

Brussels, June 11th, 2018

On 7 June, the European Parliament had a full-house for a conference on the issue of biodegradable plastics in the marine environment. This event was organised by the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development in the context of the recent publication of the 'EU Plastics Strategy in a Circular Economy' and the legislative proposal for a Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment.

The objective of the conference was to generate a debate between policymakers, the scientific community, the plastic industry, and NGOs on the possible solution that innovative biodegradable plastics can contribute to tackling marine litter.

During the conference, the need for an EU standard on marine biodegradation was discussed, aiming to ensure clear guidelines for the industry that comes up with these technical and technological innovations, as well as clear labelling for end-users.

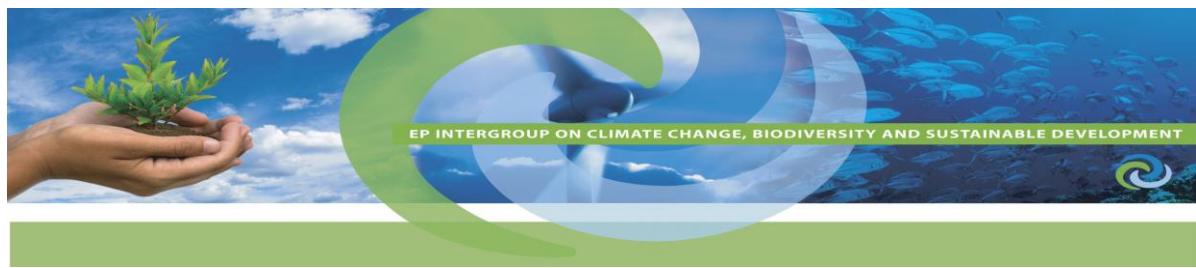
Policymakers, both at the European Commission and European Parliament level, highlighted the need to tackle this issue and propose actions. "At the current rate of production and consumption of plastic products, by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea", as was stressed by DG Environment Head of Unit Sarah Nelen.

The recently published EU Plastics' Strategy presents guiding principles to target waste prevention, re-use, recycling, and other potential solutions such as marine biodegradation. According to the NGO Friends of Earth Europe (Member of the Rethink Plastic Alliance) however, "it is difficult to develop biodegradability standards that are 100% safe", so "the priority should be to reduce plastics regardless of their origin".

A recurring question, that came up during the meeting was about the reasonable time-frame and conditions needed for plastics with biodegradable characteristics to be bio-assimilated without any toxicity on the environment? According to the scientific body Hydra (financed by an FP7 research programme) and to the French company SPHERE, a French producer of biodegradable resins, promising research is underway, while the first results show that marine biodegradable plastics disintegrate, and bio-assimilate within 3-5 months.

What was emphasised was that while disintegration can be measured in real conditions, bio-assimilation can only be measured in a laboratory, reproducing real life conditions in a smaller environment. Biodegradation is the process by which plastics are bio-assimilated by the action of micro-organisms and transformed into oxygen, water and humus, which is difficult to measure in open, real life conditions.

According to the bioplastics industry, all efforts made on education, prevention, and even potential sanctions are compulsory, but are unable to stop the leakage of plastics into the marine environment. This is where they can contribute with revolutionary innovations. In



this context, the scientific and industrial representatives present welcomed the prospects offered by the Commission in its proposal for a Directive on single-use plastics, and called for the development of a standard for marine biodegradable plastics.

The European Parliament is now expected to present its first draft report on the Commission's legislative proposal on single-use plastics and fishing gears on June 12th (Rapporteur: Frédérique Ries, ALDE, Belgium).