

Plastic pellet regulation: the Rethink Plastic alliance welcomes the EU Parliament's green light

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After 2 years of negotiations, the Regulation on preventing pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution has finally been formally approved by the European Parliament, paving the way for its publication in the Official Journal and entry into force in the coming weeks.

As pellet pollution is a daily reality for citizens – such as in [Tarragona](#) (Spain) or [Ecaussinnes](#) (Belgium) - Rethink Plastic alliance (RPa) welcomes this long-awaited Regulation which we have advocated for over a decade (see the note to the editor below).

The final regulation marks a significant step towards a concrete “Zero Pellet Loss” objective and follows a comprehensive supply chain approach, introducing measures on prevention, adapted packaging, staff training, mandatory certification of conformity issued by an accredited certifier for medium and large operators.

By mandating annual reporting on pellet losses for both EU and non-EU carriers, the European Union sends a strong global message that compliance and accountability are essential to tackling this major source of microplastic pollution.

Still, RPa is disappointed that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) managing fewer than 1,500 tonnes per year per installation will fall outside the regulation's ambition, facing only reduced obligations, such as a one-off certification five years after the regulation comes into effect. This represents a major loophole that risks undermining ambition in the new Regulation.

Quotes:

- “This Regulation is a long-overdue course correction – with this groundbreaking law, the EU is finally treating plastic pellets as the major microplastic hazard they are. For decades, producers and handlers have been unaccountable for billions of pellets lost into the environment. This Regulation sets out a vital benchmark for accountability, establishing binding supply-chain obligations to protect the EU's land and seas. Yet loopholes and delayed implementation risk weakening its impact, allowing tonnes more pellets to slip through the cracks. We urge Member States and industry to deliver on the EU's zero-pellet-loss ambition with decisive action and stop plastic pellet pollution at its source.”

Amy Youngman, Legal and Policy Specialist for the Environmental Investigation Agency

- “It is a huge relief to see EU decision-makers unite behind a binding regulation with a set of specific measures to fight plastic pellet pollution on both land and sea. The Commission got it right by choosing a supply chain approach, ensuring a uniform implementation of prevention and clean-up measures. Including maritime transport was a welcome addition, likely driven by recent container ship accidents, although an unjustified 3-year delay is disappointing. It is high time such binding rules replaced existing voluntary initiatives to ensure pellets are finally treated as the hazardous pollutant they are, not just another cargo”.

Frédérique Mongodin, Senior Marine Litter Policy Officer for Seas At Risk.

- The situation in Tarragona is a prime example of why clear regulation is urgently needed. Plastic pellet pollution doesn't only occur during maritime transport - it's also a chronic issue on industrial sites, where responsibilities are too often blurred between actors. After years of monitoring pollution on the ground and bringing this issue to decision-makers, we know that challenges will remain even once the regulation is fully adopted. We've documented pollution coming from small and medium-sized companies, and although EU decision-makers haven't fully reflected this reality in the final text, the responsibility will now fall on national and regional authorities. If the rules themselves aren't strict enough, the on-the-ground inspections will have to be.

Lucie Padovani, Marine Litter Lobbying Officer for Surfrider Foundation Europe.

For the Rethink Plastic Alliance, this regulation must be considered a basis which gives an essential tool to EU Member States to reach a Zero Pellet Loss Ambition. It belongs to them to make it effective, powerful, and to strictly follow its implementation.

Notes to the Editor:

- [Plastic production pellets](#), around five millimeters in size, are the building blocks of all larger plastics and constitute the third largest source of microplastic pollution in the EU. These pellets are known to accumulate, especially in the aquatic and marine environment, where they have significant negative impacts on wildlife and ecosystems.
- Plastic pellet pollution occurs across all stages of the supply chain in the EU ([Plastic Giants report](#) & [Plastic Pellet value chain](#)).

- 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.](#))
- As one of the many examples of plastic pellets pollutions: in December 2023, [a pellet spill on the Galician coast](#) showed firsthand how poor pellet transportation at sea can have catastrophic consequences. This, combined with mounting [research linking microplastic contamination to human health risks](#) and a [petition](#) supported by over 90,000 Europeans, activated parliamentarians, who voted 538 to 32 in favor of adopting binding rules, seizing a last opportunity to protect the planet and people from harmful and toxic pellet pollution.

Chronology of a regulation:

- 16 october 2023: [Proposal of a regulation to prevent pellets pollution by the European Commission](#) The text gives priority to prevention, mandatory certification, transparency in reporting but the scope is incomplete, containing too much exemptions, especially for SMEs (our reaction [here](#))
- 16 january 2024: Rethink Plastic Alliance sends an open letter to the Members of the European Parliament, urging MEPs to consider a regulation with a broader scope, irrespective of a company's size or a mode of transport, maritime included. (see [here](#))
- 23 february 2024: Members of Rethink Plastic Alliance brings MEPs on the ground to consider Pellet's Pollution in Ecaussinnes, 50kms from Brussels (see [here](#))
- 19 march 2024: The European Parliament's Environment and Public Health Committee (ENVI) adopts its position by supporting the Commission's approach to regulating the supply chain and go the extra mile by including measures on maritime transport (our reaction [here](#))
- 22 april 2024: in the last plenary session of its mandate, European Parliament adopt its position, a missed opportunity to tighten the regulation by choosing to exempt businesses that handle less than 1,000 tonnes of pellets a year from mandatory certification, audits and staff training. (our reaction [here](#))
- 17 december 2024: Council of the EU adopts its General Approach: it includes binding measure for SMEs handling more than 1000 tons of plastic pellets per year but in the same time, it extends delays for many operators,

including SMEs and maritime transport (our reaction [here](#))

- 8 april 2025: End of trilogue, the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission find an agreement. If it confirms a true supply chain approach, addressing spills and losses from all actors, EU and non-EU carriers, [across all stages](#), the majority of SMEs are finally exempted from measures, such as independent oversights. (our reaction [here](#))

Link to the whole procedure file [here](#)

We remain at the disposal of journalists for any comment.

About Rethink Plastic Alliance

Rethink Plastic is an alliance of leading European NGOs, with thousands of active groups, supporters and citizens in every EU Member State. We bring together policy and technical expertise from a variety of relevant fields, and work with European policymakers to design and deliver policy solutions for a future that is free from plastic pollution. We are part of the global [Break Free From Plastic](#) movement, made up of 11,000 organizations and individual supporters from across the world who are demanding massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

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