

Plastic Change's political aim for efficient measures against plastic pollution

Introduction

In its 2016 report on the challenge of plastic pollution (1) of the environment the UN issues the statement that it (plastic pollution) is a "common concern for humankind". The UN also concludes that there is enough information on the harmful effects of plastic in the environment to call for the principle of caution (2). In the report from the Danish Environmental Agency on sources of plastic pollution it is stated that "the combination of continued and perhaps growing release, the fact that the substances remain in the environment for centuries and over time get fragmented into smaller pieces, which can affect the environment increasingly, means that the micro-plastic problem has the element of a "time bomb". The result of the releases happening today will only be visible in many years from now, when it may be impossible to limit the effects. If this is a fact we do not know yet. (The Environmental Agency, 2015)" (3)

Plastic is used, often with great advantages, all over in modern society. Therefore it is no wonder that plastic also is scattered in the environment. Plastic pollution has now reached an alarming level. Plastic Change operates in favour of a massive action at all levels in order to change the present, increasing trend and to secure a drop in environmental plastic pollution.

Since large plastic objects degrade over time (4) into micro-plastic (5), the damage will increase even if we stopped all plastic pollution tomorrow. The decomposition of plastic objects increases the damage until the plastic is totally decomposed in several hundred years from now. Additionally billions of nano- and micro-size plastic particles are discharged to the environment –either from wear of plastic materials or loss from production, caused by micro-plastic additives in consumer products or because plastic is added to a process such as waste water purification. This causes a release to the marine environment and often to soil pollution from distribution of waste water sludge in the fields.

- (1) In this policy the word "plastic" means a range of synthetic compounds from the smallest polymers to the largest moulded plastic products. Plastic may contain chemicals added during production such as dye/colouring agents, stabilizers a. o. in liquid or solid state.
- (2) <http://www.unep.org/about/sgb/Portals/50153/UNEA/Marine%20Plastic%20Debris%20and%20Microplastic%20Technical%20Report%20Advance%20Copy.pdf>
- (3) <http://www2.mst.dk/Udgiv/publications/2015/10/978-87-93352-80-3.pdf>
- (5) Micro-plastic is defined as plastic particles smaller than 5 mm

Facts are that plastic production has increased from 15 million tonnes in 1964 to 311 tonnes in 2014.

The production is expected to double in 2030 and quadruple in 2050. Then the weight of plastic will surpass the weight of fish in the oceans, unless we intervene by such as political regulation. Presently an estimated total of 150 million tonnes are released into the oceans. On this background the UN concludes, that there is a moral argument for us to stop further plastic pollution (6) of the oceans.

The plastic waste has been going on shadowed by the climate changes and it contains a part of the explanation of this. Today 6% of all fossil oil goes into plastic production, the equivalent to the consumption of air traffic. When the counties of the world implement the measures agreed upon during COP 21 for reducing oil consumption and for prevent climate changes, this part will have increased to 20% and 15% of the global CO₂ release (7).

Forty years after the launch of the first global recycling logo we only recycle 14% of the plastic we use for wrapping. By developing international standards for which types of plastic to legalize for the market, so that only recyclable types will be used, combined with a vision of plastic never being considered as waste, we will be able to tackle the challenge of plastic in the environment.

Priority for efforts

Our policy is based on a founding principle of a strong need for a future circular, sustainable plastic production cycle able to minimize the formation of waste. It starts partly from the EU Frame Directive on Waste 2008/98/EC (8) introducing the principle of “the polluter pays the cost” and the “extended producer responsibility”. Here is a hierarchical summary of the efforts:

- Reduce (the consumption of raw materials)
- Re-design (products designed for reuse and recycling)
- Remove (replace single use plastic where possible)
- Re-use (alternative utilization or reuse)
- Recycle (regaining plastic)
- Re-collect (collecting and cleaning up plastic)
- Recover (synthesis of plastic for fuel, phasing out incineration for energy production)

Important regulations

A number of international conventions and regulations are the basis of Plastic Change’s policy concerning plastic pollution of the oceans of the world:

- UN’s Global Aim for Sustainability (SDG 2014) (9)
- UN’s Global Programme of Action (10)
- UN’s Legislation on World Ocean Regulation (11)
- IMO’s Regulation of waste dumping from ships (12)
- The London convention on dumping at sea (13)
- FAO’s Code of Conduct for responsible fishing (14)

- UN's Convention on Biodiversity
- UN's Convention on Migration of Species (16)
- The Stockholm Convention on regulation of difficultly degradable materials (17)
- The Basel Convention on transport of waste etc across borders (18)

Plastic Change works for

- a global tax on first use plastic materials. The returns from this go into a fund to promote circular economic initiatives and replacements for materials and products.
- a global taxation of all market released plastic products. The yield from this is considered to help implementing infrastructures for collecting and regaining plastic in all countries, so that plastic is no longer lost as waste. The tax is intended to increase the value of plastic waste and in this way motivating to re-collect it, if possible as a deposit system involving all plastic products. Secondly the tax should make clean-up possible wherever plastic is littered in nature, because it was not considered a resource.
- international standards on which types of plastic to allow in the world market to secure the plastic to be recyclable.
- developing global standards for textile production in order to prevent release of synthetic fibres to the marine environment.
- substitution (of plastic) by biodegradable materials, where plastic can not be controlled in the final phase of the life cycle of the product.
- a total stop for waste dumps in a future sustainable economy with 100% recycling of materials used in production.
- phasing out incineration in a future economy with recycling of the materials used in production.
- a total stop for to addition of plastic to products, including care products.
- the plastic industry to implement an aim for all plastic producers, raw materials and manufacturing not to pollute with raw materials (pellets) in production, transport and further processing.
- the self-evaluation of the plastic industry and inspection of whether the member enterprises live up to "Operation Clean Sweep" to be replaced by an extern, independent control function.

Nationally Plastic Change works for

- Denmark to adopt an actual policy to regulate production, so that nothing is released to the environment, to prevent releases to the environment in shape of packaging or other littered waste and to increase recycling in a future circular economy.
- the setting of reduction targets for plastic polymers/nano-plastic, micro-plastic and macro-plastic in the environment and identification of the necessary instruments for action.
- implementing a ban on adding plastic to consumer products.
- implementing a ban on the use of plastic polymers and micro-plastic in open processes and directly in the environment.
- defining release standards for water treatment plants and industrial emissions, including defining special release standards for companies producing or processing plastic.

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- the plastic industry to aim at the participation of all member companies in Operation Clean Sweep.
- Operation Clean Sweep to establish independent evaluation of whether the member companies meet the requirements for 100 % production control of raw materials (pellets), including dust and flakes from processing, in the production.
- establishing environmental requirements for numbers of micro-plastic and plastic polymer particles per litre sea water, in sediments and in living organisms (biota), in fresh surface water and in ground water based on a precautionary principle.
- establishing quality requirements for waste water sludge and field soil concerning micro-plastic and plastic polymers (quantity and weight).
- establishing requirements concerning release of micro-plastic and plastic polymers from products.
- the recycling of all plastic products.
- making it possible for everyone, by campaigns and infrastructure (litter boxes), to collect and deposit plastic along shores.
- securing volume in the recycling sector and breaking down potential barriers (different standards) in the present, varied public recycling systems, considering reorganizing the system into a governmental service.
- ending all depositing of plastic.
- no waste to be generated in a future circular economy.
- a total ban on plastic bags, alternatively introduction of a deposit system and recapture of all bags.
- a phase-out of black plastic and other non-recyclable plastic types.
- an exempt for Danish harbours of the waste water charge imposed, when fishers and others voluntarily bring in plastic collected at sea and on the beaches.
- monitoring programmes to establish the present level of pollution, so that we can record the effect of the implemented measures. Monitoring programmes should include all sizes of plastic in both the marine and the air environment and also foods, especially marine organisms.
- Denmark to revive/strengthen the effort in the EU, the UN and the regional marine environmental convention, including OSPAR, HELCOM

On the EU-level Denmark should work for:

- achieving as high overall reduction targets and targets for waste recycling as possible and to promote a more extended use of economic instruments during the ongoing revision of the EU waste directives.
- active contribution to limit the quantity of marine waste in connection to the implementation of the 2030 targets for sustainable development.
- contribution to the development of EU-level quality standards for secondary raw materials, starting from 2016 and on.

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- contribution to analyzing and suggesting possible measures concerning the correlation between waste-, product- and chemicals legislations, including possibilities for limiting the occurrence of problematic chemicals and improve the tracking of these in products.
- contribution to secure the development of an ambitious, distinct plastic strategy on EU-level as soon as possible.
- that no European harbours penalize marine enterprise by tax on delivered waste, since this leads to a widespread practise of dumping waste at sea.
- no plastic waste to be exported to countries outside the EU.

In this European plastic strategy Denmark is obligated to work for:

- a substantial reduction of marine waste.
- a reduction of marine waste from ships.
- the EU to set ambitious targets for recycling of plastic packing.