

The European Commission has taken a leap forward in tackling plastic pollution, with new laws to reduce throwaway single-use plastics.

The proposal, which is designed to prevent and reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, and in particular the marine environment, sets a number of different policy measures to tackle these problematic single-use products, from bans and reduction efforts, to labelling and extended producer responsibility schemes.

Meadhbh Bolger, resource justice campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe said:

“These new laws are answering the call of citizens. They will foster reusable alternatives to single-use plastics, providing exciting potential to not only cut pollution but also to create jobs and deliver opportunities for thriving resilient local economies, while preserving the natural resources upon which we all depend.”

The range of legislative measures includes:

A ban on single-use plastic straws, cutlery and plates, cotton buds and balloon sticks

A requirement to achieve ‘significant’ reductions in the consumption of plastic food containers and cups within 6 years, through measures such as national consumption reduction targets, minimum reusable packaging targets, or ensuring such items are not provided free of charge

A 2025 target of 90% separate collection of plastic bottles, to be achieved through Extended Producer Responsibility schemes or the implementation of deposit return schemes

Detailed labelling on sanitary towels, wet wipes and balloons informing citizens of the negative environmental impact of inappropriate disposal

The introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility schemes for waste fishing gear, cigarette butts, beverage containers including lids and caps, food containers, lightweight plastic bags and wet wipes amongst others.

However, the legislation fails to set specific EU-wide reduction targets for food containers and beverage cups, with a promise to look into this possibility only after a lengthy six years after transposition (circa 2027). This could result in countries claiming they are taking the necessary steps as long as any reduction is achieved, regardless of how small.

The same time period is also given for a review of the list of products the legislation addresses, with the possibility to expand it. This is vital to shorten to three years after transposition rather than six.

Speaking on behalf of Rethink Plastic, the Environmental Investigation Agency’s Sarah Baulch said:

“Given the urgency and scale of the problem, the lack of specific reduction targets for Member States is alarming. We call on the European Parliament and EU Ministers to put in

place such targets and set a shorter review period to ensure an effective and swift move beyond single-use plastics.”

The European Parliament and the Council of EU ministers will discuss and amend the legislative proposal in the coming months.

Source: foeeurope