

Environment Council 9 October 2018 Luxembourg

Briefing Note

Agenda Item : AOB

Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment – *Information by the Presidency*

Irish Position:

Ireland welcomes this draft directive and looks forward to working with the Presidency and Commission to developing an effective directive that will deliver measurable reductions in the detrimental effect of plastic on the marine and wider environment.

Aim of Council discussion: We understand this is an information point for the Council from the Presidency.

Main elements of proposal

In January 2018, the EU Commission published its long awaited plastics strategy. The strategy focuses on plastics production and use and sets a goal of ensuring all plastic packaging is recyclable by 2030. On foot of this strategy, in May 2018, the Commission published this draft proposal to reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the Environment. The proposal aims to deal with the top ten single use plastics items that cause 70% of marine litter. The main elements of the proposal are summarised below:

1. A total ban on certain plastic goods (plastic cotton buds, cutlery, plates, straws, drink stirrers and sticks for balloons) Single-use drinks containers made with plastic will only be allowed on the market if their caps and lids remain attached;
2. Consumption reduction targets for plastic food containers and drinks cups;
3. Obligations for producers to cover the costs of waste management and clean up through the establishment of EPR schemes for food containers, packets and wrappers, drinks containers, cups, tobacco products with filters, wet wipes, balloons and lightweight plastic bags;
4. A collection target of 90% of single-use plastic drinks bottles by 2025;
5. Labelling Requirements for sanitary towels, wet wipes and balloons which indicate how waste should be disposed of, the negative environmental impact of the product, and the presence of plastics in the products;

6. Awareness-raising measures;

7. For fishing gear, which accounts for 27% of all beach litter, the Commission aims to complete the existing policy framework with producer responsibility schemes for fishing gear containing plastic. Producers of plastic fishing gear will be required to cover the costs of waste collection from port reception facilities and its transport and treatment.

Implications of proposals for Ireland/Irish Position

Three points of concern for Ireland at the moment are:

- (a) the 90% collection rate for plastic bottles by 2025
- (b) imposing an obligation on EPR schemes to pay for litter clean-up and
- (c) the introduction of EPR schemes for two major industries (Tobacco and Sanitary).

In relation to (a), it is widely believed that this provision will essentially force MS to introduce a mandatory Deposit and Refund Scheme. While we do not have national statistics specific to plastic bottles at this point in time, Repak, which manages the collection and recycling of approximately 80% of all packaging on the Irish market, has reported a collection and recycling rate of 69% of plastic bottles for 2016. Pushing this up to 90% within the given timeframe will be a huge challenge for Ireland. A study is to be commissioned shortly to assess whether Deposit and Refund is the right model, in an Irish context, to increase collection rates and how it might operate in conjunction with the current EPR infrastructure in place for packaging in Ireland.

In relation to (b) our EPR scheme for packaging is designed to fund the collection and waste management for all packaging placed on the market by producer members. Industry has expressed concerns about the proportionality of the requirement to cover litter clean-up and suggests that it does not recognise the shared responsibility approach of all actors including the consumer.

In relation to (c) Ireland, along with other MS, are questioning whether a mandatory EPR model is necessary for these industries, given that their products are predominantly a litter rather than a waste management issue.

Discussion to date and Position of other Member States

The proposal is being discussed on an on-going basis at the Working Party on the Environment. Several MS have shared the concerns raised by Ireland, although the 90% collection rate does not appear to be as a big a problem for some other MS. In the most recent revision of the text provided by the Presidency this target has been softened to 75% collection rate by 2025 and

90% by 2030. In addition, the mandatory EPR schemes for non-packaging items (tobacco, sanitary ware and balloons) have been refined to cover just the cost of litter clean-up and education and awareness.

Comment on the Views of the European Environment Bureau

N/A