

RETHINK
PLASTIC

ENVI Committee takes a positive stance against plastic pellet pollution, but there is still room for improvement

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Today, the European Parliament's Environment and Public Health Committee (ENVI) adopted its position on the [Proposal for a Regulation aimed at preventing pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution](#). The Rethink Plastic alliance, comprising various EU-level NGOs, acknowledges this significant advancement but highlights remaining gaps in the proposal.

With mounting [studies](#) linking microplastic contamination to human health risks such as stroke, heart attack and more, MEPs had the opportunity to adopt requirements to prevent a significant source of microplastic pollution: plastic pellets. Used to manufacture almost all plastic products, those small particles are in industries' hands during their entire life cycle - from production to transport, storage, conversion, and recycling.

As such, MEPs have supported the Commission's approach to regulating the supply chain with minimum requirements for all carriers and operators, but they went the extra mile by making these binding, stronger and including maritime transport — a move civil society strongly supports in light of massive recent spillage at sea on the Spanish, French and Portuguese coasts. However, a supply chain approach can only be as efficient as its weakest links. In that sense, by choosing to exempt certain companies from audits and certification based on the scale of their operations, MEPs introduced an important loophole in the implementation of the text.

After the ENVI vote, MEP's next opportunity to protect the environment and public health from the dangers of pellets will be the Plenary vote in late April, which is the final plenary for this Parliament. If the proposed regulation passes, trilogue negotiations will continue once the new Parliament is elected

"It was high time for the ENVI Committee to address this pollution effectively, as MEPs have seen plastic pellet pollution making headlines, whether from catastrophic offshore spills such as in Galicia, or from chronic inland contamination sites in Ecaussinnes (Belgium) or Tarragona (Spain). Now, we need the plenary position to go further and the Council to make it a priority before the end of the mandate", says Lucie Padovani from Surfrider Foundation Europe.

“We are relieved that MEPs chose to reinforce the Commission requirements and impose pellet loss prevention rules on the shipping industry. Still, proposed plans and compensations fail to include any remedial measures to restore affected ecosystems following pellet spills. We are tired of seeing plastic pellets flooding marine ecosystems and poisoning wildlife. It’s time to hold those responsible for pellet pollution accountable for the lasting negative impact they’ve made on the environment. We hope this regulation can be both an opportunity to make up for past spills and to beat pellet pollution for future generations.” adds Frédérique Mongodin from Seas At Risk.

“Stronger does not mean that it is strong enough. While this is an important first step in mandating measures to achieve pellet loss reduction, gaps in the ENVI’s position create loopholes which make it difficult to achieve our ultimate objective - zero pellet loss. It is perplexing why certain industry players are given a pass when it comes to stringent audits, certification and implementing all necessary preventative, containment and clean-up measures when their actions have historically resulted in environmental degradation that threatens all life. The loopholes undermine the ambition of the regulation and signal a missed opportunity to hold all pellet handlers accountable for their contribution to plastic pellet pollution. We urge for the regulation to be strengthened before its final adoption,” Amy Youngman from EIA concludes.

ENDS

Notes to the Editor:

- Plastic pellet pollution occurs across the supply chain in the EU ([Plastic Giants report](#))
- It is estimated that as many as 184,290 tonnes of pellets are lost in Europe every year. ([Impact assessment report from the European Commission](#))
- The exponential expansion of the production of raw plastic materials since 2005 has resulted in increased waste generation and over 170 trillion plastic particles in the world’s oceans. ([TINY PLASTIC, BIG PROBLEM. THE CASE FOR PREVENTING PELLET POLLUTION.](#))
- More than 20 NGOs and organisations called on MEPs to strengthen the proposal by including maritime transport among others ([Open letter](#))

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Description of the Rethink Plastic Alliance

Rethink Plastic, part of the Break Free From Plastic movement, is an alliance of leading European NGOs working towards ambitious EU policies on plastics. It brings together the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), ClientEarth, Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Environmental Coalition on Standards (ECOS), Greenpeace, Seas At Risk, Surfrider Foundation Europe, and Zero Waste Europe. Together they represent thousands of active groups, supporters and citizens in every EU Member State working towards a future free from plastic pollution.



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