

FACTSHEET 3

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Measures for the prevention of marine litter

This fact sheet focuses on proposals to prevent further input of marine litter. Remedial clean-up of litter along beaches and in the sea is time-consuming, costly and only captures a fraction of overall debris. Mechanical processes to remove litter from the sea must take care not to cause serious ecological damage, for example through the inevitable concurrent removal of marine organisms. Generally, more precautionary action must be taken, measures should be directed primarily at encouraging renunciation of certain products, aimed at promoting ecodesign. Another focus should be on prevention or reduction at input sources and input paths of litter to avoid entering the (marine) environment.



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Approaches to avoiding further inputs of marine litter:

- **"No-Special-Fee" system in Baltic Sea ports:** The current revision process of the EU Directive on port reception facilities should be used as an opportunity to ensure a uniform and simple system of litter collection in Europe's ports. Inadequate means of disposal, different rates and/or high fees for disposal and complicated logistics are hampering sufficient use of the disposal facilities in European ports. A positive example is the "Baltic Strategy on Port Reception Facilities for Ship-generated Wastes", which has introduced a "No Special Fee" system for Baltic Sea ports. Disposal fees are included in port charges. Economic measures (fees or subsidies) that create incentives to avoid waste or disposal at ports are also viable and should be taken up in future packages of measures.
- **Improving waste management at sea:** The volumes of waste at sea could be reduced by increasing recycling, dosing and refill systems, for example for cleaning agents, and by reducing packaging. Another solution is to install systems shredding materials and collecting them for recycling. The residual waste and food leftovers are then incinerated in efficient converters operated according to German standards. Other onboard measures to reduce volumes of residual materials (e.g. compactors) and sufficient storage space for waste can reduce (illegal) discharges. In addition to these technical improvements, raising awareness and educating the ship's crew are essential.

- **Transpose new MARPOL Annex V regulations into national law:** The recent amendment to [Annex V of MARPOL](#) has resulted in a general ban on discharges of waste from ships at sea (save for a few clearly defined exceptions). If the new regulation has not yet been transposed into national law, as is the case in Germany, no penalties in breach of Annex V can be issued either. A speedy enforcement of the new regulations in national law should be ensured. Should fines prove to be lower than corresponding disposal costs in ports, they should be adjusted upwards. It has to be taken into account that MARPOL Annex V addresses ships bigger than 400 BRT meaning that e.g. for most fishing boats another regulation might be needed if not existing yet.
- **Prevent further discharges of primary microplastics:** Achieving a better cleaning result, many cosmetics and personal hygiene products such as body scrubs, toothpastes and contact lens cleaning solutions contain plastic pellets (mostly made of polyethylene and polypropylene). They are discarded after single use and can reach the marine environment as they are not usually removed at sewage treatment plants. But there is counter movement. Upon the request of 22 environmental associations, Unilever recently decided to discontinue using microplastics in its products by 2014 at the latest. The Dutch House of Representatives has agreed to call for a general ban on microplastics in cosmetics across Europe.
- **Universal deposit charge on all plastic bags:** Detailed data indicates that "small plastic bags" and "shopping bags" are the most prevalent finds along the drift lines of Europe's seas. A universal charge on all plastic bags in retail trade, such as has existed in Ireland since 2002, can help to curb the use of plastic bags. Whereas plastic bags represented about five per cent of the litter findings in Ireland before the measure was implemented in 2002, that figure fell to less than one per cent by 2007. This measure not only brought about an overall reduction of pollution, it also played a significant role in raising awareness among the Irish people about the problem of marine litter pollution. The EU Commission is considering levying environmental taxes on plastics that are in widespread use, and on plastic bags in particular.

All the measures described here offer potential solutions to handling plastic products or waste. One important requisite for more sustainability in the manufacture of plastics itself lies in "smart" product design. Although there are only relatively few basic plastics (polymers), many of the additives used in their production can greatly impair their recycling or result in more downcycling than eco-effective recycling. A reduction of the use of hazardous substances in the production of plastics could lead to an increase in recyclability. Product design should focus on maximum product persistence to avoid depletion of non-renewable natural resources and to effect a general limitation on the production of new plastics. Planned and technical obsolescence as well as product design that makes repair of plastic products uneconomic or even technically impossible are preventing this. Furthermore, it would be desirable if a fundamental change in the use of plastics designed for single usage, for example with take-away food, would take place.

Further literature

- Conference *Issue Paper*, Chapter 5 and Annex I, II:
<http://www.marine-litter-conference-berlin.info/downloads.php>
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- European Commission (2013). Green Paper on a European Strategy on Plastic Waste in the Environment: COM(2013) 123 final.
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http://www.rpaltd.co.uk/documents/J767_DGEnvMarineLittering_FR_Publ_001.pdf

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