

PLASTIC PELLET POLLUTION: SURFRIDER EUROPE ON THE GROUND WITH EUROPEAN DECISION-MAKERS

ECAUSSINNES (BELGIUM)

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On Tuesday 29 March 2022, Member of the European Parliament Frédérique Ries and representatives of the European Commission and the Belgian government accompanied by Surfrider Foundation Europe visited Ecaussinnes (Belgium), where plastic pellets are polluting the area. Surfrider Europe renewed its call for binding legislation to counter this pollution which is suffocating the seas and the ocean.

Pellets are used as a raw material to make everyday plastic items and can take the form of microplastic particles or powder. Due to their small size and poor practices, they are easily spread, no matter where in the supply chain they are handled. They are therefore transported by rivers to the seas and oceans where they pose a significant threat to biodiversity and the marine environment as they can be ingested by wildlife or carry harmful contaminants that impact human health.

In Ecaussinnes, the Feluy industrial zone - where the companies Total Petrochemicals, Harry Vos Logistics, Katoen Natie and Feluy Service Center are located - is a source of a major source of pellet pollution. The Commune of Ecaussinnes, through which the Senette River flows, first noticed this pollution in 2007 near the industrial zone. While Total Petrochemicals produces the pellets - and is in fact the leading producer of TotalEnergies polymers in Europe - the other three companies are involved in their handling, transport and logistical management. These companies announced they would take action via the Operation Clean Sweep initiative, an industry programme supporting companies to implement measures against pellet loss.

*“Pellets’ impacts are directly found on the road, on the lands surrounding the industrial area, and massively in the waterways. Direct impacts can be seen in the city of Ecaussinnes. Following floods last July, market gardeners, as well as farmers, contacted the municipality to report a heavy presence of pellets in their parcels. In 2020, the city of Écaussinnes carried out an eco-diagnosis of the pellet problem. The manufacturers were asked to supply a sample of pellets in order to analyse the chemical releases of these plastic pellets into the water. But they refused to do so” **said Arnaud Guérard, Environment Councillor at the municipality of Ecaussinnes.***



Credit : Surfrider Foundation Europe

As demonstrated [by our actions in Tarragona\[SH1\] \(Spain\)](#), and our report published in 2020 on five recent cases of pollution by plastic pellets in Europe, Surfrider Foundation Europe is actively fighting to reduce this microplastic pollution at source.

Surfrider Europe – a European NGO which takes action to protect the ocean and seas, with the support of the Rethink Plastic alliance, organised a "pellet hunt" in Ecaussinnes on Tuesday 29 March, which was attended by MEP Frédérique Ries, a representative of the European Commission, representatives of the Belgian Federal Minister for the Environment, Mrs Khattabi, and of the Walloon Minister for the Environment, Mrs Tellier, as well as elected representatives of the Commune of Ecaussinnes.

They were able to observe the massive pollution that impacts the Commune of Ecaussinnes and its surroundings, but also to note the persistent, chronic and insidious nature of this pollution that affects all our marine and aquatic environments.

*"In Ecaussinnes, the mayor and the local actors are fighting hard against this pollution. This is clear proof that it is at European level that we must act. In terms of prevention and collection of these pellets, action must be taken throughout the sector to prevent their spills. It will be a matter of convincing the European Parliament to articulate the strongest and most ambitious text to prevent this pollution and capture these pollutants." **Frédérique Ries**, Member of the European Parliament.*



Credit : Surfrider Foundation Europe

Plastic pellet pollution would be perfectly avoidable if appropriate, binding, ambitious and effective regulation was adopted.

Surfrider Foundation Europe, together with the Rethink Plastic alliance calls for the adoption of a European-wide regulation with measures that:

- Are binding
- Cover the entire value chain of plastic pellets
- Hold all companies involved in the value chain accountable
- Require companies to follow and comply with specific guidelines to prevent the loss of pellets
- Require all staff to be trained
- Set legal requirements for frequent and independent third-party audits of these companies
- Penalise spills of pellets into the environment
- Refuse permits for new infrastructure to increase plastic production in Europe.

[Link to the photos and videos from today's event](#)

[Link to Surfrider's report on plastic pellet pollution](#)

Surfrider Foundation Europe, a European NGO created in 1990, works to protect the ocean, the coastline, the waves and their users. For 30 years, with a team of experts and 50 volunteer branches in 12 European countries, the association has been working with stakeholders (citizens, private and public sectors) on several major issues: marine litter, coastal development, climate change, water quality and user health.

More on Surfrider Foundation Europe: www.surfrider.eu

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