

Microplastics: Outlawing Microbeads in Personal Care products sold in the EU

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party convening in Warsaw, Poland on 1 to 3 December 2016:

Notes that:

- microplastics are pieces of plastic measuring less than 5mm and mainly made of polyethylene (PE), but polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA), and nylon are also used;
- microbeads are spherical-shaped microplastics of less than 1mm in cosmetic and personal care 'rinse-off' products such as facial scrubs, soaps and toothpastes;
- these microplastics are also used in 'leave-on' lotions, make-ups, sunscreens, and deodorants. These are much smaller (eg 0.0003mm) which means 10-100 trillion particles in one sunscreen;
- in Europe the use of microplastics in these products has been estimated as between '3,800 and 7,500 tonnes of microplastic' each year;
- there is no definition of biodegradability as this can vary considerably between plastics;
- microplastics from cosmetics enter the wider environment when rinsed away in waste water and then released into rivers and the sea;
- waste water treatment plants are not designed to filter out microbeads.

Is concerned that:

- between 2,400 and 8,600 tonnes of plastic enters the marine environment from Europe every year;
- microplastics in the sea present a serious and growing threat to human health and marine ecosystems;
- microplastics can have the potential to persist for hundreds of years in the environment and have been recorded at every location in the globe;
- plastics used in cosmetic products cannot be collected for recycling, and this is counter to efforts for more sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- the ingestion of microplastics effects the feeding, movement, growth, and breeding success of marine organisms including shellfish according findings by the United Nations advisory body;
- the annual dietary exposure for European shellfish consumers can amount to 11,000 microplastics per year;

Resolution:

Microplastics:
Outlawing
Microbeads in
Personal Care
products sold in the
EU

Year and Congress:

Warsaw, Poland 2016

Category:

Energy and
Environment

Page:

1

- when fish are examined they have microplastics in their stomachs (35% of 670 examined in a total of six species) and the highest number of fragments found in one fish was 83 in one study;
- it has a negative impact on biodiversity with species such as the population of European Perch being threatened, as hatchlings ingest microbeads, become less active, and are then easy prey;
- plastic debris has become a human health issue as the cocktail of contaminants include endocrine disrupters and known physical effects of particles observed in human cells showing lung and gut injury, as very fine particles can cross cell membranes, the blood-brain barrier, and the human placenta;
- chemicals in plastics and also chemicals which attach themselves to plastic in the natural environment could cause poisoning, infertility and genetic disruption in marine life, and potentially in humans if ingested in high quantities.

Understands that:

- legislative bans have been introduced in Canada, Norway, and the USA at both state and federal level (with some bans starting from December 2017);
- in December 2014, the Netherlands, Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium and Sweden issued a joint statement to EU environment ministers calling for an EU ban on microplastics in cosmetics and detergents;
- the international mechanism by which the EU and governments in the region cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic, OSPAR, stated that if voluntary agreement proved insufficient then it would call on the EU to 'introduce measures to achieve 100% phasing out of microplastics in personal care and cosmetic products';
- the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) called for an eventual phase-out and ban on the use of plastics in cosmetics and personal care products;
- the trade association Cosmetics Europe recommended that its membership discontinue microbead use in rinse-off products by 2020;
- a number of companies have or will discontinue the use of microbeads in rinse-off products, including Colgate-Palmolive (phased out in 2014), Unilever and Boots (in 2015). Johnson and Johnson started phasing out microbeads in 2015 and was no longer developing products with microbeads in them. A total ban BDF Beirsdorf, Colgate Palmolive and L'Oreal (total group phase out by 2017).

Notes with disappointment that:

- a report commissioned by the European Commission stated that introducing a ban on microbeads in the EU would be more complicated

Resolution:

Microplastics:
Outlawing
Microbeads in
Personal Care
products sold in the
EU

Year and Congress:

Warsaw, Poland 2016

Category:

Energy and
Environment

Page:

2

than the laws 'in the US and Canada' because it was 'unclear as to whether any of the [existing] Directives and Regulations' that had been identified 'would be suitable';

- the report identified the following mechanisms, and their key limitations:
 - 1) Cosmetics Regulation - concerned with health rather than environment;
 - 2) REACH Directive - concerned with chemicals and does not recognise 'plastic' as a term;
 - 3) Eco Design Directive - currently aimed at energy using products; and
 - 4) Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive - cost prohibitive and not 100% effective at removing microplastics from water effluent. Although the EU report concluded that the Eco Design Directive 'may have the most potential' if supported by a Member State it is a disappointing response to such a serious problem.

Believes that:

- an EU-wide policy rather than the UK acting alone is a more effective way of tackling such issues as pollution does not stop at national boundaries;
- in the light of evidence confirming the seriousness of the issue there is a pressing need for the EU to address direct sources of microplastic pollution.

Urges the EU to:

- take urgent and decisive action over the phasing out of microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products sold in the EU by 2020;
- institute systematic monitoring of microplastics in the environment and fund further research into the health impact of environmental microbeads;
- stimulate private sector action. The Commission and Member States should encourage a wider range of companies to take similar action to those covered by Cosmetics Europe with governments and companies sign up to eliminating microbeads from their supply chains by 2020;
- reinforce its proposal for extended producer responsibility schemes, in particular by detailing the costs that producers have to cover and by including the obligation to cover litter prevention and collection and clean-up initiatives;
- encourage Member States to use their public procurement policies to ban the use of microplastics. The public sector is a significant purchaser of cleaning products (and personal cleansing products in the medical sector) so they could include the condition that microplastic-containing cleaning products must not be used;
- in the interim introduce appropriate criteria into the voluntary EU-wide Green Procurement Policy criteria for cleaning products and services.

Resolution:

Microplastics:
Outlawing
Microbeads in
Personal Care
products sold in the
EU

Year and Congress:

Warsaw, Poland 2016

Category:

Energy and
Environment

Page:

3