

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2013/2113(INI)	Procedure completed
European strategy on plastic waste in the environment Subject 3.40.01 Chemical industry, fertilizers, plastics 3.70.05 Marine and coastal pollution, pollution from ships, oil pollution 3.70.09 Transfrontier pollution 3.70.12 Waste management, domestic waste, packaging, light industrial waste 3.70.13 Dangerous substances, toxic and radioactive wastes (storage, transport) 3.70.18 International and regional environment protection measures and agreements 6.40.13 Relations with/in the context of international organisations: UN, OSCE, OECD, Council of Europe, EBRD		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety		18/04/2013
		S&D PRODI Vittorio	
		Shadow rapporteur	
		PPE ANTONESCU Elena Oana	
		ALDE PANAYOTOV Vladko Todorov	
		Verts/ALE AUKEN Margrete	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		22/05/2013
		Verts/ALE LAMBERT Jean	
	ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	TRAN Transport and Tourism	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG Environment	Commissioner POTOČNIK Janez	

Key events			
07/03/2013	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2013)0123	Summary

13/06/2013	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
28/11/2013	Vote in committee		
06/12/2013	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0453/2013	Summary
14/01/2014	Results of vote in Parliament		
14/01/2014	Decision by Parliament	T7-0016/2014	Summary
14/01/2014	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2013/2113(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	ENVI/7/12250

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2013)0123	07/03/2013	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE516.911	09/09/2013	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE521.520	10/10/2013	EP	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE514.576	18/10/2013	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE524.604	27/11/2013	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0453/2013	06/12/2013	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T7-0016/2014	14/01/2014	EP	Summary

European strategy on plastic waste in the environment

PURPOSE: to launch a debate on how to improve the durability of plastic products throughout their life-cycle and to reduce the impact of plastics waste on the environment (Commission Green Paper).

BACKGROUND: global plastics production grew from 1.5 million tonnes (Mt) per annum in 1950 to 245 Mt in 2008, with 60 Mt in Europe alone. It is estimated (under a business as usual scenario) that 66.5 Mt of plastic will be placed on the EU market in 2020 and global plastic production could triple by 2050. In the European Union (EU 27), it is estimated that around 25 Mt of plastic waste was generated in 2008. Of this 12.1 Mt (48.7%) was landfilled while 12.8 Mt (51.3%) went to recovery, and only 5.3 Mt (21.3%) was recycled.

Once in the environment - particularly in the marine environment - plastic waste can persist for hundreds of years. Harm to the coastal and marine environment and to aquatic life follows from the 10 million tonnes of litter, mostly plastic, which end up in the world's oceans and seas annually. Waste patches in the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans are estimated to be in the order of 100 Mt, about 80% of which is plastic.

Plastic waste is not specifically addressed by EU legislation despite its growing environmental impact. The Framework Directive on waste ([2008/98/EC](#)) sets a general recycling target for household waste which covers, among other materials, plastic waste. The need to continue efforts to reduce the incidence and impacts of plastic in the marine environment was particularly highlighted at the Rio+20 Summit.

CONTENT: the purpose of this Green Paper is to launch a broad reflection on possible responses to the public policy challenges posed by plastic waste.

The document highlights the opportunities that can arise from the improved management of plastic waste. It stresses, in particular, that enhanced recycling could contribute to the aims of the [Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe](#), adopted in 2011, and help to reduce

greenhouse gas emissions and imports of raw materials and fossil fuels.

Appropriately designed measures to recycle plastic can also improve competitiveness and create new economic activities and jobs.

The Green Paper should help to:

- reassess the environmental and human health risk of plastic in products when they become waste, addressing their environmentally sound design, both functionally and chemically;
- open a reflection process on how to tackle the problem of uncontrolled disposal of plastic waste and marine litter;
- move forward the reflection on internalization of life-cycle impacts, from raw material extraction to the end of life phase, into the costs of plastic products.

Interested stakeholders are invited to submit their views on:

- whether the legislation in force needs to be adapted and, if so, how, in order to manage plastic waste and to encourage its reuse, its recycling and its recovery over landfilling;
- the need to lay down specific plastic waste recycling targets and to take measures to avoid substandard recycling or the dumping of recyclable plastic waste exported to third countries;
- the effectiveness of voluntary action, in particular by producers and retailers, so as to achieve better resource use in the life cycle of plastic products;
- the possibility of introducing deposit and return or lease systems for specific categories of plastic products;
- the type of information to provide to consumers at the point of purchase of plastic products;
- changes to the chemical design of plastics to improve their recyclability;
- whether product design policy should tackle planned obsolescence of plastic products and aim at enhancing reuse and modular design in order to minimise plastic waste;
- the introduction of market-based instruments in order to more accurately reflect environmental costs from plastic production to final disposal;
- the opportunity to promote biodegradable plastics and to encourage the use of bioplastics;
- actions to be taken to reduce the volume of marine litter;
- the promotion, by the EU, of an international action to improve plastic waste management worldwide.

Contributions should reach the Commission not later than 7 June 2013. The follow-up to the Green Paper will be an integral part of the wide-ranging review of the existing waste legislation, which will be completed in 2014.

European strategy on plastic waste in the environment

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report by Vittorio PRODI (S&D, IT) on a European strategy on plastic waste in the environment. It welcomed the Commission's Green Paper, noting that plastic materials were becoming increasingly diverse and accumulated in large quantities (a total of 80 MT is estimated to be floating in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans) and persisted in the environment for hundreds of years, killing marine life, provoking toxic reactions and releasing endocrine disruptors. Members noted that poor implementation and enforcement of EU waste legislation by Member States, lack of relevant targets and price mechanisms, insufficient internal demand for recycled materials, illegal dumping, illegal exports and improper storage, had led to significant global damage to human health and the environment, and to increased exports of waste, resulting in loss of materials and employment in the EU.

Accordingly, it was necessary as a matter of urgency to revise Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and propose plastic waste norms that go beyond product rules and standards, and the report proposed that the EU legislation on plastic waste should aim first at its reduction, and should therefore be revised in order to include:

- specific binding targets for collection, sorting (which could reach the ambitious level of 80 %) and recycling of the various plastic waste streams and mandatory criteria for recyclability (clarifying the distinctions between mechanical/organic recycling and recovery/incineration). The aim should be a progressive and ambitious target for recycled plastic free from hazardous additives that are no longer allowed to be used in new products, to be reached by 2020;
- the EU-wide harmonisation of criteria for collection, sorting and general waste management, with a view to creating a level playing field in accordance with the waste hierarchy, including the removal of technical, regulatory, administrative and financial barriers to recycling;
- specific labelling of materials in order to inform consumers concerning mechanical or organic recyclability of products, together with indications for consumers on how to increase sorting and recycling; and
- criteria for the replacement of single-use and short-lived plastic products by reusable and more durable materials.

Members also called on the Commission to make proposals by 2014 to phase out the landfilling of recyclable and recoverable waste by 2020, without, however, incentivising as a result the energy recovery option over recycling, and ensuring that environmental efficiency criteria are applied to all options. Plastic waste should be used for energy recovery only in cases where all other possibilities had been exhausted and where the technology used included the requisite purification systems for preventing environmental damage and harm to human health.

Alongside the targets mentioned above for recycling, it was essential to introduce appropriate measures discouraging incineration of recyclable, compostable and biodegradable plastics, in order to optimise the life-cycle of each plastic type while respecting the waste hierarchy. Members asked the Commission to propose measures relating to design that improve the overall environmental impact of products. Furthermore, the report considered that:

- the most dangerous plastics (such as micro- and oxo-biodegradable plastics) and those which contain heavy metals should be phased out of the market or banned outright, as soon as possible before 2020 in order to develop a market for reused and recycled materials, and separate collection of these should be immediately implemented;
- as demanded by a majority of European citizens and consumers, the use of single-use, non-recyclable, non-biodegradable and non-compostable plastic bags should be radically reduced and where possible phased out.

Members called for more public and private investment in research and technologies aimed at obtaining more sustainable plastics and for enhanced plastic biodegradation processes, waste sorting methods, processing and mechanical recycling, recovery of plastics from oceans, eco-design and smart packaging. Horizon 2020 could offer opportunities to respond to this important societal need and advantages include the creation of new economic activities. The committee pointed out that full implementation of EU waste legislation could save EUR 72 billion a year, increase the annual turnover of the EU waste management and recycling sector by EUR 42 billion, and create over 400 000 jobs by 2020.

The report also called for the following:

- more public procurement tenders, including those of the European institutions, to include clear demands as regards the recycling of plastic waste as well as favouring the use of recycled plastic where possible;
- bolder steps to tackle illegal exports and dumping of plastic waste, including stricter enforcement of EU shipment regulations, as well as stricter inspection schemes at ports and at all waste treatment facilities, targeting suspected illegal transfers;
- the financing of waste recycling infrastructure to take priority over the financing of waste dumping and incineration, with greater efforts to incentivise citizens and businesses to adopt a circular economy concept with regard to plastic waste;
- concrete actions and campaigns such as the establishment of a European Day for plastic waste, when citizens could return any volume of plastic waste to predetermined points;
- stepping up dialogue with third countries, such as those with Black Sea territorial waters, in order to address the problem of marine plastic litter more effectively;
- local and regional authorities to coordinate public service provisions with environmental targets and objectives in order to achieve multiple objectives and stimulate green jobs in the process.

Lastly, Members recommended that the Member States integrate the circular economy model in their professional training schemes, and recalled that, by promoting vocational training and work-based learning, the European Social Fund could help satisfy the demand for sustainable quality jobs in less resource-intensive industries, in line with the [Social Investment Package](#) presented by the Commission in February 2013.

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Given that some 40 % of plastic waste derives from packaging and mostly from single-use products, it was necessary to revise the [Packaging Directive](#). Furthermore, Members noted that the economic potential for recycling of plastic waste was currently much higher than the 33 % achieved with regard to plastic packaging waste and the 25 % achieved with regard to total plastic waste.

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- local and regional authorities to coordinate public service provisions with environmental targets and objectives in order to achieve multiple objectives and stimulate green jobs in the process.

Lastly, Parliament regarded identifying the future needs of the labour market as a priority, and emphasised that appropriate levels of training and skills were needed for eco-innovations to flourish and for EU waste legislation to be correctly implemented. It recommended that the Member States integrate the circular economy model in their professional training schemes, and recalled that, by promoting vocational training and work-based learning, the European Social Fund could help satisfy the demand for sustainable quality jobs in less resource-intensive industries, in line with the [Social Investment Package](#) presented by the Commission in February 2013.