



# Pollution linked to marine litter and plastic waste: avenues for CPMR action

## BACKGROUND

During the CPMR General Assembly in Helsinki, several CPMR Member Regions asked the CPMR to address the issue of marine and plastic litter.

This Technical Paper backs an approach on this and covers the following issues:

- What is the extent of current pollution?
- What impact does this pollution have?
- What political initiatives are currently being taken at international and European levels?
- What are Regions doing in this policy area?
- What lines of action can the CPMR take?

The answers to these questions focus on the specific problem of waste, without opening up more broadly to the general issue of the circular economy.

## 1. What is the extent of current pollution?

### What is the extent of current pollution?

**Key figures (Source: Communication “A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy”):**

- Global production of plastics has increased twenty-fold since the 1960s. In 2015, it was 322 million tonnes and is expected to double again over the next 20 years;
- Around 25.8 million tonnes of plastic waste is produced in Europe each year. Less than 30% of this waste is recovered for recycling;
- Plastics production and plastic waste incineration produce around 400 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> worldwide each year;

- Globally, between 5 and 13 million tonnes of plastics - between 1.5% and 4% of global production - end up in the oceans every year;
- The European Union is responsible for dumping between 150,000 and 500,000 tonnes of plastic waste into the oceans each year.

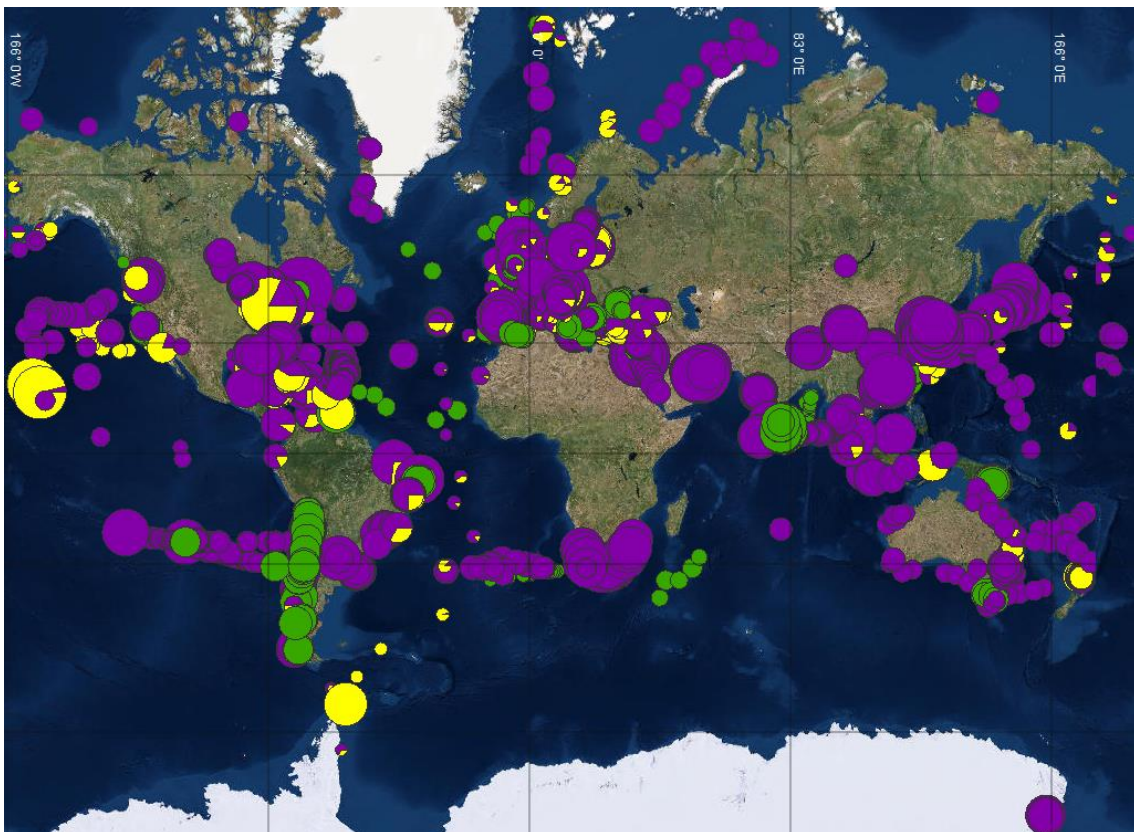
### What type of waste is being referred to?

80% of marine litter is made of plastic, and includes two types of plastic waste:

- Macro-plastics. The most abundant waste is cigarette butts, sanitary products (e.g. cotton buds), plastic packaging, plastic bottles and single-use products (e.g. plastic bags, straws, cups, plastic tableware);
- Micro-plastics. These include, for example, plastic beads or microbeads from cosmetics or skincare products, plastic fibres from clothing during machine washing, or synthetic particles from car tyres.

### Where is marine litter and plastic waste found?

The map below represents the main concentrations of waste at sea. Plastic waste is represented in purple.



Source: [Litterbase](#)

## 2. What impact does this pollution have?

### Impact on human life

The impacts of current pollution on human life are still little known, but the presence of plastic and chemical substances in seafood - and land-based products – has been proven.

### Impact on economic activities

Pollution has a severe impact on several maritime economic activities, such as tourism, maritime transport, fisheries and aquaculture. According to the European Commission, the cost of litter for the European fishing industry has been estimated at 1% of the revenue generated by catches of the EU fleet.

Pollution also generates significant clean-up costs.

### Impact on eco-systems

Finally, marine litter has a very serious impact on ecosystems with increasing media coverage. This impact includes:

- animals becoming entangled, for example in nets or plastic bags;
- ingestion of plastic waste leading to death by suffocation, or by perforation or clogging of the stomach, as well as contamination by toxic substances. According to the NGO Surfriders, more than 100,000 marine mammals die each year from the consequences of pollution generated by marine litter;
- exotic species are being transported by debris at sea;
- alteration of the ecosystem, for example, through the destruction of coral reefs.

## 3. What political initiatives are currently being taken at international and European levels?

There is growing international awareness of the issue of waste. An international coalition “Stop Plastic Waste” was proposed in September 2016 during the Our Ocean Conference in Washington DC, and officially launched during the COP22 in Marrakech.

In parallel, the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 adopted action plans to tackle marine litter within the framework of regional seas conventions such as HELCOM, OSPAR, Barcelona and Cartagena.

The issue is also now included within Goal 14, focusing on marine life, of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

EU action on marine litter and plastic waste, which is part of the response to these international guidelines is linked:

- To the EU's political guidelines on the circular economy<sup>1</sup>, which include:
  - A [Communication](#) in a European Strategy for plastics in a circular economy;
  - A [Communication](#) on the interaction between chemical substances, products and waste;
  - A [Communication](#) on a monitoring framework for the circular economy;
  - A new [Directive](#) on port reception facilities;
- To the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. One of the 11 descriptors of the good environmental status of marine waters defined by this Directive relates to marine litter;
- To the European Commission's political guidelines on international ocean governance, which includes tackling marine litter in EU waters, with the support of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

## **The EU's specific commitments on marine litter and plastic waste**

Through its Communication on a European Strategy for plastics in a circular economy, the EU has made 5 major commitments:

- Reduce plastic waste. Following efforts made to reduce the use of plastic bags, the EU will focus on single-use plastics and abandoned fishing gear. It will also focus on limiting the use of microplastics and facilitating the identification of biodegradable and compostable plastics;
- Make recycling a profitable activity for businesses, in particular by developing new rules on packaging and a standardised system for waste collection and sorting in the EU;
- Prevent the disposal of waste at sea with the implementation of new rules on port reception facilities;
- Stimulate innovation and investments;
- Encourage other countries to follow the European model.

## **Next steps**

The next steps will include:

- A new Directive on port reception facilities proposed by the Commission in January has been submitted to the European Parliament and the Council for adoption;
- A proposal for a Directive on single-use plastics in 2018;
- A review of the Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste and guidance on the separate collection and sorting of waste that should be published in 2019.

## **The issue of a new own resource for the EU, related to the production of plastic waste**

In its Communication on the EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework, the European Commission has proposed the creation of a new own resource consisting of a national contribution calculated according to the volume of non-recycled plastic packaging waste.

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<sup>1</sup> The complete list of measures relating to the European Strategy for plastics and their implementation timeline is available [here](#).

## 4. What are the Regions doing in this policy area?

In its Communication on plastics in a circular economy, the European Commission recommends a set of actions to regional authorities, grouped into four pillars detailed in Appendix I of this Paper:

- Improve the quality of plastics recycling and economic profitability;
- Curb plastic waste and littering;
- Drive investment and innovation towards circular solutions;
- Harness global action.

A growing number of regions are developing action in these areas. These actions include:

- Specific actions, such as those carried out by the Region of Crete for example, which conducts detailed analysis of the pollution affecting its beaches through the BlueIslands project;
- Global strategies, such as:
  - Region Provence-Alpes Côte d’Azur’s “Zero plastic 2030” initiative, which includes all public and private actors that are involved in the value chain and production of plastic waste, as well as citizens, in order to limit waste production, as well as waste collecting and recycling;
  - The PALMA programme (*Plan d’Action pour les déchets marins* – Action Plan for Marine Litter) set up by the Azores Region, that involves waste analysis and monitoring operations, as well as waste collection and partnerships with actors such as fishermen.

In parallel, several regions are engaged in cooperation programmes on these issues. The CPMR and its Geographical Commissions participate in the following projects, that address the problem of waste:

- Atlantic Arc Commission - [Clean-Atlantic](#) project – coordinated by CETMAR (Galicia), that aims to protect biodiversity and eco-system services in the Atlantic Area by strengthening capacity for monitoring, preventing and eliminating (macro) marine litter. The project also aims to raise awareness and change the behaviour of stakeholders and to improve the marine litter management systems;
- Intermediterranean Commission:
  - [PANACEA](#), which aims to improve the management of protected areas in the Mediterranean in order to enhance and protect the biodiversity of the Region;
  - [CO-EVOLVE](#), which aims to analyse and promote the coexistence of human activities and ecosystems in tourist areas along the coast.

## 5. What lines of action can the CPMR take?

Following the discussions organised in [January 2018](#) and [April 2018](#), and the specific work of some CPMR Geographical Commissions, including the North Sea Commission, the following action is proposed:

- Adopt a CPMR Declaration expressing support for the EU objectives to combat marine litter and plastic waste, and focusing the priorities below;
- Become involved in awareness-raising campaigns and clean-up operations. Clean-up exercises will be organised by the CPMR North Sea Commission in conjunction with its Annual Business Meeting in June 2018, and by the CPMR during its General Assembly in Madeira in October 2018;

- Foster the exchange of best practice between Regions, in particular by building on European projects in which the CPMR and its Geographical Commissions are involved ;
- Contribute to debates on relevant European regulations, such as the Directive on Port Reception Facilities, which the CPMR is working on through its Transport Working Group;
- Participate in political debates in various relevant fora at European and sea basin level. At European level, the CPMR has for example contributed to the organisation of a series of conferences on marine litter and plastic waste in the European Parliament in April 2018. At sea basin level, the CPMR Geographical Commissions are expected to participate in work of the UNEP regional conventions, as well as the Union for the Mediterranean, and sea basin strategies;
- Establish an internal strategy within the CPMR and its Geographical Commissions focusing on reducing its waste that is generated by its own activities;
- Continue cooperation with other networks active in this field such as KIMO and ACR + as well as with NGOs such as Surfrider that take action on marine litter.

## **ANNEX – RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO NATIONAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES (Source: Communication “A European Strategy for plastics in a Circular Economy”)**

In order to **improve the quality of plastics recycling and the economic profitability** of this activity:

- Favour reusable and recycled plastics in public procurement;
- Make better use of taxation and other economic instruments to:
  - reward the uptake of recycled plastics and favour reuse and recycling over landfilling and incineration;
  - step up separate collection of plastics waste and improve the way in which this is done;
- Put in place well-designed EPR schemes and/or deposit systems, in consultation with the relevant sectors;
- Make voluntary commitments in support of the strategy’s objectives, in particular as regards the uptake of recycled plastics.

In order to **curb plastic waste and littering**:

- Raise awareness of littering and consider fines, where they do not exist already;
- Promote beach clean-up activities;
- Step up waste collection, particularly near the coasts, and improve coordination between the authorities responsible for waste management, water and the marine environment;
- Step up efforts to eradicate illegal and non-compliant landfills;
- Engage in regional seas conventions, in particular to develop regional plans against marine litter;
- Consider introducing EPR, in particular to provide incentives for collecting discarded fishing gear and recycling agricultural plastics.

In order to **drive investments and innovation towards circular solutions**:

- Make better use of economic instruments, especially to raise the cost of landfilling and incineration and promote plastic waste recycling and prevention;
- Make greater use of public procurement and funding to support plastic waste prevention and recycling of plastics.

In order to **harness global action**:

- Engage in international fora to develop a global response to the increase in marine litter;
- Take domestic action to reduce the leakage of plastics in the environment, prevent plastic waste and increase recycling.



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**The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) brings together some 160 Regions from 25 States from the European Union and beyond.**

Representing about 200 million people, the CPMR campaigns in favour of a more balanced development of the European territory.

It operates both as a think tank and as a lobby group for Regions. It focuses mainly on social, economic and territorial cohesion, maritime policies and accessibility.

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