



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE/A1/AP

Mr P. Reis Santos
Secretary General
Market Advisory Council
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Subject: Plastics and the seafood supply chain

Dear Mr Reis Santos,

I would like to thank you for sharing with me the very comprehensive advice and recommendations from the Market Advisory Council, following-up on my reply from 15 September 2020 on the implementation of the Single Use Plastics Directive and Fishing for Litter schemes.

Let me reassure you that my services are paying close attention to the progress of activities and actions preventing, reducing and fighting marine pollution. Marine pollution is an increasing problem and we all have a great stake in keeping our oceans healthy and in protecting our marine ecosystems and maritime economies.

Thank you for the detailed set of advice that follows on a number of work streams DG MARE is involved in, in close collaboration with other line Commission services. Please see below few comments to your advice.

- (1) Ambitious measures as regards awareness raising campaigns were set out in the Single-Use Plastics (SUP) directive¹, requiring Member States to take awareness raising measures to ensure that consumers and users of single-use plastics products are aware of impacts of plastic littering on (marine) environment and informed about the availability of re-usable alternatives and waste management options. Moreover, the European Commission has launched a public awareness-raising campaign to highlight citizens' role in combatting plastic pollution and marine litter called “ready to change”. The campaign stresses the importance of consumption choices in the effort to make plastic products in the EU more durable, reusable and recyclable. I am glad to see the many initiatives undertaken by the citizens, civil society organisations and industry!
- (2) As regards funding opportunities under the next EMFAF, it will be up to Member States to decide which measures they want to support. Financial support for fishers can be granted for activities contributing to the fight against marine litter provided Member States select such measures for support. This might include the

¹ Directive (EU) 2019/904

retrieval of abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear, so-called "fishing for litter" activities, investments in collection facilities and equipment in ports, and the treatment and processing of litter. I fully support the continuation and further expansion of the use of the financial support available under the current EMFF and future EMFAF to prevent and fight marine pollution and I encourage you to collaborate with my services and your national authorities to expand the use of EMFAF support, in continuity of what has been done under the EMFF.

- (3) For the recent few years, we have seen an increase in projects and research undertakings on marine pollution, including on methodologies and monitoring technologies to collect and assess data on the impacts of litter on marine environment and biota. There is a number of projects financed through the EMFF fund but also through programmes under LIFE, Interreg, Horizon 2020 and others. I am confident that funding of such projects will continue in the 2021-2027 period, contributing to the ambitions under the European Green Deal and related initiatives.
- (4) The work is ongoing as regards microplastics. The Commission (DG ENV) is currently launching a specific study addressing the presence of microplastics in the environment, emitted from three source categories i.e. pellets, textiles and tyres. Moreover, the Commission will soon finalise the work to restrict microplastics intentionally added to products, e.g. in cosmetics, paints or detergents, by requesting the European Chemicals Agency to consider a restriction under REACH. The proposal is estimated to reduce emissions by more than 90 % and prevent the release of 500.000 tonnes of microplastics over the 20-year period following its introduction. If agreed, an EU-wide restriction could be in place by mid-2021 or early 2022.
- (5) As regards the implications of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes under the SUP Directive, please note that these concern only the following single-use products: food and beverage containers, bottles, cups, packets and wrappers, light weight carrier bags and tobacco products with filters. DG ENV is currently working on the development of EPR guidelines, in consultation with Member States, for criteria on the costs of cleaning up litter.
- (6) The Commission is aware of the negative effects that the current health crisis has on the human health, economy and environment. The pandemic has increased the use of single-use personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent the spread of the virus. Currently, the Commission does not envisage legislation to ensure that gloves and face masks are collected, processed and controlled. However, Member States may choose to specifically regulate the waste management practices of handling this waste, including by establishing Extended Producer Responsibility schemes in line with Article 8a of the Waste Framework Directive, where appropriate. Awareness raising is needed to inform citizens of the most appropriate ways to dispose of single-use PPE and what practices to avoid. Some Member States, stakeholders, regions and cities are taking action and sharing best practices.
- (7) Regarding your concern about export of plastic to third-countries for recycling purposes, I would like to draw your attention to the recently adopted rules on the export, import and intra-EU shipment of plastic waste. These new rules, which entered into force on 1st January 2021, ban the export of plastic waste from the EU to non-OECD countries, except for clean plastic waste sent for recycling. The

export of plastic waste will only be allowed under very strict conditions and will be controlled.

Finally, let me reassure you that in DG MARE we closely follow the progress and development of measures to reduce the impact of plastics and other marine litter on marine environment, human and animal health as well as its impacts on the sectors. My services will also continue to promote dialogue between the various stakeholders involved, which I agree, is of utmost importance in this endeavour.

I am very glad to see that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill from citizens and from fishers to minimise the negative impact of marine litter. Therefore, fishers are part of the solution to fight and remediate the marine pollution. Involving fishers in fishing for litter activities and through our continuous consultations helps to raise awareness on marine litter issues and it contributes to changing practices and culture within the fishing sector.

Thank you for your comprehensive and clear advice. My services will stay at your disposal for any follow-up discussion. Should you have any question on this reply, I invite you to contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (pascale.colson@ec.europa.eu) and Ms Alena PETRIKOVICOVA (alena.petrikovicova@ec.europa.eu), in charge of issues related to marine pollution.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA