



EU Moves to Ban 10 Most Harmful Single-Use Plastics

In an ambitious effort to stop ocean pollution, the European Commission on Monday proposed banning the 10 most common single-use plastic products as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear.

The European Union's executive arm targeted the products that are most often found on the continent's beaches and seas, which together account for 70 percent of its marine litter.

"Plastic waste is undeniably a big issue and Europeans need to act together to tackle this problem, because plastic waste ends up in our air, our soil, our oceans, and in our food," said EU Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans in a statement.

"Worldwide this is the most ambitious and comprehensive legal proposal addressing marine litter. We can lead the way. We have to lead the way for our environment, for our health, but also to turn this into a competitive advantage for Europe," Timmermans, as quoted by The Guardian, told reporters as he unveiled the measures on Sunday.

The proposed rules are tailored for the different products. For instance, single-use plastic products with readily available alternatives will be banned from the market. That applies to plastic cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws, drink stirrers and sticks for balloons—all will have to be made from more sustainable materials.

For products without a straightforward alternative—including food containers and packaging (i.e. chip bags and candy bars), cigarette butts, wet wipes, balloons and lightweight plastic bags—the plan is to limit their use with reduction targets and push manufacturers to stem pollution of their products.

Under the proposal, manufacturers will help cover the costs of waste management and cleanup, along with implementing clear labels that instruct how the waste should be safely disposed. Further, manufacturers will be given incentives to develop less polluting alternatives for their products.

Similarly, producers of plastic fishing gear, which accounts for 27 percent of all beach litter, will have to cover the costs of waste collection from port reception facilities and its transport and treatment, along with covering the costs of awareness-raising measures.

A recent report from the international nonprofit World Animal Protection estimates that at least 700,000 tons of new fishing nets, aka "ghost gear," enter the sea each year. Unfortunately, the plastics that make up most of the nets in the oceans today take around 600 years to break apart.

The European Commission has also set a target for its 28 member states to collect 90 percent of single-use plastic drink bottles by 2025.

These new measures, if implemented, would prevent 3.4 million tonnes of carbon emissions and avoid €22 billion in environmental damages by 2030 and save consumers a projected €6.5 billion, the commission estimated.

The commission noted in a press release: "Across the world, plastics make up 85 percent of marine litter. And plastics are even reaching people's lungs and dinner tables, with microplastics in the air, water and food having an unknown impact on their health. Tackling the plastics problem is a must and it can bring new opportunities for innovation, competitiveness and job creation."

The measure needs approval from its member states plus the European Parliament for adoption. The European Commission urged the EU's other institutions to "treat this as a priority file, and to deliver tangible results for Europeans before the elections in May 2019."

The directive was praised by environmental organizations.

"The only way to stop plastics pouring into our oceans is to turn off the flow at its source: production. By reducing the amount of unnecessary plastic we produce, we can make a real difference to the global marine litter crisis," Oceana Europe executive director Lasse Gustavsson said in a statement.

However, Gustavsson urged the commission to stretch the ban to cover "all single-use plastic products throughout the European Union."

"The plastics problem is not only on our beaches," he added. "Oceana has discovered plastic litter in the depths of our deep blue seas—often at depths of 1,000 meters below the surface—during research expeditions across Europe."



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Reducing harmful plastic litter is an opportunity for European businesses.

We can create sustainable products that the world will demand for decades to come, and extract more economic value from our precious resources. [#PlasticsStrategy](#) [#PassOnPlastic](#)

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