

Environmental experts at Greenpeace Italy, ClientEarth, ECOS and the Rethink Plastic Alliance had already warned the environment ministry in May that its law would violate EU rules. They have now lodged an official complaint with the European Commission.

Restrictions in the EU's Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD) apply to single-use plastics including those that are biodegradable or compostable. But the law adopted by the Italian Parliament - which is meant to directly echo the SUPD - alarmingly carves out exceptions for these plastics. Environment experts have reported the Italian government to the EU authorities after its new law on single-use plastics was found to directly contradict EU legislation.

The final step to formally transpose the SUPD into Italian law must be taken by the government, but it is late - the deadline passed on 3 July. This also puts the country in contravention of EU law.

Giuseppe Ungherese, Greenpeace Italy's toxics campaigner, said: "This law shows that Italy is clearly not committed to a genuine transition to a circular society. If we want to go beyond plastic and a single-use culture, we must avoid a simple material substitution".

"The most sustainable approach is to support solutions based on refill and reuse. This was, after all, one of the main goals of the EU Directive, but the Italian government has unfortunately failed to comprehend this."

Biodegradable plastics are being touted by industry marketers as the solution to plastic pollution. They only break down under very specific conditions - for example high temperatures, humidity and presence of micro-organisms - that won't be met in most circumstances.

ClientEarth plastics lawyer Tatiana Luján said: "Biodegradable plastics are a false solution. They are only biodegradable with lots of caveats such as high temperatures. But if they end up at the bottom of the sea, we know those strict conditions won't be met.

"The EU law is designed to start to wean EU countries off this dangerous culture of one-time use. Italian lawmakers have decided to disregard this essential aspect."

The SUPD has been at the centre of discussions in Italy, with doubts being raised over its impact on Italian industry. However, the EU law was agreed two years ago with Italy's green light.

Ungherese added: "The Italian government should have guided the industry through the transition, but instead has been focused on fighting EU rules that it had agreed on - this is detrimental to the environment and the Italian economy."

Source: clientearth.org