags (below 15 microns) from the measures to reduce overall plastic bag consumption. Therefore, these bags are still widely used, and this is very evident in MALTA and often end up in the environment, with similar harmful impacts as lightweight plastic bags. This Directive needs to close the existing loophole for very lightweight plastic bags by adding them to the list of products restricted - alternatives are widely available. There should be an allowance for exemptions where those bags are used for medical purposes, including disability, and humanitarian aid.
- **Plastic lollipop sticks** - they are similar, if not the same, in shape and size to plastic cotton bud sticks, already on the list. Plastic lollipop sticks consistently appear in the top littered items found on European beaches and alternatives (as for cotton buds), such as paper sticks, are readily available.
- **Expanded polystyrene (EPS)** - EPS is consistently among the top 10 items found on beaches and due to its characteristics, fragments rapidly into microplastics. Styrene, the monomer used for EPS production, has been identified as a “probable carcinogen” (category 2A) by the International Agency for the Research on Cancer (IARC).

3. Product Design Requirements for beverage containers;

We fully support that single-use plastic drinks containers will only be allowed on the market with tethered cap helping prevent further loss to the environment. Caps make a significant contribution to plastic pollution. Furthermore we recommend to **keep the requirement to ‘connect the cap’ for all beverage bottles**. In line, with the Commission proposal the requirement to connect the cap should apply to both carbonated and non carbonated beverages. The technology for connecting caps is available both for carbonated and non-carbonated drinks. In addition, connected caps are preferred by recyclers and connecting the cap does not make bottles heavier or require more plastic.

4. Marking (Labelling) Requirements for sanitary towels, wet wipes, and balloons

We fully support the marking requirements established. In addition, we recommend that products contain all markings, not just one (plastics in the product, alternatives that are available, how to dispose of the product). In order to provide consumers with better information and ensure harmonised marking.

5. Extended Producer Responsibility for food containers, packets and wrappers, beverage containers and cups, tobacco products with filters, wet wipes, balloons and lightweight plastic carrier bag

The measures on EPR schemes proposed represent a big step forward towards a fairer and better design of economic incentives for better packaging and product design, as well as use of materials.

Making producers foot the bill for the clean-up costs will ensure that there is a strong economic incentive for them to: (i) redesign their products; (ii) work with the municipalities to ensure high collection of their products; and (iii) team up with other companies to set up reusable systems for their products, where possible. The problem of marine litter is not new and it is well known to these producers and companies. By not supporting the proposed inclusion of full cost coverage of clean-up, business as usual will prevail, where citizens are blamed for the poor collection of products that end up in the natural environment.

Ban the release of balloons at public events. Member States should prohibit the organised, intentional release of balloons into the atmosphere at events. Many local authorities and state-level bans have been enacted globally to prevent mass balloon releases to the environment.

6. Separate Collection for beverage bottles

We fully support this and in fact FoE Malta has submitted recommendation for the BCRS, where we have suggested to make the scheme more comprehensive.

7. Awareness Raising Measures for food containers, packets and wrappers, beverage containers and cups, tobacco products with filters, wet wipes, balloons, lightweight plastic carrier bags and sanitary towels.

We would like to place emphasis on ensuring widespread availability of reusable menstrual products, in particular in large retailers and pharmacies across the EU and Malta, and that this is accompanied with awareness raising measures on alternatives to single-use menstrual products.

We look forward to the uptake of these recommendations. If you would like more information or have questions on the points above, we would be delighted to meet with you in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Anastasia Caruana Finkel

Friends of the Earth Malta