

European Parliament approves ban on single-use plastics

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New York Times

LONDON — The European Parliament has overwhelmingly approved a ban on single-use plastics such as cups, plates, cutlery and straw sticks in Europe 2021, joining a global movement as environmentalists emphasize the urgency of ending the use of materials that are detrimental to the planet. Under the proposal, adopted on a vote of 571-53 Wednesday, 10 single-use plastics that most often end up in the ocean will be phased out in the European Union (EU), as well as oxo-degradable plastics, such as

bags or fast-food container packaging.

The use of other plastics such as single-use burger and sandwich boxes that don't have practical alternatives at this point will be reduced by at least 25 percent by 2025, and 90 percent of beverage bottles will be recycled, under the proposal.

The European Parliament will next enter into negotiations with the European Council of government ministers for the 28 member states, who are expected to make a final decision on the legislation by Dec. 16.

"We have adopted the most ambitious legislation against single-use plastics,"

said Frédérique Ries, the member of the European Parliament who drafted the bill.

"Today's vote paves the way to a forthcoming and ambitious directive," she added. "It is essential in order to protect the marine environment and reduce the costs of environmental damage attributed to plastic pollution in Europe, estimated at 22 billion euros by 2030."

The European Commission put forward the legislation in May, after its research found that plastics made up 80 percent of marine litter on European beaches, posing a major threat to coastal biodiversity.

The commission found that marine litter costs the European Union from \$295 million to \$793 million per year.

The World Economic Forum estimates that 90 percent of the world's plastic waste ends up in the ocean, and that currently there are 50 million tons of plastic in the world's oceans that could take centuries to degrade. This year the forum warned that there would be more plastic than fish in weight in oceans by 2050.

In February, marine scientists in Ireland released a study that showed they had found plastic in 73 percent of 233 deep-sea fish from the

northwest Atlantic Ocean — one of the highest reported frequencies of microplastic occurrence in fish worldwide, according to experts from the National University of Ireland.

A small pilot study presented this month said that researchers had found a variety of microplastics in stool samples of eight people from Austria, Finland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and the United Kingdom — which Philipp Schwabl, a gastroenterologist at the Medical University of Vienna and lead author of the study, called "astounding."

The European Federation

of Waste Management and Environmental Services, or FEAD, the body representing waste-management companies in Europe, welcomed the Parliament's vote but also highlighted the need for fully recyclable packaging items.

"I am confident that EU negotiators will succeed in deciding by December 2018 on a level of mandatory recycled content, to be transposed into EU law by 2025, which will trigger the uptake of plastic recyclates in beverage bottles," Jean-Marc Boursier, president of FEAD, said, referring to raw materials processed at waste plants.

"By doing so, the EU will finally experience a circular shift that is long overdue," Boursier said.