

Press release

Plastic: Who will reap the financial benefits of the new plastic economy?

A new report on plastic is a hands-on gift for governments and industries to embark on a sustainable plastic transition towards a new plastic economy

<http://newplasticseconomy.org/report-2017>

States Henrik Beha Pedersen, environmental biologist and founder of the Danish organization Plastic Change as a response to “*The new Plastics Economy Catalyzing action report*” that is being released today from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with World Economic Forum and SYSTEMIQ in Davos, Switzerland.

Last year the Ellen MacArthur Foundation profoundly stirred the waters with their report “The New Plastics Economy – rethinking the future of plastics” and the prediction of having more plastic in the global oceans than fish by 2050 (by weight). Today's report states that a radical transition is needed if we are to avoid drowning in plastic. And for those frontrunners, who seize the opportunity to begin a marked transition on plastic packaging major financial benefits are to be harvested.

Henrik Beha Pedersen: Every year an estimated 80-120 billion dollars are lost to the economy after its initial use. If we act now and begin the transition it will not only benefit the environment but also the economy its just a matter of who places themselves in the lead and gets to reap the benefits of transitioning towards a new plastic economy.

The big question is if we are moving towards an economy, where we increasingly reject plastic or if we succeed in re-thinking the material in a new plastic economy.

So far Danish governments have been a big disappointment on putting plastic on the political agenda considering the global awareness and momentum on the issue. In Denmark we've been too focused on incinerating our plastic waste, which gives us a disadvantage compared to innovation and gaining marked value as a nation of circular plastic economy pioneers. Government initiatives are needed now to place Denmark in the race for competing on the new global plastic marked and becoming a frontrunner in creating circular plastic economy models.

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The new report suggests three overarching new strategies to support a new plastic economy. Under each strategy concrete areas of focus and actions are being proposed.

- Innovation and re-design (smaller applications)
- Reuse
- Recycling

Innovation and re-design

Without fundamental redesign and innovation, about 30% of plastic packaging will never be reused or recycled.

- Fundamentally redesign the packaging formats and delivery models (and after-use systems) for small-format plastic packaging, avoiding such small formats where relevant and possible
- Boost material innovation in recyclable or compostable alternatives to the currently unrecyclable multi-material applications as described above
- Replace PVC, PS and EPS, as a priority, as uncommon packaging materials with alternatives (converging to a few key materials being used across most of the market, while continuing to allow for innovation)
- Scale up compostable packaging and related infrastructure for targeted nutrient-contaminated applications
- Explore the potential as well as the limitations of chemical recycling and other technologies, to reprocess currently unrecyclable plastic packaging into new plastics feedstocks.

Reuse

For at least 20% of plastic packaging, reuse provides an economically attractive opportunity.

- Innovate towards creative, new delivery models based on reusable packaging
- Replace single-use plastic carrier bags by reusable alternatives
- Scale-up reusable packaging in a business-to-business setting for both large rigid packaging and pallet wrap

Recycling

With concerted efforts on design and after-use systems, recycling would be economically attractive for the remaining 50% of plastic packaging.

- Implement design changes in plastic packaging to improve recycling quality and economics (e.g., choices of materials, additives and formats) as a first step towards a Global Plastics Protocol
- Harmonize and adopt best practices for collection and sorting systems, also as part of a Global Plastics Protocol
- Scale up high-quality recycling processes
- Explore the potential of material markers to increase sorting yields and quality

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- Develop and deploy innovative sorting mechanisms for post-consumer flexible films
- Boost demand for recycled plastics through voluntary commitments or policy instruments, and explore other policy measures to support recycling
- Deploy adequate collection and sorting infrastructure where it is not yet in place

Henrik Beha Pedersen: Forty years after the launch of the first universal recycling symbol, only 14% of plastic packaging is collected for recycling globally. We can do much better. Oil is a scarce resource and there will be enormous environmental consequences if we continue with the current linear plastic economy. Fishing industries, tourism industries and local communities will be particularly affected if we don't succeed in stopping the plastic leakage into our oceans. The new report from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation is much needed and presents operational action points towards a global community living sustainably with plastic packaging.