



Resolution

“Stop the dumping of Plastics”

Translation



The sea takes and forgets!

Nothing is less true. Our North Sea 'receives' yearly some 20.000 tons of waste including a lot of plastic waste. About 70% of the waste sinks to the bottom. About 15% stays afloat and the rest washes on at our beaches. This costs the municipalities in Belgium and the Netherlands hands full of money (approx. 10 million Euro). The world's oceans become in this way not only one large plastic soup, but this pollution costs annually the lives of more than 1 million marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles. According to more and more scientific research the plastic absorbs polluting substances which are present in the sea water and this could promote the dissemination of these substances in the food chain. This alarming situation calls for joint action on land, at sea and by national and international bodies.

The plastic soup: small, smaller, micro and also more problematic?

The United Nations calculated in 2006 that in every square kilometer of ocean there are 17.760 pieces of plastic floating around. Also in our North Sea this is in many cases about large pieces of plastics (bottles, bags, packaging materials), as well as a lot of smaller items. Currents spread these items worldwide over the oceans. The plastics are also getting smaller and smaller by the sun, the wind, the abrasions and the wave action. The large pieces of plastic are especially a threat to sea mammals and sea turtles; the smaller pieces are dangerous to seabirds. They look at it as food. The fact that this is no dry scientific theory is becoming more and more proven through scientific research. There is almost no Fulmar whose stomach is not filled with plastic. The plastic can be broken down further into "micro plastics" which are eaten by plankton, crustaceans, fishes etc. Toxic chemicals (PCB's, insecticides, pesticides, etc.) that are present in the sea water, attach to this micro plastic and are being absorbed in the food chain.

Towards a more responsible use of plastics

Is the banning of plastics the solution? The answer is 'no'. In society today it is unthinkable to do without plastics. Take plastic out of a pacemaker, a prosthesis, an intravenous drip or other medical applications and we are years going back in time. Plastics also have their merits and are as such not a problem. The problem lies in the careless use of plastics. Chemically speaking, these materials are organic polymeric compounds created to last for a very long time. A short use of these materials is therefore a contradiction in terms with these characteristics. Starting point of a sustainable use of plastics is therefore: "To Reduce, to Reuse and to Recycle". Plastic which doesn't fit within this 3R-philosophy doesn't be part of a sustainable use and is a waste of finite resources. Plastic products should therefore in future be designed according to the principles of "design to recycle" and "closed loop". Plastic products which cannot be recovered for some good reason and which stay behind in nature, should be easily degradable. However, this may not be an excuse for not pursuing in the first place the recovery and the recycling of plastics waste.





Change, Yes we can (?)

In Belgium there exists already more than ten years a collection system for plastic bottles, which led to a recycling percentage of 70% (Fost Plus, 2010). Belgium is among the best pupils in the classroom. *However, should this be a reason for euphoria? Is "not as bad as" the same as "good"?* No, not really. For all plastics waste together this recycling percentage is even much lower (approx. 30%). Our roadsides are still full of waste. There seems to be still a long way to go. Unless we can stop "throw away" behavior or make a radical break with 'disposable applications' of plastics. That this is not impossible has been proven by the Belgian distribution sector (Comeos) with a voluntary agreement which has reduced the use of "carrier bags " by 85%, but also by countries such as China and Australia or cities as San Francisco who have actually set a "plastic bag ban".

It keeps the street clean if everyone sweeps outside his own door

The problem is not so much in applying half measures but in the illusion that the problem will have disappeared in this way. KIMO (the association of coastal municipalities) and environmental NGO's such as Friends of the Earth, Natuurpunt, Stichting De Noordzee, Seas at Risk, Sea First, together with the Belgian plastics industry (Federplast.be) are calling on the authorities to use everything in their power to stop further plastic pollution and to clean up the mountain of waste at sea. That everybody carries responsibility is clear: 50% of the waste comes from ships, 50% of the waste is coming from onshore. That cleaning (for instance Fishing for Litter or cleaning beaches) is necessary is also clear and no doubt about that. However, micro plastics are too small to catch. It is therefore crucial that there is no more additional waste. Prevention is more than ever necessary in order not to increase the problem. New sources of plastic pollution should not be allowed. An example is the addition of non-biodegradable micro plastics (polyethylene, polypropylene, PET, nylon) to cosmetics and soaps, but also for example in lip gloss and toothpaste.

The undersigned organizations are therefore calling on the policymakers at all political levels:

- to come within one generation (deadline 2035) to a complete recovery and recycling of all plastic product waste which does not break down (biodegrade) by setting up a global obligation, all over the world, to collect household waste. Exception to this may be some products which are intended to stay behind in nature (for instance rope, agro textiles ...): these products should have a guaranteed controlled degradability without release of harmful substances. A step in that direction is the call by the European Plastics Industry to stop the landfilling of plastic waste in Europe by 2020.
- to obtain within the European Marine Strategy and in particular through striving for a Good Environmental Status a reduction of 50% in marine pollution through plastics by 2020.
- to make within OSPAR and IMO a priority of the battle against marine pollution.



We are asking:

- Legislation with targets for reuse and recycling of all plastic product waste, measures to reduce the amount of disposable waste and to stimulate the reuse or the recycling of plastic (e.g. by an extended producer responsibility, charging a cost price for carrier bags and an embargo on offering non-biodegradable carrier bags for single-use).
- A ban on non degradable micro plastics in consumer products.
- Public actions (e.g. cleaning beaches/education/awareness/..) to put the issue of plastic pollution in the picture and to create a social support platform for policy actions.
- Actions through public (e.g. cleaning beaches) and private (e.g. Fishing for Litter) stakeholders to combat plastic pollution on land and at sea.
- Establishing and maintaining a general ban to the disposal of any waste into the sea a.o. by tightening of the European Port Reception Direction (2000/59/EC) and Annex V-MARPOL 73/78, as well as by the introduction of a liability for (loss of) the cargo.
- Scientific research and monitoring to map the ecological, economic and social impact of plastic pollution.

The undersigned are convinced that this is a hopeful sign and an incentive to invest in a healthy marine ecosystem, in product innovation and in a unique win-win situation for people and nature.

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